Thinking with Jacques Rancière about education:

An adventure on the borders of possibility.

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade or so, considerable attention has been given by educational theorists to the works of Jacques Rancière. Most commentators on Rancière's educational thought, which is based on the writings of Joseph Jacotot, believe that it provides us with a novel way of thinking about emancipatory forms of education that can serve to confront the forces of oppression, inequality, nihilism, and compliance we find ourselves confronted with today. The general purpose of this study is to assess whether and, if so, to what extent this belief is justified. This task is approached by taking up and testing out Rancière's adventuring method of contingency, which is interpreted to be a form of education and a form of research simultaneously. Style is a central aspect of the argumentative force of Rancière's approach. Following this, a characteristic of the thesis is the development of three stylistic forms of writing: connecting scenes, spiralling, and weaving. The point of departure for the adventure is Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. This book then functions as a portal into the world of Rancière's works as a whole, which in turn function as a portal to the world beyond Rancière's works yet implicitly present in those works. In order to test the educational value of the adventuring method, an attempt is made to understand Rancière's works. Reflections on this process further allow for the development of a way of thinking about research adventures as a form of education. The argument made in this thesis lies partly in its aesthetic and stylistic force, but several conceptual claims are also developed. One claim entails the problematisation of the dichotomy between will and intelligence maintained by Rancière. Another claim is that the concept of emancipation – which is fundamentally political in nature – is not applicable to education. As an alternative, a way of thinking about education is developed, infused by a reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*, as sensible configurations of space and time which urge children to persevere and increase their power to express and to think under the mark of equality. Two notions play a central role in these configurations: *fascination* and the *demand to persevere*. The first is developed through the reflections on the thesis' adventure and coupled to Rancière's understanding of the will as a power to be moved. It is a way to think the self, that is, the will, as fundamentally relational in nature. The second relates to Rancière's notions of *unconditional exigency* and *equality of intelligence*. A prevalent interpretation of that latter notion is problematised in the observation that understanding Rancière cannot be done without having prior knowledge and understanding. Finally, the concept of the *weight of words* is developed as a reformulation of Rancière's reading of Aristotle's distinction between expression and noise. Overall, the stance is taken that Rancière's conceptual framework is not without its flaws,

but that it does hold powerful potential for developing egalitarian forms of education that allow children to increase their power of understanding, and to confidently assign immanent justification to their will to express and to confront injustice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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PRELUDE

The following pages are the expression of an adventure into the works of Jacques Rancière. He is a philosopher whose works centre on an idiosyncratic search for thinking revolution and radical democracy. But he is also an educational thinker, and all of his works can be read as finding new ways to think educationally. "Adventure" is a term taken from one of Rancière's works (1987/1991)[1], and the thesis will, as such, be an experiment of the enactment of the meaning of Rancière's works while adventuring into those works themselves. My wish is to search for a way of thinking and writing about education, and thinking educationally, with the vigour and radical courage necessary to confront the growing shadow of domination and hatred raging forward into the third decade of our budding millennium.

The thesis should be read as being addressed to two audiences. The first is an audience consisting of educators in a broad sense who are interested in Rancière's works and my take on those works. The second is a more specific audience consisting of those who have experience adventuring through Rancière's works and have written about his philosophy of education. My aim in regards the latter is to add my voice to the growing body of scholarly work on the works of Rancière in educational theory and philosophy. My assessment of that body of work is that there is much insight to be gained to inspire ways of thinking about education today. However, my belief is also that the ways in which Rancière's works have been taken up can result in re-establishing the stultifying forms of thought and expression which they had set out to relinquish. Therefore, my will has been to begin with my own reading of Rancière's works in order to try out the meaning of those works in a way that could express something which I found missing in the existing literature. The contribution of this thesis to the already existing body of work on Rancière thus consists most fundamentally in the approach taken to confront Rancière's texts in an equal relationship between two wills.

Summarising Rancière's thought on education is impossible, so let me do it here: there exists an always present possibility to perceive, and express a belief in, an equality of intelligence between all speaking beings. Rancière further proposes that such an equality can never be proven, but that it can always be verified. My aim, therefore, is to try and verify it. This will be undertaken through an adventure which will sometimes take sudden turns, in

[1] For translated texts, both the year of publication in the original language and the year of publication of the translation will be used in referencing throughout the thesis.

following the basic premise of the educational methodology proposed by Rancière: the method of equality, which is a method of contingency. The reader should therefore expect moments where the adventure's path suddenly shifts course – and remember that this is itself an attempt at the enactment of the meaning of equality.

The thesis is an attempt to confront the question of what education might mean in current times. My belief is that such a confrontation must also be a confrontation with myself. During the adventure I became increasingly aware of the overlap between the "me" and the "we", and the possibility this overlap gives for learning about the "we" through a reflection on the "me". For example, my disengagement with society and reality, and the resulting compliance to injustice, can be read as an indication of our disengagement, our compliance, our unwillingness to change. So my search is a search for conditions of possibility for transformation, which is simultaneously a search for meaning and the possibility for joy in the midst of grey nihilism that expresses only the possibility for sadness.

Finally, a word about gender pronouns. I have decided to use the gender-neutral pronouns "they" and "them" when referring to non-specified persons. I had some doubts about this, because I believe that using a plural pronoun for singular persons adds some confusion to the language that could be avoided if we opt for any of the gender neutral singular pronouns that have been proposed throughout the years[2]. That said, since language does not always work in the way we would like it to, this seemed to me the most inclusive option, since even an alternative like "she/he" remains within the unnecessary boundaries of a binary gender distinction.

[2] See the Wikipedia entry "Gender neutrality in languages with gendered third-person pronouns".

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The introduction to this thesis begins, in a way, at its tail. The adventure of which the process of writing the thesis consisted was, as one key part of it, a reaching for an understanding of Rancière's works. The summary of those works with which the introduction begins is a result of the adventure, which will set the stage for the adventures that follow in the rest of the thesis. Following the method of contingency, the thesis will contain side adventures, weavings of many threads, spiralling, and hitting brick walls. This introduction will contain two additional parts. One is a short description of my own background as well as an elucidation of the role of autobiography in the thesis. The other relates the approach taken in the thesis.

The thesis is grounded in a concern for our times, followed by the question of how we might think about education today in order to confront the times with an openness toward new ways of thinking, without abolishing the need for a protection of what is worth preserving. Originally, the thesis began with the following question: "Can Rancière's understanding of truth as poetics be an emancipatory force on the boundary between research and educational practice?". Throughout the years of study the focus has shifted somewhat, but the general concern has remained the same throughout: the philosophy of education of Jacques Rancière and what it can teach us about educational research adventures – and, perhaps, about philosophy as a way of confronting a reality in which my own being and the being of an ever-shifting "us" overlap and intertwine, and as a way of finding words to describe the indescribable.

In this chapter I first give a rationale for choosing to write a thesis focused on one specific author, as well as of the methodology with which I approached the task. Following this I give a brief summary of Rancière's works. Then I discuss the role played by my Internship experience in a Children's Home. Finally, I provide some indications of the path that I will follow in the thesis.

Rationale of topic and approach

In this thesis, the bulk of my attention will be given to the writings, as well as the speech (in the recordings of lectures and interviews available in English), of one specific author: Jacques Rancière. My belief is that this undertaking will contribute in a valuable way to the furthering of insight in the contemporary field of education. Here, I want to elucidate how I came to the decision of focusing so strongly on Rancière's works, and why I believe the endeavour that followed this decision has been worth the effort.

First, I explain the path that led me to choose Rancière specifically. To begin with, one of the observations I will make in this thesis is that it can be incredibly difficult to say exactly why we want the things we want. This is partly why "the will" is one of the central themes running throughout the work. Moreover, as Mollenhauer (1983/2013) has argued, the endeavour of trying to retrace one's past in order to delineate the sources of one's will is inherently educational. The following can thus be considered a short educational investigation.

I do not believe there was one very clear reason that was the result of a process of strictly rational deliberation that led me to write a proposal for an inquiry into the works of Rancière. Rather, it was a combination of reasons and a strong sense of being drawn toward his writings – fascination – that came together in my will to dedicate myself for several years to this project. One central role was played by Rancière having been an important figure for my own professors (most notably Jan Masschelein) during my postgraduate Master's programme in Social and Cultural Education at the University of Leuven, Belgium. The way they taught him made him appear to me as a radical voice that had only recently been discovered (especially in education) and as someone who had breathed fresh air into a world that had long been in the process of stagnating.

My undergraduate Bachelor's programme had been in something called Humanistic Studies at a small university in Utrecht, the Netherlands, a kind of secular alternative for theology rooted in the humanist worldview and tradition. This included a fair proportion of philosophy classes, with phenomenology the main tradition that was drawn from. This means, for me, that I came to think of philosophy, in one sense at least, as the act of trying to penetrate seemingly impenetrable texts in order to expand and transform my worldview. For example, reading parts of Heidegger's work "Being and Time", one of the central works in this tradition, felt like a kind of stretching and twisting of the mind through the attempt to understand his strange but fascinating play with language, in order to achieve a different way of perceiving my own being. Not as a subject surrounded by objects, but as *Dasein*, a being-there, grounded in the primary constitution of being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty added corporality to this way of understanding our being, and Arendt added natality, plurality and tradition. The latter will become important later in the thesis, as I will return to Arendt in a critique of some of the central aspects of Rancière's educational thought. We also learned about ethics, and about the notion of life as art, with the later works of Foucault being a central point of focus.

At the end of my Bachelor's programme, I felt unsatisfied with the paradigm there. I had also developed a strong interest in education and wanted to pursue my own further

education in that field. This was, for an important part, because I had come to realise that I had suffered from major depression for extended periods of time since early secondary school, and that this had been exacerbated in an intertwinement with a refusal for most of the adults around me to acknowledge that something was really wrong. I felt that this refusal echoed the wider societal failure to attend to the deep wrongs or injustice permeating the globe. I mention this here because it explains, at least partly, why I came to be drawn so strongly to Rancière, for whom the notion of "wrong" – and, importantly, a deep analysis of historical moments in which wrongs that had been imperceptible were made perceptible through aesthetic reconfigurations of spaces and times – plays a central role in his conceptualisation of politics. On the other hand, it also explains why I have come to disagree quite strongly with some aspects of his educational philosophy, as well as with what I was taught in Leuven.

There, in Leuven – where I studied for three years: two years for the Master's programme itself, and one year for a pre-Master year – the philosophical focus shifted (though notably, Arendt remained an important figure). Again, although philosophy did not comprise the major part of the study, a substantial part of the classes was philosophical in nature. The focus of most theory we read was on education; for example, when we discussed Arendt it was often in relation to her essay "The Crisis of Education" (Arendt, 1958). Phenomenology still played a role there, in authors like Arendt, Mollenhauer, and Levinas; however, it was no longer the main point of focus. Neither was humanism the main tradition that was drawn from in these studies. Simplifying, perhaps the word that would best summarise the central paradigm in Leuven as I perceive it is "critique". For example, for a course on interpretive qualitative research, we read Packer's (2011) "The Science of Qualitative Research". Designating Kant as the antagonist, and Foucault as the hero of his book, Packer – through a monumental summary of the history of qualitative social science research – argues that 'the social scientist can, and in fact must, "dare to know and constitute him- or herself in political opposition to present structures of domination" ' (Poster, cited in Packer, 2011, p. 288). In other words, an important role now came to be played by theories related to emancipatory forms of politics and education, to the ways in which large parts of humanity are exploited, oppressed, and dominated, and to educational ways of addressing injustice and inequality. Also, while the humanist tradition could be said to still be firmly rooted in modernist thought, postmodernism was now introduced to me, especially in my dissertation, where I scrutinised the "post-qualitative" research paradigm in education, which is quite radically postmodern, poststructuralist and posthumanist.

One familiar with educational theory might at this point assume that the tradition of critical pedagogy was the dominant source of inspiration for my professors in Leuven. Although it certainly did play a role – we read some Freire, Apple, and Giroux, among others – they also took quite a radical turn away from this tradition. I believe this was a turn toward a Rancièrian mode of thinking and acting. Rancière can be viewed as both a continuation and deviation of all of the previously mentioned traditions – humanism, phenomenology, modernism, postmodernism and poststructuralism, critical pedagogy – but he does not fall neatly into any of those categories. There is – or at least, there supposedly is, and investigating this claim is something I will try to do in this thesis – a distinctly "Rancièrian" way of perceiving the world, and education specifically.

I want to mention that I had come to Leuven because I wanted to reach an understanding of the broad field of education on a deep level, from a strong feeling of ignorance resulting from a childhood which, in my view, had not taught me enough about what good education might be. But Rancière was completely new to me, and I had not at all expected to learn about education from his radically strange perspective. I craved knowledge and understanding, but was taught about a thinker whose main work on education is about "ignorant" schoolmasters. I desired to acquire a solid grasp of contemporary scientifically grounded theory on good education, but was presented with a way of thinking and acting infused by notions of uncertainty and contingency. For a course called "Laboratory" we learned from Jan Masschelein about the educational primacy of random encounters. For example, we experimented with attending to random things in the world by travelling alone to the borders of Europe and writing down and photographing what we saw at arbitrary, set times. For Masschelein (2008), education is not about formation and self-development but about transformation and self-displacement; not about becoming conscious or gaining better understanding but about attention, especially to the unknown. It is about "e-ducere": 'leading out, reaching out' (Masschelein, 2008, p. 212). He also argues for what he calls a "poor pedagogy", stating the following:

> Critical educational research requires what I want to call a poor pedagogy, a poor art: the art of waiting, mobilizing, presenting. Such a poor art is in a certain sense blind (has no destination, no end, is not going anywhere, not concerned with the beyond, has no sight on a promised land), she is deaf (she hears no interpellation, is not obeying 'laws') and speechless (she has no teachings to give). She offers no possibility of identification (the subject position – the position of the teacher or the student – is, so to say, empty), no comfort. (Masschelein, 2008, p. 217)

Being introduced to this school of thought was, to put it bluntly, highly destabilising for me. I wanted to learn knowledge and understanding that would make me a good educator.

I also wanted to find and strengthen the ground upon which to build my self. Instead, I learned about education as a kind of ethos of eternal doubt, and I only felt less grounded.

Still, I somehow became fascinated by this view on education, which seemed to be a radical answer to many of the issues I was also taught to recognise in the world of education, summarised by Hunter in the following way:

> Diverse phenomena such as performativity, intensification and escalating workloads, surveillance, marketization, and commodification. Themes such as 'gap talk', 'outcomes', and regimes of standardized testing. (Hunter, 2017, p. 8).

What I felt was that all this was intertwined fundamentally in a certain way of perceiving the world, and that Rancière's point is that, in order to bring about real change, it is first necessary to change that way of perceiving. But I also felt that I had not reached enough understanding of his theory – and, importantly, how it relates to other theories he follows or criticises – and so I could not truly assess whether I agreed with my professors in their belief in the radical value of Rancière's theories without first assessing them myself.

Still, my plan was not at first to spend so much time and attention on the works of Rancière during my PhD studies. Rather, I wanted to spend a more modest period on his works (around half a year) in order to reach an understanding of those works, especially in relation to his notion of truth. That understanding would, I thought, then function as the basis for the development of a conceptual framework that would enable me, as well as anyone who read this thesis, to think in a radically egalitarian way about emancipatory forms of education. I would also branch out to other literature in order to relate it to my reading of Rancière's works. However, a big problem arose (and I will come back to this observation again in later parts of the thesis): I did not reach a sufficient understanding of Rancière's works in order to feel ready to proceed. Though others, including my supervisors, were doubtful about my lack of understanding, and tried to convince me that I was putting the bar too high and being too critical, I resisted the temptation to conclude that I had understood enough when I knew that this was not the case. I felt, and feel, that other commentators on Rancière have often done this too quickly, influenced perhaps by the demand for speed and efficiency that is part and parcel of the worldview some of us are trying to get away from. In this stubbornly slow but also highly frustrating mode of being, where I lost ground even more than before and felt like I might go mad at some points, I also realised that if I really wanted to understand Rancière, I had to try and see if I could change my understanding of understanding itself. There was thus a necessity – an urgency, in Rancière's words – to take on his own methodology of Universal Teaching (explored in the following chapter), of

contingency and random encounters, of uncertainty and ignorance, and, in terminology that I will develop myself in this thesis, of *fascination*, in order to try and effect the shift in ontological perspective I believed Rancière's works were demanding of me. Meanwhile, in order for this process to remain academic in nature, I decided to reflect on this process as an educational adventure. This provided a unique opportunity: to reflect on the meaning of education for Rancière while both *learning about* and *enacting* his understanding of education at the same time.

There is certainly a danger in such an endeavour: theoretical myopia, staying attentive only to one (White, European, male) author without giving enough attention to others. But I trust that my leap of faith, which this thesis essentially is, has academic value. It is a way to explore the method of fascination while observing what it can do to a person; it is to see what it means to become devoted to one person for a period of time, while also observing the danger of veneration inherent in such fascination, and so to develop a mode of resistance to any singular framework of truth. But it is also a way to really try and get to the meaning of the idea that 'everything is in everything' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 19) and the idea that education is essentially about *beginning* – somewhere, anywhere – following the first principle of Universal Teaching: 'one must learn something and relate everything else to it' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 20). It is about the possibility of such a view to demand of one to crawl back up from the infinite force of nihilism and to regain a sense of will when it had been suppressed/oppressed through corrupted forms of education. It is to see what it means to find a world saturated with meaning and poetry, and how to conceptualise a mode of education that allows for the teaching of that meaning and of that poetry, and of the beauty in the will to be equal to all others.

I will now introduce Rancière through a short summary that I wrote near the end of the PhD study trajectory, and which can therefore be understood as a kind of "research finding".

Jacques Rancière

Jacques Rancière (1940) is a French author whose works span a wide range of different themes. The most central of these are politics and aesthetics, and the relationship between the two. His writings are embedded within the tradition of Western – and, more specifically, French – philosophy, as well as in history and modern literature. Education has always played a very important role throughout Rancière's works. Though education may not be his primary philosophical or historical concern, it is often present in his thought, even when not explicitly so. The work often considered be the most elaborate expression of his educational

thought can be found in his 1987 work *Le Maître Ignorant*, translated in 1991 by Kristin Ross into English as "The Ignorant Schoolmaster" (which I will refer to as TIS throughout the thesis). In that work, as in others, Rancière makes connections between education and wider political and social realities (either historical or contemporary). This interest in education can perhaps be understood better when considering Rancière's own history as a university student.

Rancière was a student of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, with whom he participated in writing "Reading Capital", a work in which Althusser, together with several of his students, analysed Marx's "Capital". In 1974, Rancière published his first individual work under the title "Althusser's Lesson", an extension of an earlier essay in which he had radically distanced himself from his former professor's teachings, as well as his theoretical movement, Althusserianism (Battista, 2017). The reason for Rancière to have distanced himself from Althusser and Althusserianism is hinted at in the title of another of his works, namely "The Philosopher and his Poor" (1983/2003). In this work, Rancière traces the history of Western philosophy and finds in it a certain kind of move performed by a multitude of thinkers (examples given by Rancière in the book are Plato, Marx, Sartre, and Bourdieu), a move similar to the one he accused Althusser of having performed. In this move, the philosopher establishes their own position as a philosopher by creating another, distinguishing category: the category of those who are dependent on the philosopher's thinking in order to think for themselves, a category Rancière sometimes generally refers to as 'the poor' (Rancière & Noudelmann, 2003/2017, p. 144). It is through the activity of analysing this category as an object of study that the philosopher can constitute themselves as someone with the special capability of carrying out analysis, while at the same time constituting the other as someone who lacks this capacity.

Having located this kind of move as one of his main protagonists at the beginning of his career, Rancière keeps finding it in different ways in all kinds of different academic disciplines – philosophy, sociology, history, education – and even in the very existence of fields or disciplines itself. To put this more succinctly, in my understanding, Rancière always seeks out and analyses hierarchies, in the many different capacities within which they exist. Simultaneously, what he aims for is to tease out the possibility of equality, especially in those instances where it seems impossible to find. Also important, accordingly, is that his critiques are often not directed at those who are obviously in favour of hierarchies. As he puts it in one book, referring to those who spread ideas regarding the necessarily hierarchical underpinnings of human communities: he has 'nothing in common with those that spread it, and so nothing to discuss with them' (Rancière, 2005, p. 2). Instead, he aims himself at those

who purport to seek out equality, yet instead keep it in place through the type of move described above. In the field of education, he sometimes refers to this group as "progressives". One main representative of this group of thinkers for Rancière, as already mentioned, is Bourdieu. Others are those who are generally subsumed under the category of "critical pedagogy", such as Freire, Giroux, Apple, and MacLaren (though Rancière's critique is especially forceful when it comes to Bourdieu).

What all of the thinkers mentioned above have in common is that they are working in the Marxist tradition, which is where Rancière, it seems to me, can also be located. But perhaps it can be said that Rancière builds on quite a different Marx than the others. The difference can be analysed on the basis of a different conception of *emancipation*. Critical pedagogy is also referred to as emancipatory pedagogy (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014). Emancipation is therefore central to the project as envisioned by critical pedagogues. Emancipation is also central to Rancière's educational thought for, as will explored later, the "ignorant schoolmaster" can be understood, in one of its senses, as a provocative way for Rancière to refer to the emancipatory teacher (Masschelein, 2013)). In the way in which it is sometimes discussed in the secondary literature, there is supposedly a fundamental difference between Rancière's emancipatory teacher and, for example, Freire's emancipatory teacher (as in Biesta & Bingham, 2010; Vlieghe, 2018). But the difference is perceived in various different ways by the different authors. It should also be noted that the critique raised against Freire and critical pedagogy in general is rejected by others (as in Malott & Ford, 2015).

Here I want to note that Rancière's concept of emancipation is counter-intuitive in comparison to the more common ways in which it is discussed. Emancipation commonly refers to being released from control by another person; originally from the father, so that emancipation converges with entering adulthood (Biesta, 2010). But for Rancière emancipation is something that is done by someone to themselves, and it is not the same as an escape from control. Rather, before potentially freeing oneself from the constraints of someone else's control, one needs to realise one's own power that is available regardless of whether the oppressor tells you that it is not[3].

Part of the different conception of emancipation in which Rancière diverges is in the notion that the intellectual (philosopher, sociologist, pedagogue, et cetera) must take on the role of unveiler, of revealing behind appearances hidden depths only accessible to the one who possesses the capacities and knowledge (which he often equates with science) necessary

[3] This may not actually be a different conception than emancipation in Freire, but constraints on space and do not allow me to go further into this here.

to see things for what they really are. Instead it seems that, for Rancière, appearance and reality are not categorically opposed, and there is no hidden depth to be found. The move from appearance to hidden depth is therefore not, according to Rancière, a move which emancipates – on the contrary. It is the same move described above, where the suggestion of hidden depth functions not as an emancipatory force where an obscured reality is being revealed, but rather one in which the one who is supposed to become emancipated is called on to obscure their own power to think and perceive reality by themselves.

Emancipation for Rancière is then never something that can be given by someone to someone else in terms of providing something like knowledge to them – although this thought should, I believe, be qualified, as I will do shortly. Moreover, it is not something that will happen in the future, but something that happens in the present. It is not something obtained after a long road of learning knowledge, but something that can be achieved in the present without the need for knowledge or academic understanding. Visible in these ideas then is the notion of time, a topic of philosophical scrutiny in many of Rancière's works. He often refers to the idea that different people can live in different temporalities, and when he discusses the opposition between hierarchical and egalitarian forms of thinking he often does so in terms of time. This importance of the topic of time is also visible in his use of the word "progressives" mentioned earlier. The time of progression is the time of the "not yet". For Rancière's "progressive", emancipation is the result of an emancipated teacher providing knowledge to a not-yet-emancipated student. For Rancière, emancipation is a "micro-event" in which a shift takes place in a person's perception of themselves. This is something that happens *now*, not in a process over time in the future. It is something like a person becoming apparent to themselves as an intelligence, that is, as someone capable of thought, of perceiving the world and relating to it through thought. The emancipatory teacher is then not characterised by whether they do or do not provide knowledge, but by whether they allow the student to relate to what they teach in their own way, thereby allowing them the experience of observing their own intelligence manifested in the material actions of themselves as a body. He writes that:

> … whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will learn what he wants, nothing maybe. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 18)

Perception is the central notion here. It is also here that I believe the role of the emancipatory pedagogue in Rancière's framework should be located. In my interpretation, what such a pedagogue does is to perceive the other person as powerful. This perception takes on the form of a presupposition which is implicitly but powerfully present in their

actions toward the other person. So it is not that they give power to someone but that they presuppose the power to already be present in them.

As I understand it, this also means that emancipation only takes place in a situation in which a person's perception as powerful has already disappeared. This is a situation Rancière denotes with the word "stultification". To be stultified is be rendered stupid and passive. It is then still an escape, but not in terms of liberation from someone else's control of one's body. In this sense, someone can be oppressed or even enslaved yet emancipated, perceiving their own situation to be unjust and deploying their intelligence in order to find ways to liberate themselves from the position they have been assigned to by others. Another way of formulating this is that the emancipatory pedagogue recognises the actions and words of the student as meaningful expressions of a creature equal in intelligence to all others. By doing this, the pedagogue take on a certain kind of position, both in a metaphorical and physical sense. Metaphorically, it means that they "ignore" the so-called "social position", the roles the pedagogue and the student are supposed to take on (hence the name "ignorant" schoolmaster). What it means in a physical sense – how they speak, how they position their body – is not a question asked by Rancière. Important for him is that people are assigned social positions/roles which predesignate the extent to which they are supposed to be capable of human thought, action, and expressive power. He often discusses this in terms of a dichotomy that is either explicitly stated by someone or implicitly present in what they say – a dichotomy, generally put, between those who are supposed to be capable of these things and those who are not.

The most important example for Rancière of someone who states the dichotomy is Plato, and this polemical figure therefore often comes back throughout his works. An example given by Rancière of the dichotomy being implicitly present is in "The Excursion", a poem by Wordsworth. Summarising his critique of this poem, which is about equality, Rancière states that, in it,

> … equality is given from on high, and the poem completes itself in a program of educating the people that mounts, like a prayer to the sky, towards "the State's parental ear". (Rancière, Rohrbach & Sun, 2011, p. 245)

The "vertical equality" he locates in this poem echoes his critique of the equality espoused by leftist thinkers such as Althusser, Bourdieu, and the critical pedagogues, for whom (in Rancière's interpretation) equality needs to be given by someone to someone else before that person can consider themselves equal to others. What he searches for instead is a "horizontal equality" present in the style of writing in, for instance, the poems of Keats (Rancière, Rohrbach & Sun, 2011), the literary works of Mallarmé and Flaubert (Rancière,

1996/2011, 1998/2011, 2011/2013; see also Panagia, 2018), the historical writings of Michelet (Rancière, 1993/1994), and in the educational thought of Jacotot he describes in TIS (Rancière, 1987/1991). His fascination for that educational thought is then tied in to the aspects of egalitarian thought described above. And the various different aspects of his theory are all connected in his wider search for equality. This further leads him to take opposition against what he often calls the "social order", which he has also alluded to in terms of policy (Rancière, 1992), the police order (Rancière, 1995/1999) and *partage du sensible* (Rancière, 1995/1999, 2000/2004, 2004/2010). In this police order, bodies are distributed in terms of assigned positions with a predefined identity, the boundaries of which they are not supposed to transgress. More specifically, the sense of identity Rancière seems to be condemning is the one which prescribes to people how they should behave, how they should speak, how they should live, and how they should think. His critique is aimed at the aforementioned way in which people are assigned a place of thought or non-thought, action or non-action; and, following from this, of either mastery or servitude. He refers to the latter as the "part that has no part", as those who do not partake – except in the role of servant – in the *partage du sensible*, which can be translated to both partitioning and a sharing of the sensible or perceptible. In some sense then this is the group of people who are not perceived or sensed as reasonable individuals, but as disposable and only, at best, fit to serve.

Against this kind of imposition by the social order Rancière takes on Foucault's concept of "subjectivation" in order to denote the egalitarian move away from the hierarchical order. This notion relates to the "subject", an often used concept in the academic tradition. Chambers has explored Rancière's usage of both subjectivation and subject, noting that his understanding of the political subject deviates from both the:

> … liberal model in which the autonomous subject precedes and serves as the ground for political action, and the Marxist model (especially in a certain orthodox flavor) of a subject that is fixed in place by a particular economic-social structure. (Chambers, 2012, p. 100)

So the subject is not something that is pre-given – neither as that which grounds political action, nor as that which is prescribed by the social order. Instead, it is that which comes into existence in the act of subjectivation itself. Rancière explores various instances of what this means in a more concrete sense. Generally, the role played by language is crucial in instances of subjectivation. Rancière describes instances where people use words – especially words used in order to denote types of people – in ways in which those words are not supposed to be used. And this "improper" usage of the words induces a kind of shift in the way people perceive themselves as well as others, thereby inserting a new mode of

perception within the existing ways in which people are supposed to perceive reality (according to those who dominate in the social order). It is in this context, I think, that it is also relevant to recall Rancière's discussion of the word "capacity", because in order to perform this inherently creative act of using words and conceiving of meanings in new and unexpected ways, the capacity to enact such a performance must be presupposed. Rancière refers to such a capacity with the word "literarity", which is that which characterises the human being as a being who speaks, a poetic being.

Important here is to remember Rancière's notion of the subject, which is not the autonomous subject which precedes political action, nor the subject that is fixed in place by the structures within which they live. Hence when a subject uses language in unforeseen ways (either in their own expressions or in the interpretation of the expressions of others), it is in an interplay with the linguistic structures that neither fully control them nor are fully controlled by them. Another way to say this, explored by Lane (2020), is that agency is ascribed by Rancière to both the subject of language and to the language itself. This means that the new direction in which one may go (both in terms of action and in terms of perception) is not only unexpected for those to whom the subject speaks, but also for the subject themselves. Subjectivation is then a process in which a subject appears to themselves and to others in a new, unforeseen way through their reappropriation of linguistic expressions. It is therefore also always a process of disidentification for Rancière, or 'escaping from a minority' (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 48).

Having discussed the importance in Rancière's works of (horizontal, radical) equality, of perception, and of the way in which he understands language as a means of political subjectivation, it now becomes possible to locate the importance of the concept central to his political thought: democracy. For Rancière, democracy is the essence of politics. In other words, there is no politics without democracy. However – and this is a central characteristic of all of his philosophy – he thinks about the word democracy by proposing to use it in an idiosyncratic way. Democracy, for Rancière, is:

> … not the parliamentary system or the legitimate State. It is not a state of the social either, the reign of individualism or of the masses. Democracy is, in general, politics' mode of subjectification if, by politics, we mean something other than the organization of bodies as a community and the management of places, powers, and functions. Democracy is more precisely the name of a singular disruption of this order of distribution of bodies as a community that we proposed to conceptualize in the broader concept of the police. It is the

> name of what comes and interrupts the smooth working of this order through a singular mechanism of subjectification. (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 99)[4]

Democracy is thus, for Rancière, not a state of things that exists over a period time, but rather a momentary disruption of a temporality – and of a *partage du sensible*. This means that democracy is what happens, through deviant usage of discourse, when appearances are shifted. Once again, Rancière indicates his break with the Marxist tradition of critical pedagogy by emphasising that this shifting of appearances is not about unveiling, about revealing what is real behind illusions. Appearances are not illusions for him. Democracy is:

> … the introduction of a visible into the field of experience, which then modifies the regime of the visible. It is not opposed to reality. It splits reality and reconfigures it as double. (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 99)

When democracy interjects into the existing *partage du sensible*, it "splits reality". This notion of the split connects to a difficult but often recurring theme running throughout Rancière's works: *l'ecart*, a gap or interval (he also often writes about an "excess"). The concept of the gap or interval is difficult because the way in which it is used by Rancière defies the logical law of identity which states that each thing is identical with itself. For example, Rancière writes that 'political intervals are created by dividing a condition from itself' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 138) and that 'the wrong instituted by politics is not primarily class warfare; it is the difference of each class from itself' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 18). This refers again to Rancière's conceptualisation of subjectivation as a form of disidentification. This is also why, I think, Rancière writes about the gap in an apparently nonsensical way. The gap is a gap in "the sensible", and is therefore a form of "dissensus", a way of sensing which is opposed to common sense, that is, the hegemonic way of perceiving – that is, making sense of – reality. Politics is a form of dissensus, making equality appear where it had not been perceived before. It is 'always at work on the gap that makes equality consist solely in the figure of wrong' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 62). This is how politics and aesthetics relate to one another for Rancière. As Tanke writes:

> In this sense, his practice owes much to strands drawn from the history of aesthetics, that form of philosophy which recognizes the constant separation of the sensible from itself. (Tanke, 2011, p. 42)

[4] Note that the French *subjectivation* has been translated here by Rose as "subjectification". Chambers (2012) has argued vehemently that this should have been "subjectivation", which is a translation I will follow in this thesis.

And, referring back to Rancière's polemical attitude towards social science and critical theory (and, in line with this, critical pedagogy), Pelletier notes that:

> More 'reflexive' social science discourses, which address the problems of 'critical theory' by owning up to their own location in social order, end up, from the perspective of Rancière's argument, simply re-confirming its hegemony, or its lack of difference from itself. (Pelletier, 2009, p. 269)

So Rancière's two fundamental points of critique of the tradition of critical pedagogy – against their assumption of a hidden depth and of the intellectual who has to reveal this hidden depth to others – tie in to his own conceptualisation of subjectivation as a form of dissensus, the creation of a gap in the sensible where a social/symbolic category becomes distanced from itself. Critical pedagogy, instead of allowing for an unforeseen, improper – and, in some sense, even impossible – change to happen, reaffirms the social categories it purports to criticise, thereby inevitably reifying those categories instead.

Having given a short explication of my understanding of Rancière's works, I will now turn to another main aspect of the thesis, and one of the main inspirations for me to begin writing it: my internship experience in a Children's Home.

Internship experience

Ethical concerns

My two-year Master's programme included an internship of four months. My experiences during my internship were important in leading up to me writing this thesis, and the thesis is partly a continuation of those experiences. For my internship I worked in a Children's Home in a non-Western country, housing 13 girls aged 9 to 17. In the thesis, there will be several moments when I reflect on some of my experiences there. It was not known at the time that I would take my experiences up in published writing. Therefore, in order to prevent crossing ethical boundaries, I refrain from giving any information that could lead to knowledge about the location of the internship or the people involved there. All names are made up. Moreover, I emphasise here that these are reflections based mostly on my memories, though I did make some recordings in the first several sessions of the project there – with permission of both the organisation and the children – which I can still reflect on today. The point, in any case, is that the role played by these scenes in the thesis is not to provide an accurate depiction of a real situation, but rather to deepen the understanding of the more theoretical explorations within which the scenes are embedded.

The Children's Home

The children who lived in the home could be seen as representatives of the group Rancière calls the 'those who have no part' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 9). They either had no parents or their parents could, for various reasons, not provide an adequate environment for them to grow up in. Some of the children had been in the home from an early age, others had arrived when they were somewhat older. The home was part of an organisation educating women (mostly) about their rights working in private homes. The organisation was run by "Marion". She had been personally responsible for taking in most of the children in the home and was the closest they had in terms of a mother figure. The person primarily responsible for running the home itself was a man, "George".

My time during the internship entailed a liminal process of transformation regarding my own views on education and what it means to be an educator. To make clear what I mean by this, I will reflect on the relationship between the views on education I had before my travels and the ways in which they were influenced by the experience. I was aware of the fact that I had a preconceived image of what I was going to encounter and that this image would most probably not be accurate. Moreover, I was aware of the influence my own social background would have on my perceptions and interpretations. A fear I had was that I would try to become the White European teaching others the right way of doing things. My primary aim was therefore to have an open attitude and to let myself be taught by others rather than being the teacher myself. This was made easier by the fact that I did not consider myself to be an expert in any way; the approach taken by my Belgian professors had not been to produce experts. On the contrary and strongly inspired by Rancière, we were encouraged to be "ignorant" educators, which was the guiding idea inspiring my attitude as a social and cultural educator. However, this did not mean that I took on an uncritical attitude throughout my time there. Rather, an intricate dynamic would evolve in which my experiences were often a test of my own identity. Every unexpected event took on the form of a confrontation with myself. A decision had to be made when something unforeseen and confusing occurred: either stay with my previous beliefs or let them be shifted by what had happened. In what follows, my aim is to give an insight into these considerations and how my perceptions shifted throughout the experience.

The pedagogical style I encountered in the Children's Home was, for an important part, based on the assumption that the most important aspect of becoming mature is to learn how to behave properly. A clear distinction was made between improper and proper behaviour, and both were connected to one's future role in society. Most of the children had a background of life on the street, and the behaviour that came naturally to them was often

not in line with George's beliefs about proper behaviour. Therefore, the children were often punished. This meant, for the younger children, that they were hit with a stick on specific parts of their body (the top of the shoulders and their ankles) where they would receive pain but no injury from the strike. This was perceived to be an undignified form of punishment for children around age twelve and older. Their punishments (and these were also applied to the younger children) were restrictions on the amount of time available for joy and play, alongside scolding sessions from George. Next to this was the ever looming most radical possibility: being expelled from the home.

In order to control the behaviour of the children and to know when they had disobeyed their orders, George had turned the house into a panoptic environment. He had placed CCTV cameras throughout the house, and almost all of the house's locations were viewed by these cameras. The children knew very well which corners and little spots were outside of the cameras' field of vision. He usually did not watch the footage but he pretended to do so once in a while, so the children believed that everything they did was subject to his gaze. The CCTV cameras were not just meant for control of the children – they also functioned as a way to protect them. George, besides being the children's educator, also served as their counsellor. This was problematic, because when they told him things about themselves, he would use it against them later in order to strengthen his control over them. During one of the classes with them it became clear that the meaning of "counselling" had become intertwined for them with the meaning of the word "control".

It was in this context that the organisation asked me to come up with a pedagogical project for the children. I decided to conduct a short "experiment"[5] in which I wanted to find a way to implement Rancière's pedagogical ideas (as I understood them at the time, based on my first two readings of TIS) in a practical context. Before starting the research experiment, we (the children and I) discussed Rancière, the concepts I considered relevant for an understanding of the research, and my plans for the coming two months in which the project would take place.

For the project the children were split into two groups. There were six "big" children and seven "small" children. The distinction was made on the basis of their proficiency in English, and coincided more or less with their age. With both groups I followed the same pattern with the classes with one girl from the big children group to help me translate in the

[5] I use the word experiment here deliberately to echo the use of it by Rancière in his book. It was a project with an experimental nature in the sense that it was the first time I organised things in this way, and I did not know what the outcome would be beforehand.

small children group. The first several sessions were centred on a discussion of a list of topics I had chosen because I thought they were central to Rancière's pedagogical ideas:

- Learning
- Teaching
- Intelligence/Attention ("I'm going to try")
- Laziness/Distraction ("I don't know")
- Equality
- Ignorant/Emancipatory teacher
- Speaking/Writing/Studying/Research
- Language
- Journal
- Sources

I wanted first and foremost for the children to think about the meaning of these concepts – that is, the meaning of these concepts for them, not my understanding of the concepts as impositions upon them. After these discussions I gave them a notebook and a pen. I asked them to come up with a question they wanted answered and then to do research in order to find an answer to that question. They had to keep a log of what they learned in their notebook (in English for the bigger children, in their local language for the smaller children).

The project had three main aims – two official and one unofficial. The first official aim was similar to Otoide & Alsop's (2015) wish to find out 'what it might mean to respond to Rancière in the form of pedagogy' (p. 235) and in doing so to 'see what can be done under the supposition of equal intelligence' (p. 235). The second aim was for the children to improve their English. The third and unofficial aim was for me to introduce a way for the children to use the laptop they owned, because although they had been gifted this by a previous intern, they had never been allowed to make use of it and had therefore never used a computer in their lives. Though I did not think about it in these terms at the time, in my current understanding of the most central concept in Rancière's pedagogical framework is that of "urgency". This concept follows logically from the presupposition of the equality of intelligence: if we assume an equal intelligence among all children, and we also assume that they can do research by themselves without the explanations of a teacher (as Rancière seems to propose), then the role of the educator is to compel the autonomous exercise of the child's intelligence (see Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 30).

Looking back on the project there were, I believe, several aspects that worked and others that did not work as well as I had hoped. One reason that things went differently to the way expected was the interference of George, who would often come in and change decisions made by either myself or one of the students. Another reason was that, because of the experimental nature of the project, there were things I could have done better as a teacher. For example, after the students had written their reports I did not check on what they had written because I believed that it was about the work itself and not about the end result. I disagree with that now, and know that I should have paid more attention to what the students had done. Another thing I strongly regret was that I noticed much too late that one of the girls, who was 10 years old, was illiterate, even though she pretended that she was not (because she felt embarrassed). Yet I know that most of the older children wrote a lot in their book, showing that they did take the project seriously and that they had done research. The smaller children took on less theoretical questions and practice, for example, singing and drawing techniques they had found online. Here too I am partly critical of my own approach, because I now believe that these techniques might not be learned in the best way without the presence of a "knowledgeable teacher".

Having given a short summary of Rancière's works and a description of my research project in the Children's Home, this introductory chapter will conclude with an overview of the rest of the thesis.

Overview of the thesis

The next chapter will be an exploration of TIS in the form of a written "counter-translation" (a word taken from that book itself). Thereafter the initial reading of TIS will function as a portal toward other paths, in order to perform the primary activity of the kind of education described in the book: to begin somewhere and relate all the rest to it. From my reading of TIS, two main concepts are taken up for further chapters: "will" and "intelligence". Chapter 3 takes up the first of these concepts: will. The argument made is that Jacotot's understanding of the *self* as *will* can be read as an expression of Spinoza's ontology of the self as a striving to persevere and increase one's power of expression. Chapter 4 asks about my own will to write this thesis. It consists of an intertwinement of reflections on the contemporary world and introspective observations of my own sense of nihilism in relation to those reflections. The Chapter 5 deals with the notion of the equality of intelligence which, for Rancière, is qualitative, not quantitative. The question asked is what this means, which is also to ask about the meaning of meaning itself. Chapter 6 returns once more to the will, this time focusing on my own will to understand. A stance is taken

against the notion that understanding things adequately is impossible and insignificant. Chapter 7 returns to some of the threads followed in the thesis and re-weaves them into a coherent whole. In the final chapter, a critique is formulated of the prevailing assumption that education, like politics, is about emancipation. The ground is laid for a way of thinking about education as sensible configurations of space and time which urge children to persevere and increase their power to express themselves and to think under the mark of equality.

CHAPTER 2: COUNTER-TRANSLATION OF RANCIÈRE'S "THE IGNORANT SCHOOLMASTER"

Preliminary reflections on translation

Before commencing on my adventure into Rancière's works, it is important to make some comments on the role of language and translation in this thesis. Rancière is a French author, which means at least two things. The first is obviously that he writes almost all of his works in French. The second is that he writes against the backdrop of a distinct philosophical, historical, and cultural tradition.

Since I do not know French well, I could only engage with Rancière's texts in the two languages I do know: Dutch and English. My first reading of The Ignorant Schoolmaster (hereafter: TIS) was in Dutch (titled De Onwetende Meester: Vijf Lessen in Intellectuele Emancipatie) (1987/2007). It was the book's translator, Jan Masschelein, who first taught me about Rancière, in the first of his two courses I studied on the philosophy of education. My further readings of TIS, as well as all other works by Rancière, were in English. There are, I believe, both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. An advantage is that I could compare the Dutch and English translations with the original French. This allowed me to gain an insight into how the two translators had interpreted the original, which opened up more of the meaning contained in the original. However, one disadvantage is that not all of Rancière's works are translated. Especially when it comes to articles, interviews, and public appearances, there is a part of "Rancière" which remains inaccessible to me. Fortunately, almost all his books have been translated to English, and a large collection of translated interviews was published in the year in which I began working on my PhD thesis (Battista, 2017). With many of his articles also translated, and a growing number of lectures and interviews he gave in English available online, I believe enough of Rancière's works are available to undertake a comprehensive study on those works in English.

Another disadvantage is that the muddling effect on meaning which befalls all translations is intensified in translations of Rancière, because he often plays with ambiguity in order to express multiple meanings in one word or phrase. For example, the word "Maître" means "Master", but is also used specifically for schoolmasters, which is not the case in English. It is the case in Dutch, so the Dutch translation "Meester" comes much closer to the original. The ambiguity in the original French, in which there is an allusion to the different senses of masterhood and mastery, is not as clear in the English "Schoolmaster". Another central example is Rancière's notion *partage du sensible*, which I will discuss in Chapter 7. As I explain in more detail on page 208, I believe this notion is untranslatable, because both

"partage" and "sensible" have several meanings, and no English phrase can ever adequately capture the amalgam of signification denoted by their combination.

Finally, scholarship is always for an important part an act of translation. Studying written texts or listening to spoken words in a language we know can be deceptive if we believe that "knowing" a language will allow us to extract an objective meaning contained in the words. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that such a belief is based on an understanding of language in terms of the 'conduit metaphor' (p. 10) of language. According to this metaphor, words are like a conduit through which an objective meaning is communicated from one individual to another. Packer (2011) takes up this argument in a fierce critique of the ubiquitous research practices in which meaning is taken to be objective, and language is seen as no more than a tool used to transport objective meaning. This overlooks the aspects of interaction, and the creative aspect that is always present in communication. Rancière would, I believe, wholeheartedly agree with this critique, and it is especially pertinent that this chapter is a "counter-translation", a term I take up from TIS itself. Regardless of whether I read the book in Dutch, French, or English, the chapter will be my translation of Rancière's words, just as he translated Jacotot's words, and any reader of this thesis will, in the very act of reading, translate my words once more.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster

Rancière published "Le Maître Ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle" in 1987, and it was translated by Kristin Ross in 1991 to English as "The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation". In the Translator's Introduction, Ross (1991) places the book in its historical and political context and tells the story of how she believes it came to be. As Ross tells it, TIS was written by Rancière as an interjection in the then current debate in France between two camps regarding the reformation of the nation's education system. The problem underlying the debate for both sides were the social inequalities permeating French society, and the failure of the school in ameliorating this problem. Both sides of the debate were on the political left, but the solutions they proposed about how the school should address social inequalities were very different. One side – represented by the first Minister of Education in the Mitterrand government, Savary – aimed to reform the education system by shifting the focus to the whole personality of the child and taking on a 'compensatory attitude to unequal opportunity' (Ross, 1991, p. xiii) meaning that the curriculum would be adopted to the social background of individual students. The other side – represented by the second Minister of Education in the Mitterrand government, Chevènement – changed course drastically. The

school now had to be in service of 'the imperatives of technological modernization and competition for France in a period of worldwide economic crisis' (Ross, 1991, p. xiii) meaning that everyone was – on paper – going to study the same rigorous curriculum focused on topics such as grammar, rigid examination, and civic instruction. This debate permeated the media landscape of 1980's France.

According to Ross (1991), Rancière in some sense agreed with Chevènement's argument (inspired by Milner's work *De L'école*) that equality would entail teaching every student the same thing. He also agreed with Milner's view that Savary's approach was obscurantist, racist, and infantilising[6]. However, he did not agree with Milner's solution to the problem, because he disagreed with the very way in which the problem was understood. It is in this shift of where the problem lies that Ross locates the most central "lesson" of TIS. The shift Rancière makes could even be seen as a central philosophical novelty permeating all of his thought (though it was not really a novelty, but rather an idea he found in the writings of Joseph Jacotot and revived when doing archival work, as I will discuss further below). In TIS, Rancière argues that the belief that equality needs to be solved by the school system is itself the problem that needs to be addressed. Instead, equality should be presupposed as being already there. This refers back to the discussion of time earlier: equality has to be presupposed as something that is here, *now*, rather than as the end result of a process that will come somewhere in the future. More specifically, the proposition is that we should presuppose the *equality of intelligence* between everyone. This notion seems to be nonsensical (since normally, in both common and scientific discourse, intelligence is conceptualised hierarchically). Therefore, recalling the discussion of Rancière's notion of *dissensus* in the introduction to this thesis, TIS can (as I understand it) be seen as an enactment of Rancière's notion of dissensus, an attempt to interpose a new way of making sense that is perceived as nonsensical in the hegemonic *partage du sensible*, which I will return to more thoroughly in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

My own first reading of TIS took place during a course given by Jan Masschelein in a philosophy of education course during my Master's programme. I did not understand much of it on my first reading; yet somehow the book still fascinated me. So when I went to do my Master's internship in a Children's Home (as discussed in Chapter 1) I decided to re-read the book and conduct a small educational research experiment on the basis of my

[6] Savary was inspired by the sociological theories of Bourdieu, who, as explained in the Introduction, Rancière often targets in his many polemical writings as a representative of a wider way of thinking and way of writing which, in Rancière's view, purports to be egalitarian but is actually inherently inegalitarian. I will come back to this at several points in the thesis.

understanding of the pedagogical principles delineated in it. This in turn (combined with a number of other factors, which I will explore in Chapter 3) was the motivation for writing this thesis. The first step, therefore, was to write a chapter on the book which had inspired me to undertake this adventure. It entails an adventure into the book itself, in order to write, in terminology from the book itself, a "counter-translation" of TIS, in an attempt to make sense of it.

This chapter was drafted at the beginning of the research process. Here I want to place a short note, written from my perspective at the finishing stage of the thesis. In the past several years I have reconsidered the way I was approaching my reading of TIS. Those considerations have made me critical of my own attitude toward the book as a researcher. I think that, instead of trying to take on a neutral attitude toward the book, I had too strong an inclination to like it and to rather uncritically agree with Rancière. To an extent this has had a useful effect. That effect consists of a willingness to let my own intuitive thought be changed by Rancière's writings, even if those writings seemed wrong to me. This is good, I suggest, because one of the reasons for me to write this thesis was indeed to let myself be changed by Rancière's thought; to see if I could, through reading his works, observe a shift in myself toward a more egalitarian way of perceiving the world.

However, in this endeavour I have come to observe, in my own approach, a tendency which I believe is one of the very dangers to which Rancière is pointing. In short, I was venerating him too much to be really critical toward what he was saying (I was made acutely aware of this when reading Papastephanou (2020)). Because of this, I have made two forms of revisions to this chapter. The first consists of a rewriting of some parts of it to be more in line with my current understanding of things, as well as adding references to secondary literature about Rancière (the first version of the chapter had no such references because I explicitly wanted to write it before reading anything else about it). The second consists of thoughts I have about what I wrote in the past, which are written in such a way that they intertwine with the first version of the chapter. This can be understood as a dialogue with my former self.

Chapter overview

In what follows, the adventure into TIS will commence by plugging into a concept used in the book itself: totality. The way the adventure is approached was originally informed by a misunderstanding of this concept, because of which I wanted to read the book without reference to other works to see how much I could make of it by myself. Additionally, the book is discussed with respect to a number of different layers. The most superficial layer is

that of the book's story about a man named Joseph Jacotot, whose educational thought was very popular for a short period in the 19th century, but who had been more or less forgotten until Rancière's revival of him in TIS. That story is deepened through a discussion of the pedagogical method Jacotot developed, which, according to Rancière, was not really a method but rather a non-method. This is again deepened in the philosophical concepts Rancière develops on the basis of his interpretation of Jacotot's non-method.

The substance of TIS as I understand it is explored in terms of different threads woven together in a canvas. The first of these is that of two different circles identified by Rancière: the circle of power and the circle of powerlessness. These circles constitute ways of perceiving (or sensing)[7] which form a knot with ways of acting and expressing. There are two ways of perceiving (and thus, two ways of acting/expressing): the way of equality and the way of inequality. Then, power is connected to the concept of intelligence. For Rancière, as for Jacotot, the circle of power can interject within the circle of powerlessness through a presupposition: the presupposition of the equality of intelligence. This power is fundamentally about expression, and so the importance of storytelling in Rancière's conceptual framework is revealed – both as an educational practice and as a research practice. Then, a move is made toward Rancière's discussion of the will. In the way he discusses this in TIS, the will is what or who we are as an individual. But we can be thwarted from our will in the social order, which he discusses in terms of the material metaphors of planets and atoms. Another distinction is made (founded on that between equality and inequality), namely between attention and distraction. These notions open up to an exploration of Rancière's discussion of two different kinds of communication: reasonable communication and rhetoric. Finally, in the concluding part of the chapter, some possible implications for education will be discussed.

All references in this chapter without the specification of a year of publication refer to TIS (Rancière, 1987/1991).

The book as a totality

While trying to make sense of TIS during my later more in-depth reading of it, I scrutinised parts of it that I had only superficially read earlier. While doing this I noticed that many of the things Rancière said were references to themes outside of the book, and that he did not explicitly state what he was referencing – or, if he did, that he did not explain what

[7] Rancière writes about ways of seeing, which I have changed to perceiving because that includes all the senses rather than just one.

he meant exactly by the reference. Yet there was a statement he made which made me assume that I should be able to understand the book by itself, without exactly knowing what Rancière was referring to. This statement is made by him in relation to another book he discusses, *Télémaque*. He writes:

> The book is finished. It is a totality that the student holds in his hand, that he can span entirely with a glance … There is nothing to understand. Everything is in the book. (p. 23)

In my initial interpretation of this sentence, I thought that Rancière was arguing that everything I needed to know to understand a book could be found within that book itself. And because I believed this to be one of the central ideas of his philosophy, I decided to keep going back to this adage to see if it was also applicable to TIS. This was what made me continue reading, and re-reading, every time I thought I had hit an impenetrable wall; when I could not understand what was written, and felt that I needed an explanation to be able to continue. Finally, it seems to me that this book can offer an alternative vision on education than the much criticised forms of education focused on "lifelong learning" (see Biesta, 2013; 2016 and Masschelein and Simons 2010; 2015).

Beside the search for the book's "totality" as I understood it, another important reason for scrutinising its every detail was a strong desire for structure. It is not that there is no structure in the book, but it can be difficult to see it. I now think this is the case because Rancière ultimately argues for equality and against hierarchy, and he wants to mirror this argument in his style of writing. The way the arguments and ideas in the book are structured is not linear; he does not discuss the concepts in a logical sequence. It would make more sense to say that the book reads like threads woven together into a canvas. The threads consist of the concepts and themes of the book. Oftentimes they are introduced by Rancière, only to be seemingly forgotten soon after, until a later point in the book where he then discusses them in either the same or an altered way. This makes it difficult to find out what is going on at times. A similar observation is made by Sachs, who describes TIS as a 'a network of ramifications and cross-references' (Sachs, 2017, p. 55) and proposes to think of it as encyclopaedic – which, he notes, comes 'from the Greek kuklos (circular) and paedeia (child) suggesting the idea of all-encompassing education' (Sachs, 2017, p. 55). Important for Sachs is that the book is cyclical rather than linear. In my own thesis I have been inspired by both Rancière's "weaving" style as well as his resistance to linearity.

My understanding of the book was rather "fluid" throughout my reading of it, since, because of the "weaving" style of writing, concepts often changed in meaning as the book progressed. For example, I now interpret Rancière's use of the concept "totality" differently

from my interpretation in the beginning. The "totality" of the book does not mean that everything one needs to know if one wants to understand everything in it can necessarily be found in the book itself. It rather points to the elusive statement that 'everything is in everything' (p. 19). Rancière writes:

> All the power of language is in the totality of a book. All knowledge of oneself as an intelligence is in the mastery of a book, a chapter, a sentence, a word. (p. 26)

The difficult part of this sentence, for me (now, several years after writing the original chapter) lies in the word mastery. Rancière states that one can know oneself in the observation of having reached mastery of any linguistic expression. Yet what if mastery cannot be reached – would one then not recognise oneself as an intelligence? Could it also be that one can recognise oneself as an intelligence in the pursuit of mastery, regardless of whether one reaches it? Furthermore, and importantly, what is mastery? How can we recognise it? When can one say that one has mastered a book, a chapter, a sentence, or a word? These are not questioned concretely answered by Rancière, so it is rather up to the reader to search for an answer to them.

The point, in any case, seems to be for Rancière to argue for a way of perceiving all humans as equals by virtue of the faculty they all possess equally: intelligence. According to him, this can be perceived as something that is active in all of the works of any human being. It is about being:

> … interested in all discourses, in every intellectual manifestation, to a unique end: to verify that they put the same intelligence to work, to verify, by translating the one into the other, the equality of intelligence. (p. 136)

This way of perceiving is dubbed ' "panecastic," because it looks for the *totality* of human intelligence in *each* intellectual manifestation ' (p. 39, emphasis original). The method of equality was not dubbed panecastic by Rancière himself but by Joseph Jacotot, someone on whose works Rancière built extensively when he wrote TIS. Jacotot's story and his philosophy, together, make up one of the foundational threads of the book's canvas.

The Jacotot-narrative

The book centres on the historical narrative of Joseph Jacotot, a French polymath, philosopher, military captain, politician, and French teacher and university lecturer who lived from 1770 to 1840. It is important to remark that Rancière uses the Jacotot narrative in order to make his own philosophical points, and that the narrative is not necessarily

historically accurate throughout. A note should therefore be made: whenever Jacotot is discussed, it is Rancière's "Jacotot", that is, Rancière's figure of Jacotot. [8]

As Rancière tells it, Jacotot was a child of Enlightenment thought and practice and a supporter of the basic principles of the French Revolution, formulated in the declaration by law that 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights' (Britannica, 2021), further specified as the rights of liberty, private property, the inviolability of the person, and resistance to oppression. He was – as Rancière tells it – a child of Enlightenment thought and practice because he was an inventor and an explorer, and because he saw and acted upon the importance of experiment as a way to discover knowledge. He was a supporter of the Revolution, an egalitarian who wanted to help overthrow an outdated and oppressive regime. In other words, Jacotot was a man who lived in and through an age of *emancipation*, and whose actions were imbued with a desire for finding truth and for finding ways to convert the emancipatory spirit of his age (that is: the age of reason) into material reality. One of his experiments, as told in TIS, was to have Dutch-speaking students from the University of Leuven, then part of the Netherlands, now of Belgium, learn French by themselves without a teacher. They did this by memorising the French version of Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, using a Dutch translation to learn the meanings of the French words.

Jacotot's conclusions were captured in what Rancière, through his book TIS, refers to as *Universal teaching*, *Intellectual Emancipation*, and *Emancipatory method*. Yet Rancière's argument in TIS seems to be that Jacotot's "method" was actually not really a method, if method means something akin to following a certain pre-conceived set of steps in order to reach that aim. Perhaps it would make more sense to call it an anti-method, as Rancière does once: 'Jacotot's method— or rather, his anti-method' (p. 129). The reason for Rancière to be so fascinated with Jacotot is, I think, because of the way in which he came up with philosophical principles against what he called "La Vieille". This is translated to "Old Master" in the translation of TIS, although does not contain the word master in it[9]. It means something like "Old One", and as such refers as much to the one who applies this old "method" as to the method itself. It is an age-old principle, repeated time and again since the

[8] For a discussion of what Jacotot's method looks like, see Aldrich (2011).

[9] I discovered this when I compared the Dutch translation with the English one and noticed that Masschelein had translated "La Vieille" to "De Oude" in Dutch. English does not have a direct translation of this, so the most accurate translation would be made by adding "one" to "The Old" – but we should really think of "The Old" as something that refers to some unspecified noun. So, although I think it would have been better not to add a noun to the phrase at all, if one had to be chosen I would have picked "method" rather than "master". But unlike in Dutch, the French word is gendered, and feminine. So it could even be translated as "The old lady". As a side note, I also discovered here that Ross has, for mysterious reasons, removed Rancière's italicisation at some points in the book, though not others; she has also added some where there was none in the original French.

beginning of known history by all those individuals who want to make other human beings believe that they are inferior to them.

What Jacotot and, after him, Rancière, learned is that all intelligences might be equal. This is a *principle*, not a fact. But this principle is often doomed to be perceived as a '*madness*' (p. 75, emphasis added). In other words, it seems to be *senseless*, or without meaning. However, the principle of the equality of intelligences does make sense within a conceptual or logical framework in which concepts have different meanings than those usually ascribed to them in the 'conventional order' (p. 81) of society. This is an order in which the statement that all human intelligences are equal makes no sense, because the order is based on the opposite principle, that of the inequality of intelligence. An important aim of the book, then, as I understand it at least, is to show an alternative conceptual framework in which the principle of the equality of intelligence does make sense, and to show at the same time why the social order is one of convention, and why it is necessarily based on the principle of the inequality of intelligence, as Rancière firmly believes. In order to explore this, I will now discuss the two conceptual frameworks which Rancière discusses as circles – one which is founded on a belief in power, and the other on a belief in powerlessness.

The circle of power and the circle of powerlessness

To understand the importance for Rancière's philosophy of the Jacotot narrative and his thesis of the principle of the equality of intelligences, it is important to recognise that this can only be done in relation to the perspective of 'a circle of *power* homologous to the circle of powerlessness that ties the student to the explicator of the old method' (p. 15, emphasis original). As noted earlier, there are two "circles", and each circle is extensively discussed by Rancière in TIS. Elsewhere he also writes about "logics", stating that there is 'the logic that separates those "at the head of the class" and the logic of emancipation' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 187). Each of these circles has a set of meanings attached to concepts that together form a *way of perceiving* human beings. One way of perceiving human beings, and the meanings of the concepts constituted by that way of perceiving, are centred on the principle of hierarchy. TIS depicts an intervention in that way of perceiving, by picking out its concepts one by one and ascribing to them different meanings, thereby implementing a new way of perceiving within and through the old one. The "old" way of perceiving (which is not just old in a historical sense, but called old for the same reason that the Old Master is called old) is the circle of power, and the intervening way of perceiving, the circle of powerlessness. The concept "power" has an important place in the conceptual framework of both circles, but in a very different sense. In the first sense, situated within the conceptual

framework of the circle of inequality, power can be defined as a position of domination over other human beings within the hierarchical structure of the social order. In the second sense, situated within the conceptual framework of the circle of equality, power can be defined as something possessed by every individual human being: the power of intelligence.

Besides "power" and "method", Rancière discusses additional concepts that are used in different senses in the two conceptual frameworks, with different and sometimes opposing meanings. In TIS, Rancière delineates the circle of power within and through the circle of powerlessness, by showing how the same concepts can be used differently. To use a concept in one circle in the way that it is used within the opposite circle often makes little to no sense; the meaning of the concepts are related to the meanings of other concepts within a circle. This is certainly the case with the concept "equality". That is why the principle of the equality of intelligence cannot make sense until one has seen the meanings of other concepts as they are used in the circle of power. The circle cannot be broken by using only one concept differently. All the meanings of the concepts in the circle have to make sense in relation to each other for the whole circle to make sense. The Jacotot narrative is a point of entry into Rancière's depiction of the circle of power. At the same time, the Jacotot narrative serves as a warning; it is a way to show what happened when Jacotot's philosophy was taken as a method – in the sense that this concept is used within the circle of powerlessness – because this means that the most important part of it, the principle of the equality of intelligence, cannot make sense.

It would even be possible to add (1) when a concept is used in the sense of the circle of powerlessness, which could now also be called the circle of power(1), and a (2) when it is used in the sense of the circle of power – or the circle of power(2)[10]. This is because the equality of intelligence is related to the understanding of power as power(2). Power(1) and power(2) are mutually exclusive. Therefore, the circle of power(1) is a circle of powerlessness because it is excludes power(2). I can now also say, referring back to the discussion of Universal Teaching, that it is a method(2) and not a method(1). Similarly, to slightly get ahead of things, the equality of intelligence must be understood in the sense of equality(2) and does not make sense when understood as equality(1).

Important is that there is not one circle that is more "true" than another, at least not in the way that something can be factually true or false. The two circles entail *ways of perceiving* one another. According to Rancière, the failure of the anti-method of Jacotot

[10] I could also add (power) and (powerlessness), or (equality) and (inequality) respectively, but at this point, it seems to me that – if writing like this is going to be useful at all – (1) and (2) seem least intrusive in affording clarity of the text.

occurred precisely because it was understood as a method(1) and not a method(2). Another way of saying this is that, according to Rancière, many people did not *perceive* what Jacotot perceived (whether this is because of failure on their part or because Jacotot failed to express himself adequately is an interesting question, but its answer is not of direct relevance here). The point is that they did not "see" the equality of intelligence, did not "see" the most important part of Jacotot's philosophy and practice. This is exemplified in the following excerpt.

> Guigniaut, an envoy from the Ecole Normale in Paris who, though he was *unable to see* any significance in Calypso, had managed to see the unforgivable lack of a circumflex on croître in one of the compositions. (p. 42, emphasis added)

This points then to the observation that we perceive in the world what we expect to perceive, we notice those things that conform to the inclinations we have in the way we interpret reality. It is in the context of this observation that I want to look at what I consider to be the most fascinating aspect of TIS: Jacotot's definition of the human being as a will served by an intelligence.

A will served by an intelligence

At first I was convinced that Rancière was taking up Jacotot's notion of the human being as a will served by an intelligence in order to make an ontological claim. By that I meant that I thought he was saying what a human being *is*, as a verifiable, objective fact that can be observed empirically. However, after more contemplation, it seems to me now that Rancière discusses the notion of the "human being" in terms of *perception* rather than *being*. However, I still do note that the way in which he discusses human beings seems to be in the sense of ontology, so this remains undecided.

Sachs, too, seems to interpret Rancière ontologically when he states that 'intelligence, for Rancière, is immaterial' (Sachs, 2017, p. 67). Yet Rancière has also been called a materialist thinker (e.g. Davis, 2010, p. 185; Deranty, 2010, p. 48). How, then, can the observation that Rancière is defining the human intelligence as immaterial converge with the observation that Rancière is a materialist thinker? I am not sure how to understand this. Is Rancière's materialism a materialism that nonetheless contains concepts that refer to

immaterial aspects of nature? Is it then not rather a dualism? Could Rancière's thought perhaps be connected to the movement called New Materialism?[11]

Important in Rancière's discussion of Jacotot's formulate of the will served by an intelligence is how he frames this formulate as being politically charged. He writes: 'Man is *a will served by an intelligence*. This formula is heir to a long history' (p. 52, emphasis original). He then discusses two other definitions that came before it: 'Man is a living organization served by an intelligence' (p. 52) and 'Man … is an intelligence served by organs' (p. 52). Both these definitions contain a reference to the material part of the human being, the body. Moreover, Rancière understands them not only as philosophical definitions of the human being, but also (and perhaps even more importantly) as being politically charged. The first definition comes from 'the poet-philosopher Jean Francois de Saint-Lambert', who was 'summing up the thought of the great eighteenth-century minds' (p. 52). I take this to be tongue-in-cheek by Rancière: can someone really sum up all those minds in one such sentence? Be that as it may, he situates it within the philosophical framework of the Enlightenment, which has the centrality of the human subject in experience and meaning-making, as its most fundamental tenet. Human beings are understood as individuals who can and must gain the freedom that will allow them to do research and obtain true knowledge.

As for truth, Enlightenment philosophy seeks a 'co-naturality between linguistic signs and the ideas of understanding'[12] (p. 53), meaning, I think, that truth can and must be represented by, or expressed through, a universal language. True knowledge results when language perfectly maps truth. Because of the importance of the individual, the organisation of the state should be based on a 'republican model of a king at the service of a collective organisation' (p. 53). So the philosophical notion that "man is a living organization served by an intelligence" is connected to the political notion that society should be organised as a republic, with the state serving its people rather than the other way around, as it had been before the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century. Both are connected to the scientific endeavour to find true knowledge – and to express this knowledge in the universal language of reason. Not long after the Revolution followed the Restoration in 1814, when

[11] Quintana (2020) offers a deep reflection on these matters. She discusses Rancière's materialism in terms of *corporeality* and *incorporeal materiality*. Unfortunately, space does not permit me to explore this further in this study.

[12] In Black, D. (2006), co-naturality is defined as two things having a 'shared nature' (p. 195). So here Rancière is saying that Enlightenment philosophy sought a shared nature between linguistic signs and the ideas of understanding; to find, in other words, the "true" meaning of words (if "meaning" refers to the content of ideas). Meaning can mean something different too, of course; as in Wittgenstein's language game, where meaning is something that can be possessed by someone, a possession which can be verified by checking whether they use a word in such a way that it confirms to the rules of the game as they are understood by other people in the community.

opponents of the ideas of the Enlightenment tried to turn back everything they believed had gone wrong. Here, the philosophical notion that 'man is an intelligence served by organs' is connected to the political notion of 'the good hierarchical order: a king who commands and subjects who obey' (p. 52). Against the scientific search for true knowledge was placed 'the primacy of the established, in the framework of a theocratic and sociocratic vision of the intelligence' (p. 53).

This was the philosophical and political world that Jacotot found himself in, and in which he formulated and gave shape to his own educational theory and practice. He did this on the shoulders of the philosophical tradition that had started in the first half of the 17th century, with Descartes' method of radical doubt. In the battle between revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries, Jacotot was very much on the side of the first. As noted, he was a republican and he believed in the importance of the individual. He was a 'man of progress', or someone who 'moves forward, who goes to see, experiments, changes his practice, verifies his knowledge, and so on without end' (p. 117). That is, a "man of progress"(2). Yet although he did very much believe in the spirit of the scientific project, what he did not believe in was the possibility to perfectly represent truth through language. For Jacotot, then, the notion that human beings are a "will served by an intelligence" had a radical political consequence: the perfect society cannot exist. There is no universal language, and there are no universal laws to be constructed, either by priests or by scientists.

Having introduced the assertion that "man is a will served by an intelligence" and because the "hypothesis of the equality of intelligence" is the central idea of TIS, my next step will be to analyse Rancière's elusive concept of "intelligence". I will use the distinction of intelligence(1) and intelligence(2) during this analysis.

Power/intelligence

Intelligence(1) is the concept of intelligence in the sense that it is defined within the conceptual framework of the circle of powerlessness.

> The Old Master says that a child's memory is incapable of such efforts because powerlessness, in general, is its slogan. … There are inferiors and superiors; inferiors can't do what superiors can. (p. 24)

As Rancière discusses it, those with higher intelligence are supposed to have better knowledge – and this implies that they have a better capacity for understanding the truth, or the supposed co-naturality between ideas and material signs. Intelligence(1) can thus be defined as the 'power of understanding based on comparing knowledge with its object' (p. 72). Intelligence(2), on the other hand, is the concept of intelligence in the sense in which it

is used by Rancière and Jacotot in the conceptual framework of the circle of power. It is what all human beings have in common. Or rather, it is what Rancière and Jacotot believe we should presuppose everyone has in common.

Intelligence(2) is controlled by a will: 'There is a will that commands and an intelligence that obeys' (p. 25). Together, the will and the intelligence constitute what it means to be human. Most fundamentally, '*telling the story* and *figuring out* [are] the two master operations of the intelligence' (p. 64, emphasis original). To see what this means for Rancière, we have to go back to the very beginning of every human life.

> When I compare two individuals, 'I see that in the first moments of life, they have absolutely the same intelligence, that is to say, they do exactly the same things, with the same goal, with the same intention. I say that these two humans have equal intelligence, and this phrase, *equal intelligence*, is shorthand for all the facts that I have observed watching two very young infants'. (p. 50)

Besides a common desire and need for food and shelter, human beings all start out with an equal desire to discover and learn, and so we all start out discovering things – that is, 'to learn something and to relate to it all the rest' (p. 18). In other words, from the moment we are born our life is an 'intellectual adventure' (p. 1). Another way of saying this is that we all start out our lives doing *research*. To do research – that is: to be on an intellectual adventure – means continual movement, continuing *acts* of human intelligence. But the acts of the intelligence do not operate in solipsism. We *perceive*, but we also *express*, *speak*. That is: our research inevitably entails communication with other researchers, other adventurers, other students. And so, for Rancière, intelligence(2) is (in one of the senses in which he uses that concept) the power of language, where language is understood in a very broad sense as the many ways in which we can express ourselves and thereby "report", so to speak, on what we have learned during our adventures. Rancière writes:

> Intelligence's act is to see and to compare what has been seen. It sees at first by chance. It must seek to repeat, to create the conditions to re-see what is has seen. It must also form words, sentences, and figures, in order to tell others what it has seen. (p. 55)

Having established the important role of language, the next section will deal with Rancière's discussion of language in TIS. Before going to that section, however, I will first make some important remarks on the notion of speech in Rancière's thought.

Rancière often uses the word "speech", and this sometimes refers to spoken words, but sometimes to more than just spoken words. In relation to the former, Rancière formulates a critique of what he perceives to be the 'privileged status of speech' (p. 5) over writing. He believes that this privileged status of speech permeates educational practices, in the sense

that teachers often explain written words to their students through speech, on the assumption that those students cannot understand the written words by themselves. This is a point of central importance for Rancière, because he perceives such explanatory acts as a quintessential form of stultification. He maintains that, by helping the student understand the words on the page, the teacher subtly makes them understand something else as well: that they need to be explained that which they 'cannot understand by themselves' (Vlieghe, 2013, p. 188). This critique of the primacy of speech over writing is at the same time a critique of Plato, who, in his "Phaedrus", argued that writing is inferior to speech, because it is directed at anyone, that is, at no-one in particular, which implies that the meaning of the words is up for grabs and cannot be controlled by the speaker. This makes writing inherently democratic. Chambers (2012) explains that Derrida also argued against Plato's rejection of writing, but that Rancière's critique goes further than 'to read Plato as merely privileging speech over writing' (p. 113). For Rancière, written words are silent, which is to say that:

> … they always stand ready for further elaboration or adaptation, and they do so, in no small measure, on account of the fact that they are "orphans" and hence without any authorizing figure able to police the ways by which, nor by whom, they are used and understood. (Deranty, 2010, p. 143)

Against Plato, Rancière thus defends the democracy of the written word, and it is exactly this democracy which is suppressed by the teacher who claims to know the one true meaning of the words.

But there is a second way in which Rancière uses the word "speech", namely to denote expression in general. As far as I know, this is not something he explains, it is rather something I discovered when reading his works. In these instances, I believe he deliberately uses the word "speech" in order to allude to his reading of Aristotle. As I explain in more detail in Chapter 7, Rancière gives great weight to Aristotle's (-350/2000) definition of the human being as a political animal, on account of their capacity for speech. Rancière writes, in reference to Aristotle's views:

> The supremely political destiny of man is attested by a sign: the possession of the logos, that is, of speech, which *expresses*, while the voice simply *indicates*. (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 2)

There is thus for Aristotle a distinction between utterances that should be perceived as a sign of animality, and utterances that can be perceived as a sign of humanity. This is a distinction between 'noise and speech' (Rancière, 2004, p. 6) respectively which, in this context, is synonymous to the distinction between expression and the noise made by a brute or automaton. It is thus a matter of perception: the difference lies in how someone's utterance

is perceived, namely as speech/expression and thus a sign of intelligence, or as mere noise and thus a sign of the absence of intelligence. Rancière further connects this distinction to poetry when he states that the leading virtue of the intelligence is the poetic virtue, and that when someone expresses themselves to someone else as equals, they 'speak as poets' (p. 64).

Equality is thus directly related to language for Rancière, and he believes we should assume that everyone has a capacity to speak – that is, to express – as a poet equal to all others. One question arises from this: what does this viewpoint mean for the equality between adults and infants? Rancière clearly believes the poetic capacity to be present from the very moment of birth. Quoting Jacotot, he writes:

> When I compare two individuals, "I see that in the first moments of life, they have absolutely the same intelligence, that is to say, they do exactly the same things, with the same goal, with the same intention. I say that these two humans have *equal intelligence*, and this phrase, equal intelligence, is shorthand for all the facts that I have observed watching two very young infants." (p. 50)

He later adds to this that infants, once they start learning language, will do so through an intellectual act, namely by connecting certain meanings to expressions. The equality lies in the application of the same intelligence in this act as in all other expressive acts. Regardless of all the obvious inequalities between infants and adults, there is a basic equality between them: the equality that lies in the application of their intelligence in the effort to communicate with others. In Chapter 8, I will discuss a book chapter by Biesta and Bingham (2010) in which they discuss the figure of the child in Rancière's works, and how this figure clearly shows the poetic – and thus, by extension, as I will discuss later in the thesis, the political – capacity of speech or expression. I will also return to questions of speech and infancy at other points in the thesis. Now, I will discuss what Rancière, following Jacotot, calls the two "master operations" of intelligence.

Telling the story

This is the first "master operation" of intelligence: *telling the story*. That is: to communicate from human being to human being, adventurer to adventurer, researcher to researcher, soul to soul. All infants want the same things, and they all express this in the same manner. Later, the things they want change, and so does the way they express themselves. What we want to express is our "soul" – that is, our thoughts and feelings. This can be done through any means we see fit, such as words, movement, or painting. ' "Me too, I'm a painter" means: me too, I have a soul, I have feelings to communicate to my fellow-men" ' (p. 67). We are all painters(2), or poets(2). Every human being expresses their soul

through an effort to communicate(2). This is equal(2) for all, because most human beings learn language, and 'any work of language is understood and executed the same way' (p. 37). Language – that is, language(2), or language understood within the conceptual framework of the circle of power – is the expression of the human *soul*.

> I am registering the fact that man has an articulated language that he uses to make words, figures, and comparisons for the purposes of communicating his thoughts [and feelings] to his fellow-men. (p. 50)

Moreover, it is the expression of the *human* soul. 'I see that man does things that other animals don't. I call this fact *mind, intelligence*' (p. 50).

It is important to note that language(2) is more than just the words we speak or write:

> Man communicates with man through the words of his hands just as through the words of his speech: 'when man acts on matter, the body's adventures become the story of the mind's adventures'. … one's material activity is of the nature of discourse. He communicates as a *poet*: as a being who believes his thought communicable, his emotions sharable. (p. 65)

Another way of saying this is that we have to use the material world in order to express our immaterial thoughts and feelings. Language is material. We want to express our thoughts and feelings and have to "venture" into the material world to do so: we have to convert that which is in itself without meaning into a *sign* which has meaning to us.

> I must verify the reason for my thought, the humanity of my feelings, but I can do it only by making them venture forth into the forest of signs that by themselves don't want to say anything, don't correspond with that thought or that feeling. (p. 67)

In this sense, every adventurer 'communicates as an artisan: as a person who handles words like tools' (p. 65). And the driving force of communication is the very will to express. We are a will controlling an intelligence: we want to express ourselves and we do that by turning matter into signs, into language, in the act of trying to communicate our thoughts and feelings to other human beings. But we do this while *en route*, in the course of our individual intellectual adventure. And it takes a lot of effort to learn how to express ourselves well – which gives an indication, as I will explore further in the thesis, of what these ideas might mean for education.

All of the above indicates that the Jacotot-narrative is not only woven into TIS's canvas for delineating Jacotot's educational and philosophical discoveries, but also as a way to situate TIS within the historical period in which Jacotot lived. The "scientific" endeavour of phrenology was influential in education (as a way to demarcate who was inferior, who needed correction) *and* it was very much a part of the zeitgeist in which Jacotot found

himself. It was a means to argue against a 'republican model of a king at the service of a collective organization' (p. 52). In other words, for Rancière the search for physiological evidence of a hierarchy in intelligence belies a political agenda infused by the passion for domination. This is the agenda of the "Old Master", who, as Rancière argues, lives today as much as two centuries ago. Those who look for the inequality of intelligence do so because they are already motivated by the "opinion" that the inequality of intelligence is real. The hierarchy they observe in human beings is ideological, not empirical: to see the inequality of intelligence is to have that idea and project it upon the world.

That is to say, the search for the inequality of intelligence finds what it is looking for because it already perceives what it set out to find. But, according to Rancière's arguments, there is no causal explanation for it. So instead of taking the way of perceiving that informs us to communicate(1) with other human beings on the basis of a verification of the inequality of intelligence, we should do the opposite. We should communicate(2) out of a will to verify the *equality* of intelligence, in the works – that is, the alterations we make upon matter – of both others and of ourselves. This is crucial for educators. Whenever we work with children, and people in general, we can ask ourselves: which circle am I verifying? What do I *perceive* in the works of this person? Which thoughts and feelings could be reflected in these works? And are these thoughts and feelings – is this *soul* – that is reflected in the works equal to my own?

But then, the question remains why some human "works" are more impressive than others. This is the question of "genius". If the works upon matter are a reflection of our immaterial soul, that is, a will to express our thoughts and feelings through the use of an intelligence, and if intelligence is equal for everyone, then why are there still only so few people we call genius? What about the works of Mozart, or Racine, the example Rancière often evokes?

> In the nineteenth century, it is true certain geniuses began to boast of superhuman inspiration. But the classics, those geniuses, didn't drink out of the same cup. Racine wasn't ashamed of being what he was: a worker. (pp. 68-69)

I am not convinced by the idea that what we call "genius" can be solely contributed to someone's diligence. But this is Rancière's argument. And he further argues that if a human being is a will served by an intelligence, and intelligence is equal for everyone, then the difference in the outcomes of what we use our intelligence for (expression, creation) must be found in the will.

Will

One way in which Rancière describes the will in TIS is as 'the power to be moved, to act by its *own* movement, before being an instance of choice' (p. 54, emphasis original). One of the things I believe Rancière is pointing to here is a notion of liberty as immanent justification: we can justify wanting freedom solely on the basis that we want it. Yet since I did find the sentence cited from Rancière quite strange (on the one hand we have 'the power to *be* moved', on the other the acting 'by its own movement') I went to the original French to see if it could be translation issue. The original sentence is: "La volonté est puissance de se mouvoir, d'agir selon son propre mouvement, avant d'être instance de choix". The phrase 'puissance de se mouvoir' is then translated as 'the power to be moved', but this may be an awkward translation, because 'to be moved' sounds to me contrary to 'to act by its own movement'. The point, at least at first sight, seems to be that we have a power to move, a power to act, and "to be moved" sounds exactly as if we are acted upon and would therefore point to a lack of power. Perhaps a more accurate translation would have been "the ability to move". Yet following this thought even further, it could then be countered that the confusion between "the power to move" and "the power to be moved" reveals an important theme in Rancière's works, which is the problematisation of the boundary between action and inactivity. So the power to be moved, although in one sense one of passivity, is at the same time an active power, one that, as Bengtsson (2019) argues, was denied by Kant in his conception of the human subject. For Kant, shows Bengtsson, passivity equals something akin to a 'little death' (p. 69), because for him the existence of the human subject is impossible to think without thought itself. There is no human subject that is not an "I think". Since, for Kant, "not thinking" equals passivity, it also equals the disappearance of the very subject. And "the power to be moved" refuses this line of thought, because to be moved is a way to be 'of the world' (Todd, 2020, p. 1110). This means that "passive" sensibility is actually a powerful activity, one that does not negate the subject, but shows how our individual power is connected to our ability to be open to a world that can move us in unexpected ways. Seen from this view, then, perhaps the translation might accurately reflect Rancière's meaning in this sentence. This is further supported in some of his later writings, in which passivity takes on an important role (e.g. Rancière, Rohrbach & Sun, 2011).

Further, in the way that I understand Rancière, for him the will is something that comes *before* language, before we are constrained in our choice between material signs in order to express ourselves. Since what we want to express are our thoughts and feelings, it is crucial to note that *thought comes before language*. Moreover, this definition of the human being as

a will served by an intelligence is a direct response to Descartes' assertion that the existence of the human subject is implied by their thought. Instead, proposes Rancière,

> … in place of the thinking subject who only knows himself by withdrawing from all the senses and from all bodies, we have a new thinking subject who is aware of himself through the action he exerts on himself as on other bodies. (p. 54)

That is, we have a new thinking subject who, by wanting and acting from that want and by exerting influence on material bodies, is at the very same time provided with a proof of their own existence. To want, to act out that want, and to be aware of this as an act of freedom, are not three separate things. They are what we refer to when we speak of the human subject. Intelligence, then, is a tool with which the will exerts itself while acting on and being acted upon by material bodies. Moreover, this is not something different from what Rancière means by *language*. The realisation of all this – which is the realisation of the power of our own will – is called *emancipation* by Rancière. In this way, by asserting this different concept of the human being – that is, different from the one Descartes seemed to have "seen" – a space opens up for thinking about liberty. Writing in direct reference to Descartes' method of doubt, in which he proposes to consider the possibility that everyone we perceive is a deception created by an evil demon, Rancière states: 'no evil genie can interpose himself between consciousness and its act' (p. 57). So the individual's freedom is the result of the realisation of their own will, both in the sense that they believe in their own freedom and in the actual action which expresses that belief. The will, as Rancière seems to understand it, is at the same time an action and the consciousness of that action. And perhaps he is also formulating this as an alternative to the conclusion Descartes reached after his long period of doubt. Instead of doubting all sensible reality and concluding that the only thing we can be sure of are our thoughts, Rancière (following his interpretation of Jacotot) proposes that the thing we should not doubt is our will and our capacity to act upon matter by expressing our feelings and thoughts. This is discussed by him in the third chapter of TIS. Then, in the fourth chapter, he shifts his attention to our relationship with other people, in a move that recalls Rousseau's writing in his "Émile" (1762/1979). This is when Rancière starts discussing the social order, as explored in the next section.

The social order

Here, as for Rousseau (1762/1979), society can have a detrimental effect on the realisation of our will. This is because, for Rancière, "the social" (a term he often uses,

though he never explains what he means by it) is characterised by the desire for domination, which stems from what he calls contempt, or inequality's passion:

> The social world is not simply the world of non-reason; it is that of irrationality, which is to say, of an activity of the perverted will, possessed by inequality's passion. (p. 82)

So the adventurer, a will trying to communicate what they have observed and what they feel and think, is met by the refusal of others to accept this communication as being an expression of an intelligence equal to their own. It is also a refusal of the value of another person's way of perceiving. This is not to say that the dominant ways of perceiving are necessarily evil. In fact, especially those people who believe very strongly that what they see in the world is good, will insist on others perceiving things in the same way that they do. And they will go to great lengths to accomplish this. But they enforce a way of perceiving at the cost of not being able to truly communicate with other human beings as their equals.

The social order is a world in which children, adventurers, researchers, are told that *their* words – sounds, movement, paintings – have no meaning. They are told that the signs of the material order they refer to in order to try and communicate their thoughts and feelings are already occupied by other, more meaningful, more intelligent, *superior* ways of saying things. This is *stultification*: making people believe that they do not partake in the universal gift of human intelligence, that the meaning *they* put into signs is not intelligent at all – or perhaps just slightly less intelligent than another's. It is the annihilation of a child's confidence in their capacity to perceive things (that is: to have ideas) and to communicate what they "perceived" by making use of language.

> This production of irrationality is a work at which individuals employ as much art, as much intelligence, as they would for the reasonable communication of their mind's works. Except that this work is a work of grief. War is the law of the social order. But by the term 'war,' let us not think here of any fatal clash of material forces, any unleashing of hordes dominated by bestial instincts. War, like all human works, is first an act of words. (p. 82)

These words – requiem, lament, annihilation, grief, war – do not seem to be carelessly chosen. I think Jacotot and Rancière really see a perpetual battlefield on which perverted beings deploy the full power of their intelligence in order to try and dominate others, to establish a hierarchy *that is not naturally there*. And I believe Rancière wants to show that, first, this lust for domination can be seen anywhere in known history. But it is not just something *of* history: *it is still going on today*. It was true in Jacotot's time and it is still true today. Laws were created to enforce equal treatment, but humans, acting out of 'contempt, inequality's passion' (p. 80), find other ways to dominate. For Rancière, the Old Master

reigns today as much as in the past. Moreover, he does not believe in the possibility of a rational social order at all. This must again be understood from within the circle of power, and it relates to the dual nature of human beings, which I will explore in the following section.

Attention and distraction

In previous sections I have explored how Rancière proposes two different circles, one of power and one of powerlessness. Power here refers to a power of an individual, a power he also calls intelligence, used for a person's "intellectual adventure", which he uses synonymously with "research", and which could, I think, even be used synonymously with "life". For Rancière, the circle of powerlessness is the circle which constitutes the social order. We are born with a sense of power, but the social order works in such a way that it draws a great number of people into a circle in which they are lead to believe that they lack this power they inherently thought they had. Importantly, the school can be used as an institution in which this mechanism takes place. In those instances where this happens, the school functions as a stultifying institution. A stultified individual is then someone who has lost the sense of themselves as powerful, as intelligent. Emancipation for Rancière is therefore fundamentally the moment in which an individual regains the sense of their own power/intelligence. In order to accomplish this, another circle has to interject within the circle of powerlessness. This circle begins with the presupposition that we are all adventurers. And an intellectual adventure is a perpetual movement of the fundamental human act: research, or the reflection on the will upon itself, in the attempt to express themselves through the use of their intelligence.

Rancière has thus established a duality between two circles. One is the circle of power, which is the circle of equality, since it assumes fundamentally an equality between everyone as an intelligent being. The other is the circle of powerlessness, or inequality. Central to the notion of power/intelligence here is the individual's capacity for expression. The circle of powerlessness entails a ranking of capacity in terms of test scores. The circle of power entails an assumption of everyone's capacity to find ways to express their thoughts and feelings, and to express a way of perceiving. Here, the human being is understood as an immaterial will who ventures into the material world of signs; signs which never fully overlap with thoughts and feelings, but which nevertheless need to be used as a way to express them. So expression is central to Rancière's notion of equality. He discusses this in terms of storytelling.

For Rancière (and, as with much of what is discussed in this chapter he is following Jacotot here), there are two "master operations" of intelligence. The first is *telling the story*, which he defines as the *translation* of one's thoughts and feelings into material signs. Then follows the second step: the person to whom one communicates has to counter-translate the material signs into thoughts and feelings again. This is the second master operation of the intelligence: *figuring out*, defined as the *counter-translation* of material signs into thoughts and feelings. But this interaction only works if both individuals consider each other to be equal. If they perceive each other as unequal, that is, being hierarchically different from themselves, they will not be able to consider the expressions as reflecting thoughts and feelings that are of an equal nature to their own. They act out of 'contempt, inequality's passion' (p. 80). For Rancière, this is a contempt for the other person – but it is also contempt for ourselves, for when we see others as superior or inferior, we deny the equality of the equality of both of our intelligences. In other words, it is contempt for the humanity within both of us. This is the easy way out, because it gives us the possibility not to translate and counter-translate, which is a very difficult endeavour.

> Inegalitarian passion is equality's vertigo, laziness in face of the infinite task equality demands, fear in face of what a reasonable being owes to himself. (p. 80)

This is the denial of the two master operations. There is no translation and no counter-translation. As I will explore below, this also refers to two fundamentally different ways of using language.

An attentive, reasonable will uses its intelligence in order to communicate, to express the thoughts and feelings in their soul. It works from the principle of equality: others are equal to me, they have the same intelligence, and so they will work at translating my communication. We both use the material world to construct signs, language, equally. Our ways of perceiving things are coming from an equal capacity to *perceive* or *sense*. There is no universal reason, only individual reason. And the will has two modalities: attentive and reasonable or distracted and perverted. A distracted will submits itself to those of others; it refuses to use its intelligence reasonably. Another way of saying this is that the attentive will controls language reasonably, whereas a distracted will is controlled by others through language. Its intelligence is still controlled by the will, but the will is controlled by the will of others. There is complexity here (which is not discussed by Rancière) in relation to ideology about what the "will" is. This complexity becomes clear – and this could even be an exercise to try out – when we sit down and consider where our motivations really come from. It seems to me that they often follow forces outside of us, which means that it is not

simply a matter of saying that what we want is entirely in our own control. This will be explored in further chapters.

This is expressed by Rancière in a difficult but crucial paragraph in the fourth chapter:

> The perverted will doesn't stop using intelligence, but its use is based on a fundamental *distraction*. It habituates intelligence into only seeing what contributes to preponderance, what serves to cancel out the other's intelligence. The universe of social irrationality is made up of wills served by intelligences. But each of these wills charges itself with destroying another will by preventing another intelligence from seeing. And we know that this result isn't difficult to obtain. One need only play the radical exteriority of the linguistic order against the exteriority of reason. The reasonable will, guided by its distant link with the truth and by its desire to speak with those like it, controls that exteriority, regains it through the force of attention. The distracted will, detoured from the road of equality, uses it in the opposite way, in the rhetorical mode, to hasten the aggregation of minds, their plummet into the universe of material attraction. (p. 82, emphasis original)

There are various possible implications here for education. The question is: what could it mean for educators to be "perverted" in this way? One possible instance is, perhaps, the situation in which a universal curriculum is created which everyone has to follow, making all educators throughout the realm walk the same route, speak the same words, aggregate by performing the same actions. Another meaning could be that situation in which an educator expects a child to do exactly what they tell them to because they want them to obey their personal authority. This is at least partly what seemed to be happening in the Children's Home.

I believe, however, that when applying these ideas to education, there is a complexity which is overlooked by Rancière. This is that there are many instances in which a teacher expects a child to do exactly as they say, without losing the equality between them. To put it succinctly, teaching often involves the mechanism in which a teacher diverts the child from their own intuitions in order to make them perform an action in a better way. For example, when learning a musical instrument, there are intuitive ways of playing that are counterproductive and will not allow for the fastest and most accurate ways of playing. Another example is that of theoretical arguments, where one's intuitive logic leads to false conclusions. But even in the Children's Home, George taught me that what I considered to be *only* an enforcement of personal authority in the beginning, was something more as well. His strong belief was that the children would only be able to lead a dignified life if they let go of the behaviours they had learned during their life before coming to the Home. He wanted them to learn discipline and respect for tradition and community. Though I remained critical of what I perceived to be a fear-centred pedagogy, he nonetheless had considerable

impact on my own thought about education. Since I had very little experience with authoritative figures, I had learned to distrust them wholesale. This is now no longer the case – I believe it is rather important to think about how authority and equality can go together, which is something I believe Rancière thinks about as well.

Now follows an important sentence: 'The universe of social irrationality is made up of wills served by intelligences' (p. 82). I have already discussed how, for Rancière, the social world is a world of irrationality. This means that the social world is a world in which people are not attentive, and thus not reasonable. They are distracted from the equality of human intelligence, and they choose one way of perceiving this over all other ways of perceiving. Material signs are perceived to have one superior meaning. But here, Rancière maintains that the social world is still a world in which human beings use their intelligence. But the intelligence is controlled by perverted wills, that is to say, wills that *aggregate* and agree upon one superior way of seeing. There is intelligence, but it is stultified. However, there seems to be an inconsistency about this in the book. First, in the third chapter, Rancière wrote:

> It is lack of will that causes intelligence to make mistakes. The mind's original sin is not haste, but distraction, absence. 'To act without will or reflection does not produce an intellectual act. The effect that results from this cannot be classed among the products of intelligence, nor can it be compared to them. One can see neither more nor less action in inactivity; there is nothing. Idiocy is not a faculty; it is the absence or slumber or the relaxation of [intelligence]'. (p. 55, brackets by Rancière)

It seems to me that Rancière says here that there is either attentive action, where the intelligence is used, or there is distracted, will-less action, where the intelligence is not used. But then, second, in the fourth chapter he writes that there is an attentive will, which uses the intelligence, and there is a distracted will, which *also* uses the intelligence. The social order, for him, is a "work" in the same way that things created by the attentive will are "works".

> This production of irrationality is a work at which individuals employ as much art, as much intelligence, as they would for the reasonable communication of their minds' works. Except that this work is a work of grief. (p. 82)

Was Rancière distracted? Probably not. First, it seems that Rancière is changing, or at least adding to, Jacotot's theory. Jacotot, in his understanding of the equality of intelligence, was inspired by Descartes' philosophy. However, according to Rancière, the way Jacotot uses Descartes is 'ambiguous' and 'extraordinarily selective', because it is 'a Cartesianism of the decision of equality, but one that presupposes, precisely, the thorough refutation of

methodical thinking in Descartes' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, pp. 176-177). Both in the third chapter, in the first part of the inconsistency, and in the fourth chapter, in the second part of the inconsistency, Rancière refers to Descartes. First, he cites Jacotot's '*translation* of Descartes's famous analysis of the piece of wax' (p. 54, emphasis original). This is where Rancière first introduces Jacotot's understanding of the human being as a will served by an intelligence, which is a conclusion he reaches at the end of his rewriting of Descartes' analysis. Furthermore, he changes Descartes' *cogito* in the following way:

> Emancipation … is each man becoming conscious of his nature as an intellectual subject; it is the Cartesian formula of equality read backwards. 'Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am'; and this noble thought of the great philosopher is one of the principles of universal teaching. We turn his thought around and say: 'I am a man, therefore I think.'' The reversal equates 'man' with *cogito*. Thought is not an attribute of the thinking substance; it is an attribute of *humanity*. (pp. 35-36, emphases original)

With this rewriting of Descartes, Jacotot entered a debate fundamental to Enlightenment philosophy. For Rancière, it is a:

> … fundamental turnaround that the new reversal of the definition of man records: man is a will served *by an intelligence*. Will is the rational power that must be delivered from the quarrels between the *idea-ists* and the *thing-ists*. (p. 54, emphases original)

But then, Rancière also argues that Jacotot's understanding of Descartes was ambiguous and selective. So he adds his own understanding to Jacotot's understanding of Descartes. This might be why there is an inconsistency in the book. Rancière does take on Jacotot's insistence that we must think about the relationship between matter and mind, but he also qualifies Jacotot's construction of that relationship.

The solution to the inconsistency, then, could be reached through an understanding of the pair of threads in the book I found the most difficult to understand (but also that finally helped me really understand what I now believe Rancière is communicating): materiality and immateriality, or matter and mind. This thread shows itself most prominently in the fourth chapter of TIS, but it is already woven into earlier chapters. In the following section I will explore this theme further.

Matter and mind

> Joseph Jacotot believed that all reasoning should be based on facts and cede place to them. We shouldn't conclude from this that he was a materialist. On the contrary, like Descartes, who proved movement by walking, but also like his very royalist and very religious contemporary Maine de Biran, he

> considered the fact of a mind at work, acting and conscious of its activity, to be more certain than any material thing. And this was what it was all about: *the fact was* that his students *had learned* to speak and to write in French without the aid of explication. (p. 9, emphases original)

This is the first step of universal teaching: learn a fact. The next step is to relate everything else to it. The underlying premise of this is that we are all (equally) capable of thinking. 'What do you think about it? Aren't you a thinking being? Or do you think you are all body? "The founder Sganarelle changed all that … You have a soul like me"' (p. 23). Using our intelligence attentively is what makes us reasonable. This also means that to be reasonable we have to be veracious about what we know, and how we have come to know it. But we are a dual creature. We can be attentive or distracted, reasonable or irrational. In the fourth chapter Rancière explains this dual nature of the human being through the language of matter and immateriality. This is partly done as metaphor, but also seems to be meant by him literally. This was difficult to untangle.

Looking back at this section at a later time I think I was reading more into it than Rancière was trying to convey. Still, this is itself an interesting observation in light of the fact that I am trying to understand Rancière here – and Rancière (2015a) himself believes that what a student learns from a teacher is often something very different from what the teacher was trying to teach.

In the metaphor Rancière uses, our individual mind is immaterial, and the social order is material. Within the metaphor, the part that is immaterial seems to be made up by the will, our thoughts and feelings (which he also calls a "soul"), and our intelligence. He is not very explicit about the exact boundaries between these concepts but, in my understanding, these are the "parts" that make up the immaterial part of the human being for him. When we are attentive, we use our intelligence as a means to search, to gather truth, to translate and to counter-translate. However, we are part of the social order as well; and in the social order, we are perpetually subject to the attempts of others to divert us from our path. And so he writes, in the beginning of the fourth chapter:

> We were getting lost watching thinking minds orbiting around the truth. But matter's movements obey other laws: those of attraction and gravity. All bodies mindlessly hurl themselves toward the center. (p. 76)

That is, in the metaphor, we were alone, we would be freely floating through space, without any distraction from other beings. But we are not alone, we are always in relation to other people, and those people do distract us constantly (just as we might distract them). As soon as we are distracted from our own path, from our own adventure, our intelligence begins to be attracted toward the intelligences of other human beings. We float toward them at the

same time that we start losing contact with our own will. This is distraction, the second modality of the will. This point has to be nuanced though: a distracted will, for Rancière, actually means that the will is no longer there at all. There is not a distracted will: there is nothing. To be distracted means to no longer reflect upon one's own human activity. It means a disappearance of our self. It means to say that we perceive(2) things when we don't really perceive(2) them, to speak the words of others without seeing a meaning in them that reflects our own soul.

> The free orbit of each intelligence around the absent star of truth, the distant flight of free communication on the wings of the word, is found to be thwarted, driven off course by universal gravitation toward the center of the material universe. (p. 77)

This is why we are a dual creature: we are necessarily part of the social order. This is not something we can escape from. We are a soul *and* a body, meaning that we are a reasonable will *but also* an irrational, social being. This is not the same as good and evil. Being in the social order does not mean to be evil, and being reasonable does not mean to be good. This foreshadows a conceptual theme he would introduce in his later works, and for which he is now possible most well-known: politics and police. Maybe this is an indication of what it might mean that TIS itself already contains the totality of Rancière's thought – the politics/police dyad was already present in the work, albeit only implicitly.

We cannot live with other human beings without at least some divergence from the route we take on our intellectual adventure, without some aggregation, or uniformity. We have to agree on perceiving things in a certain way, even if we do not always feel it. I think this is why Rancière invokes the highly elusive statement that 'maybe we should give some credit to the Manichean hypothesis' (p. 77). The point here seems to be that wherever two intelligences work together to create something, what they create can never be a unified intelligence, for 'intelligence is only in individuals, … it is not in their *union*' (p. 76, emphasis original). The social order, then, can never be intelligent. And human beings are dual, for their participation in the social order necessitates them to act partly irrationally.

I think that there is a strong individualism here which I do not agree with any longer. It seems to me that an intelligence, understood as mind, exists both individually and in togetherness with other minds at the same time. We are one with others inasmuch as the ways in which we think are shared, and this is often more the case than some like to believe. And though Rancière writes this in a clear and crucial warning against the ever present danger of group-think, often in connection with some venerated leader, this for me is not to

say that thinking collectively should be denounced wholesale. Without collective thinking there cannot be collective movement, collaboration, or community.

Another way of saying this is that human beings are partly free, and partly unfree. We have a free will, but we are also subject to the laws of the social order – the material part of our being. And it is *because* human beings have a free will, that their existence in the social order is not free. For the irrationality of the social order results from the fact that different human beings perceive things in a different way. If they did not, everyone would be the same.

> But how can we reconcile such uniformity with the liberty of individual wills, each of which can use or not use reason whenever it pleases? (p. 78).

Here, I have another point of criticism against Rancière's formulation. If a situation in which everyone would always be reasonable would lead to agreement on everything, would that mean we are essentially the same being? It seems that for him, it does:

> The wills would become harmonious, and human groups would follow a straight line, without jostling, without deviation, without error. (p. 78)[13]

I believe the important point is not that we can use or not use reason whenever we please. The point is that, even when we are reasonable, we will still not always perceive things in the same way that others perceive them. There would still be disagreement about the meanings we perceive in material signs. This must result from Rancière's own argument that reason is not a universally reached truth, but an individual relationship to truth, which develops during our intellectual adventure. When we are reasonable, we attentively use our intelligence in order to try and express our thoughts and feelings. But this expression will differ from the expressions of others. That is why communication is poetic, a perpetual translation and counter-translation. But the conclusion is the same: ' "It is precisely because each man is free that a union of men is not" ' (p. 78). We are a dyadic creature: human being and citizen; attentive in our personal relationship with truth and, necessarily, at least to some extent, distracted in our position within the social order.

The law of gravity is a metaphor. In the metaphor, we are free as long as we perceive other human beings through the circle of power. As soon as we perceive them through the circle of powerlessness – that is, when we perceive them as hierarchically different from ourselves – we lose our freedom.

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[13] Only when understanding reason as reason(1) would this be the case. But in reason(2), the opposite would (I think) be the case: being reasonable is different for everyone, if only because we are different bodies. So this explains it, then; he is using reason as reason(1), and then it makes sense what he is saying.

> To remain within the metaphor of our cosmology, we will say that it is the passion of *preponderance* that has subjected free will to the material system of weightiness, that has caused the mind to plummet into the blind world of gravitation. (p. 80, emphasis original)

That is, I think, preponderance in the sense of the craving for domination, the desire to be more than others. For Rancière, it is this desire that drives the Old Master; it is the driving force of the explicative, social order. What is explicated in the social order is first and foremost that we have to perceive things in one specific way. And the fundamental characteristic of that way of perceiving is that there is a hierarchy in human intelligence. This is the social order of which everyone is part. We cannot fully escape this. Social reality does not venture along with our individual intelligence. We are "always already" entangled in a network of intelligences. And society's laws work just like the law of gravity: they make us say and do things that we do not necessarily want to do. It is *as if*, freely floating and flying, we become subject to laws of gravity that pull us toward the centre of one version of truth.

In other words: our intelligence is used by us, by our will, as long as we are communicating reasonably. But there is no place for reasonable communication in the social order, as Rancière understands it. The social order is a place of *hierarchy*, and there can only be reasonable communication between equals. This raises a question: should "order", as Rancière proposes, necessarily equate with "hierarchy"? Can we not imagine orders without hierarchies? Maybe this is the point: in any kind of order, at least one hierarchy has to be chosen: the hierarchy of one way of perceiving things over another. Or, for one idea, or ideal course of action, over another. That is, when we decide how to behave in relation to one another, we have to decide upon rules which demarcate the boundaries within which we can act freely. We will then expect all individuals within the order to use their intelligence in order to act within the boundaries of those rules. If our intellectual adventure has a thousand possible paths, the social order will demand of us to choose one.

> Reasonable man will not be taken in by these tricks. He will know that the social order has nothing better to offer him than the superiority of order over disorder. (p. 91)

For Rancière, then, 'social submission can be compared in two *apparently* contradictory manners' (p. 81, emphasis added). First, the social order is subject to an irrevocable material necessity. Second, it is individual wills that create the necessity. 'These two ways of speaking amount to the same thing' (p. 81): the material necessity is created by individual irrationality, but at the same time, because everybody is creating this irrational totality, individuals are also subjugated to it. In our irrationality, we divert others from their

path, just as they divert and distract us. And 'there need only be distraction for intelligence to give way, for it to be overcome by the gravitation of matter' (p. 79). This does *not* mean, however, that intelligence is no longer used. It means that it is no longer used by a reasonable will. Intelligence is no longer used for the veracious expression of an individual's soul and way of perceiving, but for the perpetuation of the ways of perceiving of the social order. A body thus acting without expressing its soul is like an automaton, or brute, akin to Descartes' (1637/1997) understanding of "the animal". It is the mindless, soulless body, that nonetheless possesses a human intelligence which can steer the body to cause great harm to others.

Here, we are still within the cosmological metaphor. However, it is something more than a metaphor at the same time, because all of this plays out in the domain of language, and language is material (language not only in the sense of words, but in the sense of any kind of material sign upon which we project meaning – so it is about *any* physical action, as long as it is reasonable). This can be done reasonably, from an attentive will expressing its soul; and it can be done irrationally, from a distracted will expressing the ways of perceiving of the social order. There is truly a dualism between matter and immateriality in the sense that we are an immaterial mind, but we can only express ourselves through matter. To be reasonable means to attentively control matter through the power of intelligence. To be irrational means to be distracted, that is, it means the loss of one's soul over matter, over the creation of works; it means the loss of one's power over one's own intelligence, and to have that power come under the control of the laws of the social order – that is, of the laws that demand one way of perceiving, one meaning, over others. For Jacotot, this loss of control over intelligence by the will means that:

> … the effect that results from this cannot be classed among the products of intelligence, nor can it be compared to them. (p. 55)

Rancière contradicts and qualifies this notion by maintaining that:

> … this production of irrationality is a work at which individuals employ as much art, as much intelligence, as they would for the reasonable communication of their minds' works. (p. 82)

What I perceive as Rancière's most important point, despite these paradoxical statements, is that there are two uses of intelligence: an attentive one, and a distracted one. Attentive use of intelligence is reasonable; distracted use of intelligence is irrational. Any use of intelligence through the circle of powerlessness, that is, from the belief that there is a hierarchy between human individuals' intelligences, is based on a distraction from the equality of intelligence, and this is therefore irrational.

So the task, for the educator, is to communicate in a way which manifests the belief in equality. That is what it means to be emancipated. In line then with the distinction between two ways of perceiving human beings, there are two forms of communication: an attentive form, connected to the belief in equality, and a distracted form, connected to the belief in inequality. This is what I will discuss next.

Communication

There are two forms of communication as described by Rancière. First, there is equal communication(2). Here, one reasonable being translates their thoughts and feelings and a way of perceiving into material signs – 'Every speaking subject is the poet of himself and of things' (p. 84) – and another human being counter-translates those signs back into thoughts and feelings and a way of perceiving. Second, there is hierarchical communication(1), where the meaning invested in material signs is used by one or both interlocutors in order to force a way of perceiving upon the other person. This is what Rancière calls *rhetoric*: 'the art of *reasoning* that tries to annihilate reason under the guise of reason' (p. 83, emphasis original). Reasonable communication is the truthful and attentive expression of the soul of a human being; rhetoric is the irrational expression of the citizen's distracted desire to dominate:

> Rhetoric, it is said, has war as its principle. One doesn't seek comprehension in it, only the annihilation of the adverse will. Rhetoric is speech in revolt against the poetic condition of the speaking being. It speaks in order to silence. *You will speak no longer, you will think no longer, you will do this*: that is its program. (p. 84, emphasis original)

A leader who wants to have power(1) over the people loses power(2) as much as the people do: both become equally subjugated to the "law of gravity":

> The superior man who tips the balance will always be he who best foresees when and how it will tip. He who bends others best is he who bends best himself. By submitting to his own irrationality, he causes the masses' irrationality to triumph. Whoever wants to be the people's master is forced to be their slave. (p. 85)

It seems that the orator has control over the people through their mastery of rhetoric. But they are as much controlled by the demands of the social order; they can only do and say those things that, at a certain moment, will work to gain the favour of the people. In other words: the orator cannot dominate people by means of a reasonable, veracious expression of their soul. They can only dominate by promulgating what the people already want to hear – or by instilling fear in them. It would follow, I think, that a reasonable ruler can only be one who does not want to dominate. To rule reasonably is then perhaps a curse more than it is a

gift, for the ruler has to navigate the world of irrationality more than anyone else – and even a just ruler has to enforce irrationality by enforcing one way of perceiving over another. This also implies that, were education to consist of teaching children one true way of perceiving things – even if that way of perceiving were the most just one – this would not be a rational form of education for Rancière.

Rancière thus maintains a position that is perhaps as radical and difficult to understand as the equality of intelligence (and which, he argues, follows from it logically): the social order, for Rancière, can *never* be reasonable. For Jacotot and Rancière, 'there is no language of reason. There is only a control of reason over the intention to speak' (p. 84). Reason means the control of the attentive will to "speak", that is, to use signs in order to express one's thoughts and feelings. The search for a universal and disinterested language is an attempt to the make meaning uniform: the enforcement of one projected meaning onto signs by all people. This is possible for that part of the human being that is a citizen, but not for the part that is an attentive will. 'Man can be reasonable, the citizen cannot. There is no reasonable rhetoric, no reasonable [political(1)] discourse' (p. 84). And the argument against the possibility of reasonable laws is the same. Instead, rhetoric plays on the irrationality of the people. And this irrationality has a specific cause: the passion of preponderance, or the belief in the hierarchy of intelligence. In other words, the orator stultifies people and extorts their stultification in order to elevate their own position in the social hierarchy:

> This speaker or that one, at a particular moment, knew best how to incarnate the specific stupidity of the Athenian people: the feeling of its obvious superiority over the imbecile people of Thebes. (p. 86)

This also shows why the "law of gravity" works both ways: not only the people are stultified, but the orator as well. They want power over the people, but can only gain it by subjecting themselves to what they want to hear, which is, perhaps, something similar to "make Athens great again".

Jacotot and Rancière go a step further: they also argue against the utopian ideal of "progressive" assemblies. The fallacy they see as underlying progressive political thinking is that it assumes the possibility of a reasonable configuration of the social order. They believe that, in the shift from the divine right of kings to the rule of progressive liberators, one thing remains the same: the supposed superiority of deciding the meaning of linguistic signs. This superiority is held by specific people in both cases, they just base themselves on a different rhetoric in order to obtain the position in which they are allowed to dominate language. And this domination over language *is* the domination of the Old Master – it *is* what constitutes the "explicative order".

Summary of the educational thoughts in TIS

The most central notion in the conceptual constellation woven by Rancière on the basis of his reading of Jacotot is that of the equality of intelligence. In TIS, Rancière seems to propose that educators should always presuppose the equality of intelligence between themselves and their students, and between different students. Another proposition is that such equality is thwarted through the act of explanation.

For Rancière, such widespread stultifying pedagogical practices have grave consequences in a political sense, because it means that a large part of the population goes through a school system which teaches them – not explicitly, but in the way in which they are taught – that there are people of superior intelligence and people of inferior intelligence, and that they belong to the latter group. This in turn leads to a situation in which those people who have been stultified by the education system do not consider themselves to be capable of the kind of thought necessary to be involved in political decision making. They believe that those with superior intelligence should lead them, and that, even if they feel that something is very wrong in the way that the communities they belong to – including society as a whole – operate, that feeling must not be significant. They believe that they are neither capable of reading the material signs produced by others, nor of expressing themselves through material signs, in a way that indicates the level of intelligence sufficient for being included in the group of those whose expressions can considered to be truly human. In short, the school system that is founded on the pedagogical method of explanation results in a population of citizens who are willingly complicit in the inegalitarian, oppressive, and dehumanising social structures that permeate our world.

By implication, the schooling system is therefore itself complicit in the perpetuation of these structures. These observations are reminiscent of other arguments made in the past, by thinkers such as Illich in his book "Deschooling Society" (1970/2002) and Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1968/1970). Generally put, it seems to me that Rancière is not arguing against the school as an institution (Jacotot, after all, was a school teacher). Rather, his argument seems to be that we have to consider what we mean by "school". Inspired by Rancière, Simons and Masschelein have asked this question in several of their works, for example in their "In Defence of the School" (2012/2013). In their argument, they share an observation with Rancière, namely that the word school etymologically derives from the Ancient Greek *scholè*. This word has various translations, but the one they point to is *free time*. Rancière writes:

> In one sense it is certainly true that democratic education is the paradoxical heir of the aristocratic *schole*, for it equalizes less by virtue of the universality of the knowledge it imparts, or by virtue of social levelling, than by virtue of its very form, which is that of a separation from productive life. (Rancière, 1992/2007, pp. 54-55)

The school, argue Rancière and Simons and Masschelein, is the place of free time, where free time is understood as time which is not occupied by the necessities of work, of being productive or making money. Free time is the time of equality and thus of democracy. Yet they also argue that many schools of today are often not aimed at free time, but only at teaching the skills and knowledge necessary for productivity, for finding one's way into the labour market.

So the argument is that the school can be more or less egalitarian, and that the question is not whether we should or should not have a school, but how we should organise it, and how teachers should teach (or not teach) in their classrooms. The presupposition of equality is central here, as something that already exists in the present rather than something that has to be reached in the future. But then, the task of a counter-translation of these rather abstract ideas is to give them practical meaning. This is what I will refer to in the Chapter 7 as the *weight of words*: theoretically, I may have gained some understanding of TIS. But what it "means", in the sense of what kind of concrete actions follow from it, is a whole different question – one which falls outside the scope of this theoretically focused thesis.

In summary then, in this chapter I have provided a counter-translation of TIS in an attempt to make sense of the book. This was first done without reference to other works by Rancière. Later, the chapter was deepened after I had adventured into other works by him. This made me understand the book a little better by being able to contextualise it within the context of his philosophy generally, making me realise the importance of interpreting Rancière's arguments about education in light of his political thought. During my adventure in TIS I stumbled upon a number of themes that I interpreted in ways I would later disagree with. That process made me take on a number of concepts from the book and reformulate them into a conceptual constellation that will inform the further parts of this thesis. From those concepts, I have selected two that will comprise chapters on their own: the will and intelligence, both contained in Jacotot's definition of the human being as a *will served by an intelligence*. The first of these, discussed in the chapter that now follows, is the will. Following Jacotot, the question explored is what it might mean to say that the will is synonymous to the self.

CHAPTER 3: WILL AS SELF

> Once more universal teaching proclaims: *An individual can do anything he wants*. But we must not mistake what wanting means. Universal teaching is not the key to success granted to the enterprising who explore the prodigious powers of the will. Nothing could be more opposed to the thought of emancipation than that advertising slogan. And the Founder became irritated when disciples opened their school under the slogan, 'Whoever wants to is able to.' The only slogan that had value was 'The equality of intelligence'. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 56, emphasis original)

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, at several points in TIS, Rancière uses the concept of "the will". In the epigraph to this chapter he emphatically states that we should not mistake what the will, or wanting, means. Apparently, he strongly opposes a voluntaristic notion of the will which assumes that as long as our will is strong enough, we can accomplish anything we want. In the excerpt in the epigraph he juxtaposes the following two statements and proclaims them to be diametrically opposed: "An individual can do anything he wants" and "Whoever wants to is able to". However, these statements do seem to be very similar to me, which begs the question of the difference in their meaning according to Rancière. He further proposes that we should understand the will as 'that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself in the act' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 57). This chapter starts off from the question of what this might mean.

In an important contribution, Pink (1998) writes that the will is traditionally conceived in Western philosophy as 'the faculty of choice or decision, by which we determine which actions we shall perform' (n.p.). But it seems to me that it is something very different for Rancière. In the excerpt in the epigraph to this chapter, he urges us not to misunderstand what wanting means. Elsewhere, he alludes to how the will has often been discussed, namely, in its relation to freedom as the freedom to choose between several options. This chapter starts off from a sense of fascination induced by the different way in which Rancière discusses the will in TIS. It asks about meaning: what does it mean to say that an individual can do anything they want? And what does it mean to say that we are a 'will served by an intelligence' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 54)? Confronting these questions gives rise to a unique opportunity: to ask the question of the meaning of that which is asking the question. In wanting to ask the question of the will, I am asking about myself as a wanting instance, a will asking about itself as a singular mode of the more general concept of "will".

Furthermore, in questioning the will, my aim is to seek insight into how we might understand the relationship between teachers and students when understood as a relationship between two wills.

The will in TIS

The relationship between the educator and the student – perhaps the main theme of TIS – is described by Rancière as one between 'two wills' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 13). As he states in an interview:

> What is an ignorant schoolmaster? It's a master who doesn't transmit his knowledge, a master who doesn't think his role is to be a guide leading the student onto the right path, it's a master who is pure will and who tells the will that stands before it to find its way and to exert all its intelligence in the effort to find that path on its own. (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 176)

This is a theme that stood out for me strongly in TIS. In that book he discusses Jacotot's definition of the human being as a will served by an intelligence. It is also will which lies behind Rancière's claim that we should presuppose the equality of intelligence instead of considering equality as something that needs to be sought in the future. The ignorance of the ignorant schoolmaster is most importantly an ignorance – that is, a willed act of ignoring – of the many inequalities that are presented to us as factual, or grounded in nature. Rancière states:

> The ignorant position is obviously exacerbated when the master really does not know what the student is supposed to learn. That was Jacotot's position when he taught students to litigate in Dutch, or paint. Fundamentally, however, 'ignorant' means ignorant of inequality. Every normal pedagogical experience is structured by reasons of inequality. The ignorant schoolmaster is the one who does not know that and who communicates this ignorance, that is to say, this will to remain ignorant of inequality. (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 179)

So it seems to me that what Rancière is saying is that the way in which we are often inclined to perceive others – and the way in which teachers are thus often inclined to perceive students – is as someone unequal to themselves. The following example from my own experience in the Children's Home is a way to attempt to locate such a way of perceiving in an educational scene.

There was a ten year old girl in the Children's Home who was considered stupid by the organisation's members, as well as by other children at school, where she was bullied for it. At first, I could not understand why this was the case, since, despite the fact that she knew little English, and I knew none of the several languages she spoke, it was always remarkably easy to communicate with her. She had no difficulty whatsoever comprehending

any classroom activities we did and she was perfectly capable of understanding group dynamics, more so even than her peers. She was creative, funny, compassionate, and extraordinarily sensitive to the emotions of others. Where was the stupidity the others saw in her?

Then, after a while, I finally learned what the problem was: she could not read. She seemed embarrassed by the fact, and she had clearly learned how to circumvent it becoming obvious to others. I further learned that she came from an abusive background, and she had not gone to school until much later than the others.

One day, there was a wealthy boy who came with his parents to donate some of his discarded toys to the children. Among the toys were a few puzzles made for small children, puzzles with maybe six or eight pieces. It turned out that some of the children, including this particular girl, had never made a puzzle before. I remember observing her while she tried to figure one out with only six pieces – and it took her a long time, about ten minutes, to finish a puzzle that other children her age might have finished in a matter of seconds. But it wasn't because she was stupid – it was because this was the first puzzle she had ever made in her life. It was a fleeting moment, when everyone else had already gone downstairs. There were several times when she felt like giving up, thinking that she could not do it. She wanted me to show her what to do, but I just kept telling her to keep trying. She kept attempting to connect pieces in ways that did not make sense, kept trying the same thing over and over again. But eventually it clicked, and she was really proud. 'Look, I did it!'

Maybe this is the ignorance of the ignorant schoolmaster: to ignore what others had told me about her, namely that she was not intelligent, and to ignore what she had told me about herself, namely that she could not finish the puzzle.

The will as a first principle

As a means to begin my search for what the will might mean, I start off from the simple idea that, as a human being, our actions can either follow from our will or they can follow from something else. In other words, when we act, we are either doing what we to do or something we do not want to do. This basic principle can in turn be related to education and its relationship with other important concepts, like equality, emancipation, and truth. But the will as a concept is not analysed further by Rancière, he simply uses it as if it is clear what is meant by it. He acknowledges this ambiguity when he describes the will as 'a hardly verifiable and slightly obscure internal power' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 177). Yet to me it is clear that in TIS, Rancière – following Jacotot – proposes a way of understanding the will as something that is what we *are*: the *will* understood ontologically as *self*.

What follows from this is that when someone does what they want, they are expressing their self, their being. And when they do something they do not want to do, it is not an expression of self. This can in in turn be related back to the discussion in the previous chapter of the two categories of attention and distraction, which Rancière calls the 'two fundamental modalities' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 79) of the will. When someone is attentive, they are present in their actions and expressions as a will. When someone is distracted, they are not present. But if someone acts in a certain way, and we say either that their action is not an expression of their self, or not a wilful act (which is the same thing), then where did the action come from? Some force has taken over their mind, keeping them from being attentive, which is to say, being present as a will in the present moment. What follows from this is that an education centred on a conception of will is one in which exercises of attention play a fundamental role, which I will discuss in relation to a selection of essays published as "De Lichtheid van het Opvoeden" ("The Lightness of Child Rearing"), with the subtitle "An exercise in seeing, reading, and thinking" (Masschelein, 2008a).

Exercises of attention

Throughout the essays contained in the bundle "De lichtheid van het opvoeden", the authors focus on one common theme: the Belgian movie *Le fils* ("The son"). Masschelein writes in the introduction that:

> … we, the authors of this handbook, did not choose this movie in order to illustrate our viewpoints, but the movie spoke to us in a certain way, and it impelled us to write. … The movie shows us something, addresses us in a certain way, tells us something about what child rearing is and *what it means to be a pedagogue*. The movie was an *incentive*, but we have become convinced that it also shows us how child rearing puts into play something that is overshadowed by contemporary education. (Masschelein, 2008b, p. 9, my translation, emphases original)

When I watched this movie for Masschelein's course on the philosophy of education, I found it very strange to think that it could teach me something about what it means to be an educator (that is, it did not make sense to me). It has taken me several years after having been incentivised by this book to watch *Le fils* before starting to see something meaningful in the movie. There are a few observations that I want to mention here, observations about "the boy", one of the movie's two protagonists. This will contain spoilers. The reader who has not yet seen the movie might want to watch it before reading my or any other reflections on it.

The boy, Francis, has killed the son of the other protagonist, Olivier, who teaches troubled youth the trade of joinery. Some time after Francis enters the workshop, Olivier

learns that this is the boy who killed his son. Yet Olivier takes Francis on as an apprentice, tormented equally by feelings of fascination and hatred while showing him the trade. Why is he fascinated? Or: why do I think he is fascinated? This is of course speculation (the movie does not tell us anything about the protagonists' motivations for why they act in a certain way). Speaking speculatively then, perhaps it is because he sees that the boy is *empty*. He shows little to no expression, uses few words, is timid, disconnected, and lost, without any aim or passion in life. The question is: why did he kill? And the answer might be that he did not do it because he is evil, but that it was something much more banal, namely, a simple drive for survival. He wanted to steal a car radio, unexpectedly found a child in the back seat of the car, and killed him. Perhaps Francis grew up amidst violence and repeated the violence he had learned. Perhaps he has never been shown what it means to care for anything. Olivier is a human body who cares about joinery. And he ends up showing Francis what it means to care for something, namely, wood and what can be done with it.

The relationship between the teacher and the student here exemplifies what several authors building on Rancière's works in education call a 'thing-centred' form of pedagogy (Masschelein & Simons, 2010; Vlieghe, 2013, 2018). This is a form of pedagogy differentiated by these authors from either a student-centred pedagogy or a traditional form of teacher-centred pedagogy. Both teacher and student are gathered together around a common object of study, and share the attention they give to that object. Yet beside this, in terms of what Rancière proposes in TIS, the attention should also go from the teacher towards the student, to check whether the student is attentive and staying on their own path. This is perhaps an indication of what it might mean to say that the relationship between teacher and student is a relationship between wills.

Now, for a moment, I want to observe what is happening. So far I have written about the will as a first principle, and, fascinated by how Rancière discusses this first principle in TIS, considered what it means to say that the will is the same as the self. My exploration led me past some examples which could deepen my understanding of the will, as well as what it might mean for the pedagogical relationship. In all of this, there was something which I took for granted: the fascination which led to my exploration of the topic of the will. Yet as I said in the beginning, this questioning of the will is unique in that it allows for a turn toward itself as an object of observation. Therefore, in what follows, I want to ask: what does it mean to be "fascinated"? And if one is fascinated, then what does that mean for the supposed autonomy of their will?

Fascination and "glow"

Intuitively I would say that being fascinated means that I am "drawn to" something. I experience a phenomenon, a feeling relating to the idea, a desire to know more about or understand it – *curiosity*. A wish to *attend* to it. The word "fascinate" derives from the Latin *fascino,* meaning "enchant, bewitch, charm, fascinate". In some parts of the Roman empire, to be fascinated meant to be put under a spell by the gaze of those who possessed the evil eye, which was associated with envy, or *invidia*. This gaze was said to be a characteristic of witches. A *fascinum* was an amulet or effigy or spell which was used to invoke the god Fascinus – the embodiment of the divine phallus – so that he would protect the carrier from the evil eye, the envious gaze that looks too closely with hostile intentions.

Have I been bewitched? Where did my wish come from? I thought I was willingly fascinated – but if there is still anything left of the original meaning of this word, then it means that it was not me who initiated the fascination but the idea invoked by a sentence, drawing my attention to it. I am reminded of an article written by MacLure (2013). This article was inspired by Deleuze's concept of *sense* as MacLure understands it, namely as 'something wild in language: something that exceeds propositional meaning and resists the laws of representation' (MacLure, 2013, p. 658). MacLure maintains that representation:

> … serves the 'dogmatic image of thought' as that which categorises and judges the world through the administration of good sense and common sense, dispensed by the autonomous, rational and well-intentioned individual, according to principles of truth and error. (MacLure, 2013, p. 659)

So MacLure provides an image of a certain understanding of the subject, one in which that subject is autonomous, rational, and well-intended, judging the world through the lens of their rational capacity. In order to get away from such an image, MacLure wants to search for a post-qualitative, non-representational way of doing research in which:

> … we are no longer autonomous agents, choosing and disposing. Rather, we are obliged to acknowledge that data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us. This can be seen, or rather felt, on occasions when one becomes especially 'interested' in a piece of data. (MacLure, 2013, p. 660)

She describes these occasions as:

> … a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions, agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us. (MacLure, 2013, p. 661)

What happens in these occasions is like a *glow,* which 'seems to invoke something abstract or intangible that exceeds propositional meaning, but also has a decidedly embodied aspect' (MacLure, 2013, p. 661). This glow is what MacLure calls 'the action of "sense"'

(MacLure, 2013, p. 661). Glow and sense are 'not within our control' (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). Moreover, they are related to 'event-ness' – when the data glows and draws the researcher toward it this is a 'pure event', which we cannot master; instead, 'we must be invited in' (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). Furthermore,

> … sense is important for its potential to trigger action in the face of the unknown. In order to achieve this, we must be able to 'counter-actualize' the event that befalls us. In typically difficult language, Deleuze describes this as a matter of 'attaining [the] will that the event creates in us; of becoming the quasi-cause of what is produced within us'. (MacLure, 2013, p. 662)

This discussion of sense and glow by MacLure feels close to what I was getting at when I noticed that I was fascinated. I was reading TIS, and from the many threads woven together in it, there was one thread which began to glow for me at a certain point: the thread about the will. I picked out the thread and started following it, thereby attaining the will that the event of becoming fascinated created in me. Now I might ask what it means that this thread specifically glowed for me. This meaning is even indicated by the very way in which I began my exploration of the will earlier in this chapter: by proposing that all of our actions could be perceived as either following our own will or not following our own will. The meaning of that theme relates both to my own existence and to historical and political movements. Both converge in the same observation: that not acting according to our own will – which is to say, as an expression of our self – can be the result of indoctrination or internalised forms of oppression. To think about the will is therefore for me not a matter of metaphysics: it is a matter of life or death, of a life lived living or a life lived in the murderous grip of another's will. The latter, in my view, relates to Rancière's discussion of *stultification* in TIS. Perhaps we could say that stultification is a continued state of distraction.

In the previous chapter, I explored what I considered to be an inconsistency in the way in which Rancière discusses the human being understood as a will served by an intelligence, and stultification. In my current interpretation, the point for Rancière is that we always make use of our intelligence, but the question is whether it is our own will with which we do so, or the will of someone else. However, reflecting back on this, this is still not entirely satisfactory, since he also discusses the relationship between teacher and student as a relationship between two wills – and it is clear that, in this relationship, the teacher can make a demand on the student, thereby swivelling the student's path in another direction. Yet this is not stultifying, but emancipatory.

For me, this indicates that the distinction between the will and the intelligence might not be as straightforward as it seems to Jacotot and Rancière in TIS. When the will of the teacher commands the student to engage with the material at hand, and the student obeys the

command, then it is the intelligence of the student which has to analyse the demand and whether it merits being obeyed. There is an *aporia* at play here, the first of several I will note in this thesis: teachers often give commands to students which relate to the very specific ways in which they want the student to engage with study material. Yet a command given by a teacher can also be detrimental for the student and distract them from what is good for them. So the student has to consider disobedience an option. Otherwise, the result might be exactly that they come to believe in the inequality Rancière so passionately aims to disrupt. For this, they have to use their intelligence in order to assess what they want.

Moreover, the above discussion of fascination and glow indicates that the will is always subject to change in relation to those things which fascinate it – the will as a response to things outside of it rather than that which controls those things. It is then through the process of fascination, which sets one off on intellectual adventures, that the will transforms. So it seems to me that will and intelligence are not as separate as Jacotot's formula suggests, and that both emancipation and stultification are therefore matters in which both intelligence and will are implicated. Furthermore, the observation that our will can be drawn toward something else without disappearing, means that distraction is not simply the event in which our will changes course as a response to something external. Now, in what follows, I want to provide further reflections on what the will might be, preceded by a short discussion of the history of the discussion of this concept in Western thought.

Further reflections on the will

The will has been an important topic throughout the history of Western thought. This has most often been in relation to the notion of freedom. In this approach, the will is understood as the mental faculty with which we make choices, as in the quote from Pink at the beginning of this chapter. The question of free will is then a dispute between three different general kinds of argument. The first kind of argument is the libertarian one: choices are freely made by us. The second kind of argument is the determinist one: our choices are causally determined and thus entirely outside of our control. The third kind of argument is the soft determinist or compatibilist one: a combination of both of these options is possible. The question of free will as discussed in this approach bears on the important issue of moral responsibility: it is arguable that we can only logically be held morally accountable for our actions if we had the freedom to act differently than we did. The question is also deeply educational. For example, Kant, a central proponent of the libertarian viewpoint, argued that good education leads children toward self-determination. In Kant's view, children are determined by external forces and have not yet acquired control over their own actions. For

him, to become mature is to become autonomous, which means to live according to one's own laws and thus to determine one's own actions (Kant, 1784/n.d.; Kant, 1803/1900). An example of a determinist argument can be found in Dahlbeck (2017), who rejects the possibility for such self-determination, which he calls 'self-causation' (p. 729), believing that this rejection is nonetheless compatible with a notion of autonomy and therefore with the view that education is an important endeavour. For his argument, he turns to Spinoza, who holds a determinist view on the matter of free will. According to Spinoza, the reason that we experience freedom of will, even though we are actually causally determined, stems from the fact that we are ignorant of the complex background of factors that caused us to obtain the will to act in a certain way (Spinoza, 1677/1996). This is why it is the case that, as Dahlbeck formulates it,

> … while I may come to the intellectual understanding that my actions are most likely determined by antecedent causes, it remains a psychological fact that I experience freedom of will. (Dahlbeck, 2017, p. 736)

In this chapter, I accompany Dahlbeck on his turn to Spinoza, though I approach the 17th-century philosopher's writings differently. In my approach, I want to give weight to the second part of the excerpt from Dahlbeck, in which he refers to the will as something we can *experience*. Moreover, as stated earlier, rather than considering the will as a faculty that we do or do not possess, I want to try and see what it might mean to say, as Jacotot did, that we *are* a will. This view suggests that freedom of will does not mean that we are a self with the capacity to make deliberate choices, but rather that we are unrestricted in the expression of our being.

Before turning to Spinoza, I will first attempt a short reflection on what it might mean for me to be a will. In this I am inspired by a tradition of thought on the will that is also present in Western philosophy, but which discusses it differently from the very abstract type of discussion outlined above. This is a tradition in which, for example, Kierkegaard observes that the self can be understood as a 'relation that relates itself to itself' (Dreyfus, 2007, 10:20). Such reflections have similarly been made on the will. Schopenhauer is one of the most well-known thinkers on the will. Schopenhauer saw the will as the one true principle permeating all of being. For him, the will,

> … being the one and only thing in itself, the sole truly real, primary, metaphysical thing in a world in which everything else is only phenomenon—i.e. mere representation—gives all things, whatever they may be, the power to exist and to act. (Schopenhauer, 1836/1903, pp. 37-38)

For Schopenhauer, the will is thus the primordial ground of being, a notion I will take up shortly when I begin my inward adventure. He further proposes that we are always present to ourselves in two ways. First we are present as a body, which we perceive as a representation (which is his reformulation of what Kant called a phenomenon) (Schopenhauer, 1836/1903). But then, second, we are present in the immediate experience of the actions we perform as a body (Schopenhauer, 1859/1969). Nietzsche, who was greatly inspired by Schopenhauer, also wrote extensively on the will, and one of his central notions is the *will to power* (Anderson, 2022). He built on Schopenhauer's proposal that the will is always present to us in immediate experience by performing an introspective reflection on the will. He reports on his observations by stating, first, that will always involves a 'plurality of feelings' (Nietzsche, cited in Leiter, 2007, p. 2) which is accompanied by thought. But besides this 'complex of feeling and thinking', he also observes that the will:

> … is fundamentally an affect [ein Affekt]; and specifically the affect of the command. What is called "freedom of the will" is essentially the affect of superiority with respect to something that must obey: "I am free, 'it' must obey' — this consciousness lies in every will. … A person who wills —, commands something inside himself that obeys, or that he believes to obey. (Nietzsche, cited in Leiter, 2007, pp. 2-3, italics original and brackets by Leiter)

In other words, for Nietzsche, we are 'both the one who commands and the one who obeys' (Nietzsche, cited in Leiter, 2007, p. 3). This notion of a dual or twin-nature of our selves as will echoes Kierkegaard's notion of the self as a relation between the self and itself. Another important thinker who took up this image, and who will take on a more prominent role later in the thesis, is Arendt. She maintains that Augustine was the first to undertake an adventure of inward reflections in himself, in which he discovered that there was a 'hot contention' (Augustine, cited in Arendt, 1958, p. 158) happening within himself – a conflict within himself as will. Arendt then states, in the same terms as Nietzsche, that the will's 'very essence obviously is to command and be obeyed' (Arendt, 1958, p. 157). However, I do not believe that this is as obvious as she makes it out to be. I am not quite sure about the dualistic nature of the will implied in this image. I also wonder if it is necessary to understand our will or self in such a hierarchical manner. Now, in order to gain more insight on this matter, I will continue my own reflections on what the will might be. These reflections will lead me into the thought of Spinoza, and ultimately back to Jacotot and Rancière.

As stated above, the will could be considered as a kind of ground from which our actions arise. This can only be a metaphor to live by (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), because what a word like ground refers to is some "inner place", the subjective "realm of the spirit" from which any kind of inquiry I might start on arises. But to "observe" this realm, that is,

to try and get an idea of that small patch of ground on which I have decided to stand, turns out to be an activity that is like an arrow pointing back at its own tail. As soon as I try to observe the knowledge entailed in the sentence "I want to do x" so that I can analyse that knowledge, it becomes clear that the "signified" which this sentence supposedly signifies slips away from me every time I try to "grasp" it. Inclined to say that it does not make sense, I realise that this is not true – the sentence "I want to do x" makes sense, in a way that a random string of letters would not. This primordial ground which I cannot perceive through my senses, yet the existence of which seems impossible to deny, eludes me. Why am I writing this sentence? Because I want to. Yet the meaning of the sentence "I want" eludes me, even though I "inwardly sense" that it has meaning. Perhaps the next step should be to look at the sentence – "I want" – that I am intuitively inclined to use to refer to this ground which I cannot adequately "sense", but which I still believe exists in some way.

In the very short phrase "I want" something is posited that seems to exist in such a way that it precedes the activity of wanting – the "ego", perhaps, or the "subject" – that which I refer to when I write "I". Jacobitti (1988) asks: 'What is the connection between the will and the "I", between the will and the self which possesses it?' (p. 62) and 'What is the relation of the self to the will?' (p. 62). There is a presupposition here, namely, that there is something we could call "ego" or "self", the signified of the signifier "I". On the basis of this I could write that when I use the pronoun "I", what I am referring to is my self – implying, again, there is a "me" which precedes a "self". This is confusing. Because however much I search "within" myself, I cannot seem to find a real distinction between a "me" and a/my "self", or between a "me" and a wanting instance. With Jacotot and Rancière we could postulate, as I have done, that what I want is exactly that which I call "me", which again is the same as what I call "self". There is then no difference between "I want" and "self" – and the phrase "my self" is a senseless phrase, because what I am is exactly a self, that is, a wanting instance, or a will. But then, if it is senseless, does that mean I am not meaningfully expressing anything when I say "my self"? Or is it actually possible for me to be at the same time a self (which is mine), while also being removed from that self?

It seems to me that this is indeed possible. Because what I can observe is that I have an idea of myself, that is, of my "self", in my own mind. This is my "figure" of myself. Going back to the phrase, "I want", I can try and see if it somehow relates to this idea that I have of my self. As I suggested above, "my will" seems to imply a difference between two different things. Perhaps the "my" in "my will" refers to the instance that conceives – consciousness – and "will" to the conceived instance – an idea in the mind of my self. Is the referent of "my will" then a "me" reflecting back on the things that it had apparently willed

before the reflection took place? Is this the meaning of the following statement made by Rancière in TIS: 'By the will we mean that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself in the act' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 57)? But what is this idea that I have of my self an idea *of*? In what follows, I turn to Spinoza's (1677/1996) metaphysics in order to address this question. From Spinoza, we can learn that the idea I have of my self is fundamentally an idea of my body.

A turn to Spinoza

My sudden turn to Spinoza indicates that, on my adventure into Rancière's works, I am being fascinated by the "method of equality" which Rancière extracts from Jacotot's writings. He writes how Jacotot discovered that this method was:

> … above all a method of the will. One could learn by oneself and without a master explicator when one wanted to, propelled by one's own desire or by the constraint of the situation. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 12)

It is my will, drawn by some of Spinoza's writings, which propels me forward into unexpected directions. There is, in other words, an element of contingency here. But my turn to Spinoza is not merely random. His magnum opus "Ethics" (1677/1996) was first recommended to me as holiday reading by my supervisors. The work immediately fascinated me, and I soon discovered that a week would not be enough to read it properly. At this point in the adventure, I had been engulfed in Rancière's works for about half a year, and had come to feel incredibly frustrated with the difficulty I experienced in understanding those works. It was therefore not only the content of Spinoza's book that drew me in, but also the form of his writing, with a clarity which enlightened the murky depths I felt I had been wading through for so long. I thus sat down and read "Ethics", and while reading I discovered that some of the ideas contained in it fit incredibly well with Jacotot's ideas as described by Rancière, especially their view of the will as self. In what follows I will succinctly describe who Spinoza was and why he is relevant in my adventure into the notion of will.

Baruch Spinoza was a 17th-century philosopher who, with Descartes and Leibniz, is often described in very general terms as one of the three main proponents of the Rationalist school of modern philosophy. Care should be taken with this kind of terminology because, as Markie (2021) points out, using such general classifications risks oversimplifying the complexity of the different thinkers' differences. It should be noted though that Spinoza's metaphysics is, for an important part, a response to and critique of the metaphysics of Descartes, who lived one generation before Spinoza (both historically and philosophically speaking). A return to Spinoza is therefore especially relevant in light of contemporary calls

for a turn away from educational practices and research centred primarily on questions of knowledge. The dominance of such an educational approach in the West can be traced back to the Cartesian dualism between matters of thought and corporeal matters of feeling and sensibility, and the perceived superiority of the former over the latter (Lather, 2013).

According to Della Rocca (2015), Spinoza's thought has not received nearly as much attention in the analytic philosophical tradition as it has in the continental tradition. The main reason he gives for this is the strong influence played in the analytic tradition by logical positivism, and its allergy to metaphysics and rationalist systems which attempt to delineate the structure of the whole of reality – which is exactly what Spinoza's magnum opus "Ethics" does. The book begins with a chapter titled "On God". It soon becomes clear that Spinoza equates God with Nature, which is to say that God comprises the whole of being and is therefore being itself. In other words, the essence of God or Nature – and only of God or Nature – is existence. God further consists of infinite attributes, and an attribute 'is best understood as a most basic way of being, a general nature that is expressed in determinate ways by particular things' (Nadler, 2020). On the basis of his metaphysics Spinoza delineates a system of thought spanning many aspects of reality, including affects and politics.

In relation to affects, Spinoza's work has inspired the so-called *affective turn*, a turn in both educational practice and research toward matters of affect rather than thought and knowledge. However, Robinson and Kutner (2018) argue that the concept of "affect" in this turn is often built on secondary or tertiary readings of Spinoza, and they urge 'a re-engagement with the primary philosophical origins of affect in Spinoza's *Ethics*' (p. 117, italics original). My fascination for Spinoza's work is in clear agreement with this argument.

Politically speaking, Spinoza is considered one of the first proponents of democracy in the history of Western philosophy (Smith, 2005). Furthermore, Israel (2001, 2010) puts Spinoza and his philosophy at the forefront of the radical Enlightenment, a movement he contrasts to mainstream or moderate Enlightenment. According to Israel (2001):

> … no one else during the century 1650-1750 remotely rivalled Spinoza's notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and non-absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority. (Israel, 2001, p. 159)

There is thus a clear connection between Spinoza and Rancière, in that they are both associated with the words "radical" and "democracy" – even though, as Lord (2017) shows, their conceptualisations of what democracy is about are very different.

As noted, Spinoza's thought has been influential in continental philosophy, and probably the most notable instance of this is in the works of Deleuze, who wrote two books

fully devoted to his reading of Spinoza (Deleuze, 1968/1990, 1981/1988). The first of these – one of Deleuze's doctoral theses – is titled "Expressionism in Spinoza", and it explores the importance of expression in Spinoza's thought indicated in the excerpt from Nadler above. Though I will not discuss this book in this thesis, I do note that the importance I attribute to expression has been partly influenced by my (partial) reading of this book. Spinoza has also been taken up by the psychologist Damasio, who argues that contemporary neuroscience affirms Spinoza's philosophical system, and I will reference this below. Another author for whom Spinoza was an important figure is Althusser, Rancière's philosophical "master" until he broke with him in his book "Althusser's Lesson". According to Peden (2020), Rancière himself has an ambivalent relationship to Spinoza's thought. However, Peden (2020) adds that 'a Spinozist element nevertheless figures—lingers?—in Rancière's effort' (p. 238). I believe this element becomes especially clear when Rancière writes of 'disciplines' as:

> … ways of intervening in the interminable war between ways of declaring what a body can do, in the interminable war between the reasons of equality and those of inequality. (Rancière, 2006, p. 11)

It is the sentence "what a body can do" which springs out in this excerpt, because it is an allusion to an incredible sentence often cited from Spinoza: 'no one has yet determined what the body can do' (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIIP2). Finally, in relation to the will specifically, and recalling the discussion of the will in the history of Western philosophy above, there is a conceptual continuation from Spinoza's notion of the will (the "conatus", as I will discuss below) and Nietzsche's notion of the will to power (Yovel, 2013).

Having given a short portrait of Spinoza's importance, I will now set forth on my own adventure into his work. This will not be a comprehensive study of Spinoza's thought as a whole, as it will be specifically aimed at what he has to teach about the will.

The human mind is the idea of the human body

Spinoza constructs an image of being as a univocal substance: everything is, fundamentally, one. As discussed above, his main work "Ethics" (1677/1996) is written as a polemic in response to Descartes' (1637/1997) proposition that being as we know it is fundamentally dual in nature, consisting of two substances: matter and mind. Transcending these two substances is a third substance of which we know very little: God. For Spinoza, there is only one substance, which he calls God or Nature, which I will shorten to Nature. In this one substance, mind and body are one. Nature can be thought of as all-encompassing mind infinitely conceiving of all-encompassing matter, or Nature naturing and Nature natured. The difference between Nature as a whole and a singular being – such as a human

being – is that Nature is perfect, since it encompasses all of being, while any singular thing is imperfect, since it encompasses being only partially. The human being, like Nature as a whole, is a mind thinking its own body, but in an imperfect way, which is the reason why we mistakenly consider mind and matter to be two separate realms of existence.

At this point something crucial was observed by Spinoza, namely that:

> … the first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists. (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIP11).[14]

And, furthermore, that 'the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body' (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIP13). The psychologist Damasio has reformulated these postulates into modern language in the following way:

> Mental processes are grounded in the brain's mappings of the body, collections of neural patterns that portray responses to events that cause emotions and feelings. (Damasio, 2003, p. 12)

Spinoza's assertion that "the first thing which constitutes the human mind is the idea of the human body" is thus translated by Damasio into the assertion that "the human mind is the idea of the human body", which in turn means that "mental processes are grounded in the brain's mappings of the body" – and, following Spinoza, he relates this observation to the importance of emotions and, additionally, to feelings, in how we relate to the world outside our body. More specifically, for Damasio (2003), an emotion is a physical state of our body, and a feeling is the mental equivalent, being 'the idea of the body being in a certain way' (p. 85, emphasis removed). These two – emotions and feelings – brought together are what he calls *affects*.

If Spinoza and Damasio are correct then, in my understanding of them, our mind is always first and foremost an idea of our body, and *all* of the other ideas that form in our mind during our life are related to this primary idea of our body. This means that no idea in our mind exist on its own: all the ideas in our mind exist only in their *relationship* with the idea of our own body. Our mind is a "world" which consists of a network of relationships with the idea of our body at the centre (metaphorically speaking), and all other ideas exist in relation to that one primary idea. Further, the relationships between our body and other things, and between the idea of our body and the ideas of other things, are *affective* relationships. For example, when we encounter something we know is useful to us or brings

[14] When citing Spinoza's "Ethics", it is customary to use his geometric system of organisation rather than page numbers. I will follow this tradition.

us pleasure, we enter a positive affective state; when we know that it is harmful to us we enter a negative affective state. In Spinoza's words, in the first instance we feel *laetitia* (translated into English as "joy"), and in the second *tristitia* (translated as "sadness"). And 'consequently, the mind desires to think of the said thing, or is averse to it; that is, it loves or hates the said thing' (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIIP15P).

From this basic image of how we are affectively related to the things in the world around us, we can further propose that human growth happens as the formation of affective relationships with those things that bring us joy, and which we consequently learn to love. Education could then be perceived as entailing the deliberate formation of ways in which children grow in their affective relations with things in the world. Through this formation, children develop and deepen their power, which, for Spinoza, fundamentally means to develop their understanding. As in his image of Nature as a whole, the human being – which is a part of that whole, and thus exists imperfectly in the same way as the whole – is a mind conceiving of its own body. Growth stems from a better understanding of how to act and express in relation to a potential infinity of other things, other bodies.

Striving to persevere

The way in which Spinoza (1677/1996) then describes the human being – and not only the human being, but every singular thing in the world – is by stating that 'each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being' (IIIP6) (translated elsewhere as the 'endeavour to persist in its being'), that 'the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing' (IIIP7), and that:

> … when this striving is related only to the mind, it is called will; but when it is related to the mind and body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things. (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIIP9Schol)

In other words, Spinoza – as I read him – is doing here exactly the same as what I believe Jacotot did, namely to define the essence of what we are as will. What we *are* is *will*. He calls this will the *conatus*, or the *striving to persevere in our being*. We can thus conceive of the essence of the human being as a will, understood as a striving to persevere in their being and increase their power to act and express in affective relations to other bodies. The more understanding one has, the better they are capable of interacting with things in their environment which are good for them and bring them joy, which they have learned to love, and which are conducive to a powerful way of being. We strive to persevere in our being (survival and wellbeing), and we also strive to develop ourselves and grow. For Spinoza,

those things that support us in our striving are what we call *good*. He makes the radical claim that:

> … we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. (Spinoza, 1667/1996, IIIP9Schol)

The reason I call this radical is that it turns around what I consider to be the more intuitive understanding of what is "good": something which *precedes* the will. This intuitive view states that we deliberate about whether engaging with a thing is good for us, and if it is, we then decide to pursue such engagement. But for Spinoza, the will comes first: we want something, and because we want it, we judge it to be good.

What I believe is implicated in this discussion is that understanding is not simply something of the mind, but something intuitive and embodied, something that takes place in the way in which the mind conceives of the body and the interactions between the body and other bodies. This will be relevant to take into consideration when I explore my will to understand Rancière's works later in the thesis. As noted, for Spinoza, the more we understand, the more powerful we become as a will striving forward into the world. He further proposes that actions that stem from understanding are *reasonable*. Yet we are imperfect beings, so we can never have perfect understanding of what is good for us, and never be fully reasonable. But were we – hypothetically – to conceive of a being with perfect understanding of what was good for them, then it follows from this that their existence would no longer entail the factor of choice. They would not have to make any choices because they would already know, intuitively, all the ways in which to act and express that are best for them. In one of the excerpts above, Spinoza states that human beings are *determined* to do the things that contribute to their striving to persevere and increase their power to act and express. There is an implication entailed in this statement: a perfectly reasonable being would never have to make a choice, so all of their actions would be fully determined. And they would experience this determined nature of their actions as *determination*. "Being determined" then means two things at the same time: to have one's actions be preconfigured, and to experience a full determination to perform those preconfigured actions. But we are imperfect, so we have choice, and we do not experience our actions as preconfigured. Yet we can still feel determined to do the things we believe are best for us.

Stultification or depression of the striving to persevere: imaginary boundaries

Earlier in this chapter, I proposed to start thinking about the will from the simple idea that our actions can either follow from our will or that they can follow from something else. This is also in line with Spinoza's thought. For him, those actions that are in contradiction with our striving to persevere, that is, actions that are detrimental to our own being and our own power, are not expressions of our self. They come from something, or someone, else. Such actions are contrary to reason and they follow from inadequate ideas implanted in the mind which are not actually part of who we are. Spinoza also calls these actions *passive* – so such "actions" are not actually actions, because they do not stem from us internally in an active sense, they are passive responses to something external.

Taking this thought adventure to the extreme, Spinoza proposes that someone who commits suicide is completely overtaken by external influences. This follows logically from the notion that we are essentially a striving to persevere, and self-destruction is contradictory to such striving: 'No thing can be destroyed except by an external cause' (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IIP4) and, thus, 'those who kill themselves are weakminded and completely conquered by external causes contrary to their nature' (Spinoza, 1677/1996, IVP18S). The word "weakminded" here is a translation of the Latin *impotentes*: lacking in power. And I understand power here specifically as the power to express as well as the power to act in relation to other bodies in the world which allow us to express our will more strongly. For example, when I imagine flying, it is not just my mind imagining something, it is also my body orienting itself toward the world around it, assessing its own power, and realising that it lacks power in this regard. But to say that it is *impossible* is sometimes only to block off seemingly impossible possibilities, which was proven by the Wright Brothers, who observed their own incapacity to fly and *still* projected their will upon the world until they found the power to make themselves capable of doing what they wanted – in an essentially *human* way, namely, by crafting a tool that gave them that power.

Ultimately then, my reading of Spinoza's philosophy connects closely to my reading of Rancière's discussion of Jacotot's philosophy in TIS. Both want to understand the self as will, a striving to persevere and increase their power to express. Expression is central in Jacotot's philosophy of education, and a central purpose of education is to demand of the student not to stop expressing, which is to say, not to stop being. This is done under the mark of equality[15]: everyone is assumed to have an equal capacity to develop ways of expressing, of acting, and of engaging affectively with things in the world.

[15] I use the word "mark" here in reference to Masschelein and Simon's (2010) conceptualisation of the school as what they call 'the mark of democracy' (p. 666). A mark is a stamp, but can also be seen as a sign – so that acting under the mark of equality means that one's actions are a sign of the principle of equality.

Furthermore, the will for Spinoza is that instance where extension and non-extension (mind or spirit) reveal themselves to be one and the same thing. My will is not (or: I am not) a mental faculty which controls my body; it is (I am) a body and spirit at the same time. Rancière, in his Jacotot-mode, seems to have a similar view when he writes that 'Will is the rational power that must be delivered from the quarrels between the idea-ists and the thing-ists' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 54). He further writes that:

> … it is also in this sense that the Cartesian equality of the cogito must be specified. In place of the thinking subject who only knows himself by withdrawing from all the senses and from all bodies, we have a new thinking subject who is aware of himself through the action he exerts on himself as on other bodies. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 54)

What I believe is happening here is that Rancière, in his revival of Jacotot, is expressing a Spinozean metaphysics (even though Jacotot saw himself, according to Rancière, as a Cartesian). Rancière takes this up in order to reinscribe an understanding of ourselves not simply in terms of mind (as in Descartes) but as the consciousness we have of ourselves as an acting body, and as a sensual, affective, and expressive being.

Now it becomes possible to better understand the phrase cited earlier: 'By the will we mean that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself in the act' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 57). When I act – that is, when my body moves in a way that can be called action, that is, as an expression of my will – then I know that it was *me* who acted simultaneously with being conscious of my expression, as the intelligent effect of my will. A Rancièrian education is thus always the performance of a demand on the student to be present to themselves, as a will in charge of its own intelligence. This is a demand to be attentive, which is to say, to care for something which has fascinated them.

The disappearance of the will could then be understood as the observation of our own body moving without acting, in passive response to someone else's will. This could further be one way of understanding *depression*: as the disappearance of one's will to express, and the simultaneous disappearance of the meaning of the things we perceive our own body doing – we move, but we do not act, and when we perceive this, we realise that we are not really living, which results in grey nihilism penetrating our world. Stultification, similarly, is to be rendered a brute, which is to say that our body moves in a way in which our will is not present. It is to make use of the intelligence, not as an effect of our own will, but rather as the passive response to the will of someone else who tells us (explicitly or, perhaps even more nefariously because it goes unnoticed, *implicitly*) that we *cannot* make use of our intelligence on an equal level to them. This will does not have to be expressed by a body in

the present: it can be represented as an idea which has a grip on our mind even if the original cause has long disappeared.

Autonomy as freedom from the will to dominate

Of central importance here is that Rancière repeatedly emphasises that a distracted will is a will captured by the passion of contempt. He writes:

> The perverted will doesn't stop using intelligence, but its use is based on a fundamental distraction. It habituates intelligence into only seeing what contributes to preponderance, what serves to cancel out the other's intelligence. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 82)

This is a central aspect of his discussion of the will. This is not primarily a will to seek power in the sense discussed above – the power to understand, to express, to develop ways of acting in affective relationships with other bodies – but a will to seek power over other wills. This is a striving not primarily toward things that are good and bring joy, but toward things that make one better than others. It is also in light of this that Rancière introduces his concept of autonomy, namely as:

> … a form of thinking, practice and organization free from the presupposition of inequality, free from the hierarchical constraint and the hierarchical belief. (Rancière, 2017, para. 3)

So the freedom of the will which acts under the mark of equality is a *freedom from the desire of preponderance, from contempt for others or oneself*. Now it has become possible to say that "the ignorant schoolmaster" is a demand placed upon students to strive and increase their power of expression, under the mark of equality – to develop affective relationships with other bodies that are good for them, without kindling the desire to be better or worse than others. Education in this sense can be understood as the path of 'responding to the urgency of the peril, but just as much to a confidence in the intellectual capacity of any human being' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 14). Moreover, when Rancière states that the perverted or distracted will habituates intelligence into only seeing what contributes to preponderance, this shows that perception plays a fundamental role in his discussion of the will. The distracted will uses its intelligence in order to perceive those things in the world which it can relate to in order to dominate other wills. The attentive will uses its intelligence to perceive those things in the world which it can relate to in order to increase its own power of expression, and, in turn, in order to be able to more meaningfully engage with other bodies. This understanding of the will also stands in close proximity to Butler's (2018) discussion of the subject as inherently *interdependent* upon others in order to thrive and

develop. She contrasts this to the depiction of the subject in the early liberal tradition as someone who was born into adulthood and is entirely independent of others.

I believe it is important to note that the will for Rancière is not developed in the interpersonal way implied by Butler. In fact, it is not really developed by Rancière at all – he himself states in a later interview that it is no more than 'a hardly verifiable and slightly obscure internal power' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 177). Yet I believe in this statement that he overlooks the implicit potential of the way in which he had taken up Jacotot's notion of the will in TIS, and its congruence with Spinoza's discussion of the will. Both of them do not, as I have understood it, view the will as one of the faculties of the mind or as an internal power. Rather, it is the whole of who we are. Unfortunately, space does not allow me to comment further on a question I consider to be of central importance here: the question of time. When stating that it is the whole of who we are, does that mean it is who we are at any given moment? Or is it necessarily who we are over a given period of time? How does this relate to the notion of identity? As said, this cannot be discussed here, but it does call for further explorations in the future.

One observation can be made here, however, in relation to something already noted in the introduction. Chambers (2012) observes that the subject, for Rancière, deviates from both liberal and the Marxist understandings of it. Chambers considers the liberal subject to be something that pre-exists expression and serves as its ground. And he understands the Marxist subject as something fixed in place by the economic-social structure of which it is a part. So for Rancière, the subject neither pre-exists its expressions, nor is it fully determined by the economic-social structures of which it is a part. Rather, it comes into existence in the act of subjectivation. This is important, exactly because the will can always be captured by distracting forces that pervert it and make it succumb to the gravity of the order of domination. So it is crucial for Rancière that at any given moment, we can jolt back into the realisation that we are equal to all others, as an imperfect part of the universal whole.

The will in education

In light of what I have discussed here, I want to make mention of one more observation from the Children's Home before concluding this chapter. When the children were not clear on what to do next, they would often ask me a question exemplified in the following format: **'**Uncle, we want to write that question?'. So instead of asking me what I wanted them to do, they asked me what they wanted to do. It is not, I believe, that these were children who did not generally know what they did and did not want to do. It was rather that they perceived me as a teacher, and they perceived a teacher as someone who aims at teaching you what

you want to do. This was also in line with George's pedagogical method. He wanted to install an image of himself in their mind – coupled with a sense of fear – which would make them act in such a way that it was in line with what he believed was best for them to want. He believed that their will as it was should be corrected, because in their life before coming to the Home they had developed affective relationships with things and behaviours that were not good for them. Furthermore, what he believed was good for them was not simply what was good for them as individuals: it was also what was good for them as citizens. As he saw it, they would have to learn the proper ways of society in order to be able to behave as and be perceived as good, law-abiding citizens and be able to go to college, get a job, and have a normal life.

I could follow George's reasoning much further than I would have expected at first, which taught me a great deal about – and made me become more critical of – the kind of education I had learned to consider normal in my own particular culture. At the same time, there was also a part of me which could not agree with his method, a part which became more obstinate when it felt that George was becoming more extreme in his behaviourist methods. There was a period of three days where George had to leave on a trip, and the children – who I had no authority over, so I was just there in the Home without being their educator, doing my project with them one hour a day and otherwise simply existing with them – became ecstatic in his absence. They were running, playing, and behaving in ways I consider normal for children their age but in a way I never saw them behave when he was around. This was shortly before Christmas, and shortly before the end of my internship.

When George came back, he found that some of the children had not completed their homework as he had told them to do. And, as a punishment, Christmas became a silent time for all of them. They could hang up decorations but it was done in silence, and instead of playing and being joyful they had to subsist under the yoke of George's guilt-inducing aggrieved gaze. At that moment I felt more strongly than in my whole time there what I wanted, which was to get angry with George, which was what I did, even though the children urged me not to do so. He told me that I had apparently not understood him at all during the whole time I had been there and he had tried to teach me about the different ways of his culture, and the different necessities it placed on him as an educator. Perhaps he was right, perhaps I did not understand him. But then, what is understanding, exactly? There was something else which I wondered about, and which I still wonder about often: how can an educator be sure that what they want for the children they educate is really good for them to want? This question does not seem to have a final answer; it is rather an *aporia* to be confronted eternally in all educational settings.

Having now made some preliminary reflections on the will, and on education as a demand that draws the will toward fascinating adventures, the following chapter will start from my own will in order to try out what such an adventure might look like. The chapter was originally written as the introduction to this thesis, after I had written an earlier version of this chapter on the will. But instead of an introduction, it became an inquiry into why I had wanted to begin on this thesis in the first place. That inquiry turned into an adventure into some of the ways in which I believe the time in which we live today is so precarious, so dark, that thinking about the kind of education needed to confront those times is an absolute demand placed upon everyone who wants to try and keep the spreading forces of hatred at bay. In other words: the following chapter will be an enactment of the adventure of me as a will. This is, at the same time, an attempt to enact the meaning of the will understood as the *power to be moved.*

CHAPTER 4: THE SEARCH FOR GROUND

Will is the power to be moved. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 54).

Introduction

This chapter originally began as an introduction to the thesis. After writing the counter-translation of TIS and having adventured some way through the topic of the will, my supervisors asked me to write the introduction to the thesis. The chapter can thus be seen as an immediate expression of the meaning of the power to be moved; someone else's words set my will in motion in order to set off in unexpected directions. However, reflecting back on it, I did not actually believe that this was the right moment to write the introduction; therefore, my deviation from the adventure can also be seen as an act in which my will was distracted and I passively behaved in a way that was not an expression of my self.

Moreover, at that point in my adventure, I lost clarity on what it was that I was doing. The adventure had scattered in different directions and I was trying to run in all those directions at the same time. My aim had been to understand Rancière better – and I had been reading his works for months, while the meaning of much of what he wrote remained impenetrable to me. I persistently felt that I was failing at achieving understanding in relation to the many allusions he made to things I had no knowledge of. I also felt that his style of writing remained too obscure for me to be able to say that I could really counter-translate his words in a way that made sense to me.

At the same time, I knew that an incapacity to make sense of something must be a prerequisite for learning and transformation: it is only when things do not make sense within old frameworks that we can be confronted with, and changed by, the new. My memory told me that I had wanted to write about emancipation and truth from the perspective of Rancière's works in order to construct a view on education with which to confront the spirit of domination, colonialism, individualism, and compliance permeating our world. Yet I neither felt that I adequately understood Rancière's works, nor how to best formulate more concretely the problem I was addressing, nor, following from that, how to best approach constructing the powerful educational theory I so deeply wanted to create.

This state of confusion was the groundless ground from which I began writing this chapter. Far from knowing what my thesis was doing exactly, what concrete issue I was addressing or how to provide an answer to it, there was most primarily a will to reach some

solid ground, to alleviate my state of confusion and to know from where to start and how to proceed. This desire for ground was ironic in light of the fact that I was researching the philosophical framework of the *anarchic* thinker Rancière, whose thought not only refuses the authority inherent in solid points of departure, but even aims to thoroughly turn up and leave disturbed any solid ground we may have found. There was one thing I was increasingly becoming familiar with: the adventuring style of writing, which I had already begun to develop before writing the thesis, and which Rancière's works were teaching me about. During these endeavours, some understanding did develop, even if it was not at what I deemed to be an adequate level.

When starting off on this chapter, which was supposed to be an introduction, I set out on answering the obvious question about my reasons for writing this thesis. While writing an answer to that question the chapter quickly grew to be more than an introduction. Having thought about the will for so long, I found that answering why I wanted to do the things I wanted was not at all a straightforward endeavour. The task was certainly made more difficult than it should have been because of my confusion (and recurrent states of depression, which were related to, though not identical with, the confusion). That said, the chapter turned out to be an exploration of some of the themes I believe were present in my will to go off on this adventure. Hence, this chapter consists of a modest search for truth, of contingency, of strange turns and reflections. In other words: an adventure, a budding enactment of the style of equality I wish to learn from Rancière, in the belief that – as I will discuss later in the thesis – it is not only in direct arguments, but also, and sometimes perhaps even more importantly, in the style of writing that truth can come to appear. Finally, as with the rest of the thesis, this chapter is an enactment of my grappling with Rancière's texts – a trying out of the way in which he uses words in his works.

In what follows, I will begin by exploring why I had initially wanted to focus on the concept of "truth" in my thesis. It will turn out that there was more to the question than I realised at the moment of asking it. By asking about "truth", I was really asking about a constellation of ideas. Moreover, although I knew that the question asked addressed multiple concerns, I was only conscious of some of those concerns when asking the question, whereas others only became apparent to me later during the research process. The next step will therefore be an exploration of what it means to ask the kind of question I am asking; to ask, so to speak, the "question of the question". It will transpire that, where I first assumed that the question was simply an entry point to the further research process, it was itself also an end point to be reached. I will now explore what I mean by this.

Truth and post-truth

The year 2016 saw two political events happen that many people in the Western world had "known" to be impossible: the vote for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, and the election of Donald Trump for the office of president of the United States. Sales of novels such as Orwell's "1984" rose sharply in the aftermath of these events (Freytas-Tamura, 2017). That same year, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) decided the word *post-truth* was its word of the year (Peters, 2017). This word could be taken as reflective of a certain state we had collectively entered, a state described by Vivian (2018) as a 'crisis of truth' (p. 419). Illustrative of this crisis would then be the declaration of Kellyanne Conway, the counsellor to the newly elected president, of the possible existence of 'alternative facts' (Conway, 2017) – a contradiction in terms and, in my view, an expression of a certain kind of madness, or nonsense.[16] Similar notions were echoed outside of the United States, as when its ambassador to the Netherlands Pete Hoekstra, who had declared on camera in the previous year that there were "no-go zones" in the Netherlands and that cars and politicians were being set on fire in that country, stated in an interview with Dutch television that he had never in fact said such things and that any reports that stated otherwise should be considered 'fake news' (BBC News, 2017). He then, in the same interview, stated that he had never used the words fake news that day.[17] Quintana (2020) notes another related example which she compares with the Brexit and Trump votes: a vote against the ratification of peace agreements between the national government of Colombia and the FARC. Yet another observation is that, in December 2019, an infectious disease now called Covid-19 emerged which, against the backdrop of unprecedented wildfires raging across the Southern hemisphere, would rapidly grow into a global pandemic with major consequences for the world order. The backdrop to all of this is the ever intensifying climate crisis. This is a name that connects certain single observations – such as the melting of glaciers, the rise of Co2 levels and temperatures, widespread droughts and wildfires, and rising sea levels – and interprets them to become one connected story. The list of crises could be expanded into a wholly separate doctoral thesis.

[16] She made this statement in defence of greatly exaggerated claims by one of her colleagues about the size of the audience that had been present at the presidential inauguration.

[17] I make another crucial observation here, in a footnote because I add this several years after writing the chapter. When Hoekstra made his claims about no-go zones in 2015, he began his statement with the following words: 'The Islamic movement has now gotten to a point where they have put Europe into chaos'. The remarkable thing for me is that I had never noticed the blatant Islamophobia at work here – despite having watched the fragment several times, I had never actually registered those words being spoken by him, giving attention only to the latter part of his statement. It should be noted that it was not picked up on by the Dutch reporter, either, so perhaps my own attention was guided by the reporter's line of questioning.

My response to the aforementioned observations was a feeling that these political events were related to a failure not just in Western democracies, as it was often interpreted, but, importantly, in the domain of education specifically. My aim was to attend to the crisis in truth as a shift in meaning, or perceiving the world, that I myself experienced. Like many people, I had considered it *impossible* for the events to happen. In a sense, therefore, they were impossible events for me – if, following Derrida as discussed by Biesta, the impossible is understood not as 'what is not possible but what cannot be foreseen as a possibility' (Biesta, 2013b, p. 38). Making the far from conclusive assumption that something had really shifted – as implied by the prefix "post-" – I wanted to think about how we could understand "truth" and the supposed change in its meaning, and I wanted to do so from an educational perspective. A first possible way toward an answer to this question would be to look at the OED's definition of "post-truth" as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford Languages, 2016). Taking up this definition would mean, however, that we have been in post-truth circumstances much longer than suggested here. For example, The European Commission, in a 1995 report on the role of education in Europe's future, in a section on scientific awareness and its importance in democratic decision making, stated the following:

> At the moment, decisions in this area are all too often based on subjective and emotional criteria, the majority lacking the general knowledge to make an informed choice. (Commission of the European Communities, 1995, p. 10)

Perhaps, then, this definition given by the OED is not satisfactory. Beside the observation that it denotes nothing new about our times, it is also grounded on several problematic assumptions. One such assumption is that objective facts are out there, ready for the taking, but that people are simply not listening to them. This does not take into account that facts are often not simply ignored, but disputed. Another assumption is that appeals to fact stand in contradiction to appeals to emotion, the latter of which is then lumped together with "personal belief". This kind of dichotomy is reminiscent of arguments that pit reason, understood as thought concerning universal, *a priori* knowledge, against its opposite: an opinion based on emotion and personal belief. This notion has long been contested. For example, Nussbaum (1996) has argued that compassion, properly understood, is 'a certain sort of thought about the well-being of others' (p. 28) and neither an irrational faculty nor a form of bad or false thought.

The unsatisfying answer to the question of the meaning of "truth" in the definition of "post-truth" leads to the question of whether there are alternative, more satisfying,

definitions. One such definition could be a slight adjustment of that created by the OED: relating to or denoting circumstances in which agreement on meaning of the word "truth" has itself been lost. Another possibility would be to say that post-truth means that a certain kind of truth has been broken down and either replaced by another or by no truth at all. Alternatively, a post-truth world could be a world in which certain truths have become ossified: a world in which a certain way of understanding that world has become fixed as an always presupposed and therefore unquestionable truth. So this would be "post-truth" as in "the end of history" or "the end of politics" – post-truth as a world in which truth is no longer under dispute, and the question of the meaning of truth has therefore disappeared. In that sense, there is something to the evocation of the "shaping of public opinion". Thoughts of propaganda and brainwashing might rise up at such a notion, as well as images of a world split into two groups: one of "shapers" – truth-speakers, leaders, sages, puppet-masters – and one of "shapees" – truth-receivers, followers, flock of sheep, puppets.

The latter meaning of post-truth seemed to be underlined when both the Brexit vote and Trump's election, as well as other, related, political movements, such as the rise of the "alt-right" throughout Europe, were said to have been brought about by Russian influence, channelled through individualised personal advertisement on social media (Rosenberg, Confessore & Cadwalladr, 2018).[18] For some, this led to the conclusion that Western democracies themselves were under attack (e.g. Cadwalladr, 2017; Wijnberg, 2017; Vivian, 2018). Quintana also observes what she calls an 'erosion of representative democracy' which, she argues,

> … can be interpreted on the basis of more global phenomena, in line with what Wendy Brown has called the "de-democratization" of democracy in the face of certain dynamics of contemporary capitalism. (Quintana, 2020, p. 7)

For me, these observations immediately brought to the fore a concern with the role of education played in such movements. If democracy and truth are eroding (or, even more, if their presence had been an illusion all along) then is education failing in its fundamental role

[18] The two events have since been placed in a wider narrative that implies Brexit and the vote for Trump, but also other events. For example, the rise in the Netherlands of a new far right, anti-immigration and anti-EU party "Forum for Democracy", which, in 2015, successfully called for a referendum on an association agreement between the EU and Ukraine, providing false information to the population. All these – as well as the rise of the far right throughout Europe – are understood within this narrative as results of an effort of "psychological warfare" expressed in the interference of Putin's Russia into the political systems of Western liberal democracies. But a question remains – one I will address shortly again in the conclusion in relation to the term *perception management*, and which I further wish to inquire about after this thesis, but which deviates too much from the topics at hand to get into it too much here – which is how we in the West are ourselves caught in a form of perception shaped in order to make us view the world in a certain way.

to teach young people how to critically engage with the world around them? And, moreover, what kind of educational research could confront the need for asking the question of democracy and truth today?

Earlier in this century, Ramaekers (2006) expressed a similar outlook, and he observed a tendency for an emphasis on scientifically grounded, evidence based forms of educational research in a call for objective truth and knowledge as a way to confront uncertain times. But he expresses a concern in relation to the rejection in such a circle of any non-quantitative forms of questions, and the different understandings of truth related to such questions. In the same vein, my Master's dissertation focused on a group of thinkers who propose a paradigm shift toward a form of 'post-qualitative research' (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 629). These thinkers consider the kind of questions generally asked in educational research – both in terms of quantitative and qualitative methods – as forms of post-positivism. They denounce these scientifically grounded, evidence-based forms of research in order to search for wholly new ways of thinking about truth, and to establish forms of educational research which ask ontological rather than epistemological questions. The rebellious nature of their texts fascinated and influenced me. I also sought for new ways of thinking about education and education research (even though I also observed in my dissertation that I was not quite sure whether their denunciation of all existing forms of thought and research was really justified). These were then some of the reasons for me to begin writing this thesis. And my intuition told me that Rancière's thought could be a powerful inspiration to confront the questions outlined above.

The intuition to understand what is going on

Related to my wish to inquire into Rancière's thought was thus a desire to know what was going on in "our times". This is a question of how to make sense of the world by writing a narrative. My initial impulse was to critically judge the events outlined above; to feel indignant about the loss of democracy that they implied. But this type of critique endangers the possibility of interpreting the world in a meaningful way. So what I want is also to seek for ways of paying attention that eschew too quick a sense of indignation, and of designating sources of good and evil in order to be able to comfortably position myself on the side of the good.

As mentioned, from the previous observations a theme emerges that relates in various ways to all of the topics raised: the question of democracy. On Wijnberg's (2017) view, Trump's election and his subsequent actions as president are a direct attack on democracy. One of the ways in which this is visible, according to Wijnberg, is the attack on journalism

reflected in the evocation of alternative facts and fake news. But Wijnberg also locates an issue in journalism itself, for these kinds of sudden crises seem to arise out of seemingly nowhere. The issue is that news media often report on single events, or 'snapshots in time' (Wijnberg, 2017, n.p.), and are therefore in danger of failing to connect all the single events upon which they report so as to weave them into an overarching story. One example he gives is that of climate change, remarking that 'news is about the weather, not the climate' (Wijnberg, 2017, n.p.).

For me, all of this relates to a crucial theme: attention. What had I been paying attention to, and why those things, and not others? This was again a directly related to my motivation for wanting to delve into Rancière's works – as indicated in the last chapter, attention plays a central role in TIS. It was, moreover, Rancière's explicit connection between his discussion of attention and education which drew me to it. Quintana (2020) also draws from Rancière in finding a way to address the crisis of democracy today. She observes how Rancière proposes a different way of thinking about this than the one in which the gullible masses are presupposed to lack the intelligence necessary to make proper democratic decisions – as exemplified in the definition of post-truth given by the OED – and who are therefore in need to be educated in a proper way. She observes how:

> … enlightened consciences have hastened to proclaim the turn toward the world of post-truth, as the consummation of politics turned spectacle. In my view, this turn points, instead, to the strength acquired in our consensual societies by immunitarian narratives and social practices that have had deleterious effects on politics and have been fueled rather than countered by consensualism. (Quintana, 2020, p. 6)

Quintana, too, felt that Rancière's works – on which she bases the book from which I took this excerpt – could teach us something crucial about how to approach our attempt to understand the world today.

The decision to go off on a research adventure

The theme of attention also made me question my own educational background. My experience was like a kind of slow break in the order of the world as I had until then, naïvely, perceived it. It felt like one of those moments in which something reveals itself that had long been there, but which, because its existence had previously been unrevealed to the subject experiencing the moment, came first to appear to that subject – in this case, me – as something new. So why did these specific events worry me? Did they reveal something

important to me?[19] Or was my opinion being shaped by appeals to emotion? I decided to set off on an adventure in thought – one in which, I hoped, I could go some way to what could be called 'decolonizing the mind' (Schildermans, 2019, p. 26).

My intuition that led me into this dissertation was therefore that the post-truth crisis visible in the realm of politics might very well be reflected as a crisis in education. Such a crisis in education had already been signalled by Arendt (1958) in her seminal essay "The crisis in education"[20]. In light of this, my assumption is that there is a profound issue with the meaning ascribed to the word "education" in a general sense. This is why my adventure involves the question about the meaning of the word education, a search that is at the same time a search for truth in the sense exposed above. This is, at the same time, a search for assumptions and intuitions.

Critical thinking

My intention was for my adventure to be an adventure in critical thought. But what can critique mean today? And how does Rancière's view on this theme differ from the more conventional ways of thinking about it, such as in critical theory? Latour (2004) has wondered whether it was because of the postmodernists like himself, whose critique has thrown a veil of suspicion over "facts", that "we" – the public, or at least a certain public – have come to excessively distrust even non-ideological 'good matters of fact' (p. 227). One could wonder if Latour is assigning too great a role here to academics and their theories on the way people think generally. His own self-professed aim in questioning scientifically grounded matters of fact had been to '*emancipate* the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts' (Latour, 2004, p. 227, emphasis original). We can understand this aim as one example of the modern presupposition that enlightened academic thought functions and should function as a guiding light for the thought of the general public.

This presupposition itself relates to the shock a certain part of Western societies felt after the political events of 2016 that, at least to them, had been deemed impossible but had

[19] My intention here is not to judge the events themselves. Important is rather my, and in a sense, our, reaction to them. Suddenly, "post-truth" became a hot topic, and that was my initial reason to enter this dissertation, regardless of what I think about these issues now. I will reflect again on them in the conclusion of this dissertation.

[20] Interestingly, she notes in this essay that the United States is unique in how prominent of an issue education had become in politics. She apparently was not aware of the fact that education was the absolute primary political issue throughout the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century in the Netherlands. The politics of this era were marked by what was called the "schoolstrijd" ("battle of the schools") between confessional (Protestant and Catholic) and secular (liberal) political parties regarding the freedom to organise schools along ideological lines while still receiving state funding (Boekholt & de Booy, 1987). This freedom was established in law in 1917, and, after more than a century, has come under dispute in recent years.

happened anyway. As Lord (2017) suggests, in the aftermath of the Brexit vote and the election of Donald Trump, some of those who thought of themselves as "educated" felt indignant about the irrational, uneducated choices made by the rest – the "working class", the "poor", or simply "the people". They felt this way despite 'the sizeable proportions of middle- and higher-income voters whose support was crucial for both the Trump and Brexit victories' (p. 62). Lord analyses the political philosophy of Rancière and Spinoza, wondering on the basis of which of the two philosophical frameworks we can best interpret the events. More specifically, she focuses on both of these thinkers' understanding of the concept of "disagreement", comparing the two senses in which they discuss the concept in relation to the topic at hand. She concludes that:

> … the bad social feeling that followed these events reveals disagreement in Spinoza's sense rather than Rancière's: we should interpret them, not as potentially progressive revolts of the excluded, but as the effects of divergent experience and feeling that are likely to divide us still further. (Lord, 2017, p. 61)

This notion of "bad social feeling" – echoed in Mishra's (2017) discussion of resentment and anger, which he argues underlie events such as Trump's election – evoked here also echoes the definition of post-truth as a state of circumstances in which public opinion is shaped by appeals to emotion and personal opinion rather than objective fact. We might want to ask the question who makes, or who is at liberty to demarcate, the boundary between these categories. The impossibility of both political events actually happening had been perceived as fact, but only by a certain part of the population, the part that at the same time claimed that those who voted badly did so only because they had been manipulated by appeals to emotion and personal belief[21]. But the political events were interpreted in various different, conflicting ways, a fact that belies a growing divide among conflicting forms of experience. In other words, there is disagreement between different people and peoples. But what kind of disagreement?

What I wanted to do was to try and find a way through the forest of cacophonous facts and opinions and to think about the implications of all of this for education. Taking up Latour's proposal, mentioned earlier, to switch from matters of fact to matters of concern, Simons, Olssen, and Peters (2009) also propose making this switch regarding education. Education would then not be a matter of experts, but a matter of public concern, a "thing" around which everyone affected by it could gather in order to discuss its future development.

[21] This claim was later given more force when both the Brexit vote and Trump's election had been effected through manipulation of social media platforms by a company called Cambridge Analytica (Barnett, 2017).

And this – as I will explore later in the thesis – can be related to Rancière's idiosyncratic notion of disagreement.

This ties back into the notion of truth – the previous discussion gives a tiny glimpse of the wider constellation of concerns in which the contestation of what counts as truth is a part. This constellation includes political events that seem impossible but happen anyway, a coming to grips with the times in which we find ourselves – which can perhaps still be captured adequately with Bauman's (2000) term liquid modernity – emotions such as resentment and anger, the growing divide between different parts of society and kinds of experience, various kinds of disagreement – and, following all this, an urge and an urgency for critical thought on these matters, as public matters of concern, from an educational perspective.

Disconnection

A further observation that can be made is of a general sense of a loss of connection, connectedness, belonging (again evoking Bauman's (2000) notion of liquid modernity). All of this is still related directly to the first impulse that led me into the dissertation: the observation that the crisis in truth (if it can be called that) was related to growing divide between people with different kinds of experience – where this relationship takes place between truth as well as truthfulness, or a lack of it. Yet it is not through truth, but through truthfulness, as I think Rancière argues, we may hope to find community. As discussed at several points in this thesis, Rancière understands the linking together of minds – which he will later come to call *consensus* (Rancière, 2004/2010) – through the metaphor of gravity (see Lewis, 2012). But this is ultimately not what really brings people closer together, unless we think of mass movements such as the alt right movement today, which are gathered around the hatred of the other rather than a sense of belonging to a human community of equals.

The understanding of truth introduced here thus directly relates it to the concern of the growing divide between people. This divide was what worried me and what made me wonder about the meaning of "truth" and how we can think about it today. It may seem most intuitive to find a way to bridge the divide through consensus, through thinking about things together in the same way. Yet Rancière seems to suggest something different: consensus is dangerous, because as soon as we "link" our own thought to that of others through consensus, we run the risk of losing ourselves in the process. This is why he is considered a "radical democrat" (e.g. McNay, 2014), a denominator he shares with others such as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. Consensus is related to the concept of stultification, which is, in a way, the

opposite of emancipation. We can defend ourselves against stultification by realising that we are, just like everyone else, on our own free orbit around the absent star of truth, on which we can never settle. Settling on a certain kind of truth is what happens whenever a demagogue speaks and thinks for all the others – which was exactly what I believed was going on in the case of Trump's election[22]. There are more such instances, such as in the case of gurus, but also parents, and pedagogues. Rancière (1987/1991) adds that 'no one has a relationship to the truth if he is not on his own orbit' (p. 59). Yet whenever we communicate with others – which we must do in language which, in the way Rancière discusses it, means *any* kind of material expression we perform with our body in order to express ourselves to others – we must do so under the constraint of what he perceives to be the madness of the social order.

As I understand it, Rancière extends the idea that settling on one person's truth is dangerous to the idea that settling on any kind of social truth is dangerous. But this is a very complex issue. Language is what binds us and in which we are formed. At the same time, we can lose ourselves when blindly following the words of others. This is an *aporia* with which Rancière confronted me, and which fascinated me. *Truth* is related to a kind of *distance* – a distance that is something entirely different from the divide between people, and which, as he paradoxically suggests, is the only fruitful path through which we can hope to close that growing divide. In later works this idea about a certain kind of distance in language was theorised by Rancière through his concepts of disagreement (Rancière, 1995/1999) and misunderstanding (Rancière, 2005).

The method of equality

In a biography in the form of a long interview titled "The method of equality", in the context of a discussion of the topic of his conception of "the scene", Rancière states:

> The method I've followed in my work consists in choosing a singularity and then trying to reconstruct the conditions that make that singularity possible by exploring all the webs of meaning woven around it. This is the application of 'the Jacotot method': 'learn something and then relate all the rest back to it'; but it's a method I instinctively applied even before I read Jacotot. It's the method of 'the ignorant' in a way, the opposite of the method that first provides

[22] Which was often discussed in terms of a loss of *democracy*. It was then said that Trump was attacking the principles of democracy. But I wonder now if that was really true. Not because I think Trump is a good democrat, but because I wonder how democratic US society really was before he got elected. A friend, who comes from a North African country, told me that she thought Trump was the most honest US president she had seen so far. I was completely confounded by this remark, seeing as he has been shown to have lied over 15,000 times (Kessler, Rizzo & Kelly (2019)). Her point was that, in her eyes, in his blatant disregard for truth, his complete lack of honesty, and his arrogant, boorish attitude, he actually expressed the true Western values much better than his predecessors.

> a set of general determinations that function as causes and then illustrates the effects of these causes through a certain number of concrete cases. In the scene, the conditions are immanent to their being executed. That also means that the scene, as I see it, is fundamentally anti-hierarchical. It's the 'object' that teaches us how to talk about it, how to deal with it. (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, pp. 85-86)

There are three things in this paragraph that I believe are important in relation to the method of equality and the kind of gaze this method aims to deploy. The method is that of the "ignorant" researcher, which seems to mean that the researcher does not look for causes outside of the object of study that might explain that object. This method starts out with something – anything – and then searches for other things to link to the first thing. The second thing is then the "webs of meaning" woven around the first "singularity" which was chosen as a starting place. Thirdly, this web can be woven through the act of writing. This act of writing creates a "scene". What this means is not entirely clear to me, but it is important to remember in the way in which I am going to attempt to understand Rancière's notion of aesthetics – as in, for example, Rancière (2011/2013) in which he deploys this method of commentary on the scene, one which greatly fascinates me. But let me now take a sudden turn toward my own attempt to discuss a scene and comment on it. This scene is written in light of my search for ground, related to the question of what I am doing. And what I am doing is questioning. Therefore, I want to look more closely at what it might mean to question.

The question of the question

One text in which "questioning" is questioned is Plato's dialogue "Meno" (-380/n. y.). The main topic of this dialogue is "virtue" and whether or not it can be taught, with Socrates interrogating Meno on his understanding of this concept. Meno starts out believing that he understands what virtue is, but when Socrates presses him on the matter, it turns out that he is only capable of naming specific virtues, or parts of virtue, but not the meaning of "virtue" in a general sense. He becomes angry with Socrates and calls him a flat torpedo fish, partly because he believes Socrates resembles one, but more importantly because talking with him makes Meno feel torpefied, doubtful about something that had previously seemed very clear to him. Socrates responds by stating that:

> … if the torpedo is torpid as well as the cause of torpidity in others, then indeed I am a torpedo, but not otherwise; for I perplex others, not because I am clear, but because I am utterly perplexed myself. (Plato, n.d.)

He then proposes to delve into the matter together, after which Meno asks him a question that has come to be known as the 'learner's paradox' or 'learning paradox' (Prawat, 1999). Meno asks:

> And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know? (Plato, n.d.)

Since questioning the meaning of "virtue" is a questioning of something without really understanding the meaning of the question, how can one understand what it is one is asking about? And if one does not understand what one is asking about, then how can one know when the correct answer has been ascertained? Should the meaning of "virtue" not be understood before one can ask about the meaning of "virtue"? Even if someone exists who has an understanding of "virtue", an assumption Socrates disputes, someone lacking that understanding will still not understand what they are really asking about when asking about the meaning of "virtue". This relates back to the very question *Meno* starts out with, which is whether "virtue" can be taught. Even if there is someone who understands what virtue is, it may still be impossible for them to teach it to someone else, which means that the question about the meaning of virtue is a fundamental question that belongs to the structure of every human being's existence.

In his introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger also asks what it means to question. He answers:

> Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness. The knowing search can become an 'investigation,' as the revealing determination of what the question aims at. As questioning about … questioning has *what it asks about*. All asking about … is in some way an inquiring of …. Besides what is asked, what is *interrogated* also belongs to questioning. What is questioned is to be defined and conceptualized in the investigating, that is, the specifically theoretical, question. As what is really intended, what is to be *ascertained* lies in what is questioned. (Heidegger, 1953/1996, pp. 3-4)

When asking the question of the meaning of "virtue", this questioning "has" what it asks about, even if the meaning of "having" is in this sense not clear. The meaning of the question of the meaning of "virtue" is not fully understood at the time of asking the question – yet there must be at least *some* understanding of its meaning, since a question without any meaning for the person who asks the question would not be a meaningful question to ask.

In other words, just as Socrates and Meno must already have some understanding of "virtue" when they start to interrogate the word and its meaning, even if the meaning of what

they are asking about is not very clear to them, I too had some understanding of what my research question "has" in terms of its meaning. And, just like Meno, the more I thought about my question, the less clear its meaning became, in the two different yet related ways just described. On the one hand, my lack of clarity related to the "goal", the kind of answer I believed I was trying to ascertain. On the other hand, it related to my perpetually diminishing clarity on what kind of things I was asking about. This is not because I had forgotten the meaning of the question as I understood it when I began the research, but because the more I read and thought about it, the more elements it turned out to contain that I was not conscious of at the time of first asking the question. This observation is also expressed by Roth when he writes that:

> … the foreign/strange, precisely because it is foreign/strange, is invisible and therefore cannot be visualized, envisaged, and aimed at. That is, we cannot think learning in terms of a framework that already takes the new, unfamiliar, and foreign/strange as something available to be thought, considered, and intended. This is so because we cannot ever understand the learning of something absolutely unknown if we think it from the perspective of the known. (Roth, 2011, p. viii)

Not all questions are similar to the one about the meaning of "virtue". This is not a question like, for example, asking about a country's capital. The difference lies, first, in the understanding one has about that which one is asking about. Asking about the meaning of the word "virtue" is to ask about something without fully knowing the meaning of what one is asking about. Asking about the capital of a country is a question on which there is more or less clarity on what it is one asks about, that is, an understanding of the word "capital" is presupposed in the question, a presupposition that is exactly missing in the question of the meaning of "virtue" – and the same goes for "truth", or "education".

But the difference is still more specific than this. It is not merely a difference between asking about the meaning of a concept on the one hand, and asking about some specific example of what a concept means on the other hand. That is, the paradox still would not apply when we ask about the meaning of what a "capital city" is, even if which city is a country's capital could be contested. One can go to any dictionary and find out what a "capital" is, something that is not the case with "virtue". The difference lies in the observation that unlike the meaning of "capital", the meaning of "virtue" is contested. This means that different people will give very different answers to the question what we are asking about when we ask about the meaning of "virtue", or what this question "has" in terms of the goal it works toward. Moreover, as the frustrated Meno realises after having been questioned by Socrates, it seems that the *more* he thinks about the meaning of "virtue",

the *less* it seems to be clear what this word actually means to him. This is how my research process also has developed so far: the more I think about the question I asked, the less clarity I have on its meaning, not only in terms of the kind of answer I seek, but also in terms of what it "has", that is, the kind of thing or things I am asking about.

Theory

When I set out on my adventure, I assumed that I knew what I was getting myself into when deciding to adventure my way into Rancière's works. I had read TIS and knew very little about Rancière's other works. As it turns out, the assumption was naïve. I have often felt like Meno: torpified. My assumption has turned out to be reminiscent of Alice's assumption in Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" that she was following the white rabbit into a rabbit hole and not an unknown world brimming with absurdities and nonsense. One could argue that Alice was not really getting herself into anything, because her adventure happened in a mere dream. But the social world is like a dream too, expressed in an observation like this one: 'Much prison activism stakes itself upon this categorial tension in the social imagination, between the criminal and the citizen' (Feola, p. 43). And Rancière's main work "Proletarian Nights" has as a subtitle "The workers' dream in nineteenth-century France" (Rancière, 1981/2012).

So it has at times felt like there was no difference between Alice dreaming and me constructing a theory on the basis of Rancière's texts. Both dream and theory are ephemeral, existing only intangibly. And, just like Alice's dreamworld, Rancière's texts are often utterly nonsensical (at least to me). What I therefore kept trying to do was to make sense out of these often nonsensical writings of Rancière, to stare at and ponder the symbols he decided to put on the page (an activity not unlike the one you are doing right now) and to construct a "theory" on the basis of those symbols.

Here I am trying to use the word "theory" in the sense in which it is used by Rancière, and not, for example, as it was used by Heidegger in the quote above. What do I mean by this? First, looking at the etymology of the concept "theory" tells us that it is related to θεωρός (spectator), θέα (sight), and θεός (god). It is further related to εἰδ, which derives from the Proto-Indo-European **weed-* (to see), and which has in turn led to εἶδος (image, appearance). This means that my intellectual adventure deals with possible ways of "seeing" or, in more inclusive language, with possible ways of *perceiving*, when we consider the idea of education – if we can call "education" an "idea" at all. Perhaps it will turn out that we are dealing with something else when thinking about this word. Maybe we can say that the

category of meaning has different subcategories, including ideas, gods, and brands. The latter is expressed by Klein (2003) when she discusses:

> … the idea of lifestyle branding. The idea that if companies wanted to be truly successful and competitive in a global market place, they had to understand that their true product was not their product, i.e. sneakers, movies, lattes, or computers. It was an idea, a lifestyle: *it was meaning itself*. (2:30)

Important is that these questions bear directly on education, in which children are led into a world under the guidance of educators who act from a way of perceiving the world, one in which vastly different kinds of ideas can play a central role.

"Aesthetics" in relation to "theory"

The point about theory is that it is like painting with words – it is writing, literary, a way of showing a world through a conceptual framework. Which in turn leads back to the anti-Platonic notion in relation to education. If expression/communication always means a (poetic) "painting" of a certain world, then the question becomes: how and what should we think about the worlds that are painted within the educational space? And one thing is clear from Rancière's perspective: this is not a kind of world in the Platonic sense – a world that is a city (or as it would be for us, a country, or nation-state) in which justice is defined as a certain ordering of different kinds of groups of people. So what kind of world then? *A world of artists*. Interestingly, it is exactly the artists who Plato wants to see gone (unless they represent truth exactly as they should), as does Fénelon in his "Telemachus". Both of these will be discussed later in the thesis. But as discussed, theory for Rancière is related to his notion of "staging a scene".

To build further on that notion, and to stay with the metaphor of the dream for a moment, I want to take a step into a scene in David Lynch' television show "Twin Peaks" ('Part 14', 2017). In this scene, Gordon, an FBI agent played by Lynch himself, recounts his dream of last night to two colleagues. In the dream he meets Monica Bellucci and several of her friends at a café. While they are all drinking their coffee, Bellucci looks at Gordon and tells him the ancient phrase: 'We are like the dreamer who dreams, and then lives inside the dream'. Gordon replies that he understands, at which she worriedly asks him: 'But who is the dreamer?'. A very powerful and uneasy feeling comes over him, after which Monica looks over his shoulder and indicates to him to look back at something that is happening there. When he looks back, he is suddenly reminded of a scene from his past, when something very important had been pointed out to him, which he had forgotten about until now. He realises that someone he thought was a friend had really been an evil doppelganger

all along. After finishing the story, his colleague Cole responds that he, too, is beginning to remember it now.

How does this scene relate to my research project? First, my process, in which I read other writers' written expressions and worked toward an understanding of them in order to find the right way to formulate an answer to my research question, has been a process in which I often felt detached from reality, even though I have tried to keep the link with reality by relating ephemeral ideas to concrete situations. This became worse during long periods of isolation during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Second, Rancière's words show how the way we perceive the social world is always dreamlike, or, as he puts it, how our social being is always marked by the 'sheer contingency of any social order' (Rancière, 1999, p. 25). Those who comprise this "social order" – "we" – are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives inside the dream. And the question is: who is the dreamer? Or: who are the dreamers? Are they the unknown dreamers who make the world into a dream for some and a nightmare for others? To put this question differently: on what basis do we perceive the world and ourselves in the ways that we do? Can we change the dream, change our "ways of perceiving"? And how does education relate to these questions?

Education as finding our location in history

An unforeseen effect of reading Rancière's works has been an understanding that was different from the one I was expecting. It was this: it made me realise that the most central of the dreamers, from my perspective, is me. I became conscious of the question: what am I dreaming, and why? It was reading Rancière's works that made me look back over my shoulder and ponder this question. This was like a wake-up call: I found something I had forgotten and gradually came to rediscover through my memories: that I had always been adventuring, long before I started writing this dissertation – but that my adventure had been thwarted by distracting forces.

These observations seem to be in line with Mollenhauer's (1983/2013) understanding of education. The method he champions begins with self-reflection. The following paragraph does not just give a first suggestion about the method, but also about a certain understanding of the concept of education:

> Education's purpose is to further the cause of memory. By memory I mean collective memory – our common cultural heritage whose core themes education attempts to tease out: its principles, viewpoints and norms around which memory can orient itself. This also means that for each individual, the events that make up his or her upbringing and *Bildung* are patterned – and their endurance tested – according to these core themes. In other words, education

> should focus on cultural and biographical memory, and should seek lasting principles in this memory that develop the child's potential. Finally it should also find a precise and suitable language for these tasks. (Mollenhauer, 1983/2013, p. 2, italics added)

To study education is not only to study the notion of public education or the school. It is to study the way children in general are "brought up", how this happens societally, culturally, and historically. Our societies today know various institutions that deal with upbringing, two central ones being the school and the family. To study education, therefore, is to think at the very least about both of these institutions and their relation to a social world in general. Mollenhauer also writes:

> To speak of education and upbringing is a profoundly historical endeavor. When we talk about these things, we always talk about something historical in a historical mode. Even the most a-historical statement about education has a history; at a minimum, it is the history of a generation, and the history of times to come. This may sound trivial, but it has consequences. (Mollenhauer, 1983/2013, p. 4)

Indeed, in a formulation partly inspired by my reading of Spinoza (1996) I perceive myself (my actions, my thoughts, beliefs, feelings) not only as a cause, or, perhaps, a reason – but also as an effect. I am a person, a body, standing 'between past and future' (Arendt, 1958). And if education is also the *history* of education, I feel that my reflections must include a self-reflection on my own educational history. This historical search is at the same time a search for my own self, or will. This is not just an existential endeavour but also important for educators specifically because, in Masschelein's (2018) figure of the educator, this is someone who makes those they work with attentive to the forces that work on them in their life.

Responsibility

If the historical is implied in every educational search, then I return to the question asked earlier in the chapter: *why?* Why do I want to undertake this adventure, and why did I ask the initial question in the way that I did? These questions bear with great weight on the question of education. Education is an adventure in which we form our self, and therefore our will – in relation to a teacher who tells us to do or not do things, thereby necessarily influencing or even manipulating our will/self. The question of "why" is a central question in education. Should the question always be encouraged by educators? Would a healthy democracy not be one in which all ask this question repeatedly and with attention? One of my teachers in primary school, Miss "Sarah" did not think so.

Miss Sarah tells me that I have to sit still.

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

"Why?"

"*Doe niet zo brutaal*!"

"*Ik ben niet brutaal*!"

Miss Sarah thinks I am *brutaal*, so she orders me to leave the classroom.

The head teacher asks me why I have been sent away. I tell her that I had been told to sit still, and that I had wanted to know: *'why?'*.

She sighs. This again?

"Doe niet zo brutaal" means: do not talk back to me. The Dutch "brutaal" may remind one of the English "brutal" and "brutish". Both derive from the Latin *brutus*, meaning heavy, dull, insensible, irrational. And in a sense, one could ask what my teacher was expressing when she called me "brutaal". She thought that I was insolent without proper reason. In a way, she was right that I was insolent, because although my intention really was to ascertain why she wanted me to sit still, by asking my question I was also defying her authority. What is interesting about this memory is that it points to the importance of the will in the pedagogical situation. The teacher tells the student something to do something they do not want to do. Anti-authoritarian pedagogies would argue that this should never happen. Rancière could be read as such an anti-authoritarian pedagogue.

But Magnusson (2015) makes an interesting move in this regard. In her interpretation, the important contribution of Rancière in educational theory is his shift from a thinking about pedagogy in terms of a dichotomy between authority and freedom to one between equality and inequality. To make that shift leads to a different reading of the memory. Instead of asking whether my teacher should or should not have told me to sit still, or whether I should or should not have listened to her, the question becomes whether – suspending for a moment the question of authority and freedom – the situation was marked by equality or inequality. This is at the same time to ask: how did my teacher perceive me? And how did I think my teacher perceived me? And how did I perceive my teacher, and her behaviour toward me? It is to ask about our relationship and who we were to each other.

Hannah Arendt, in her article "The Crisis of Education" (1958), warns about a certain kind of situation that reminds me of the one depicted in Golding's "Lord of the Flies". Here, children are left to their own devices, thrown into the lion's den of one another's lack of maturation. Arendt states that adults have to take responsibility for the world into which they

introduce their children. But what if the world of adults is confused? What if the "adults" do not know what to do, how to take responsibility for the world they are responsible for? Perhaps this is exactly the post-truth situation in which we find ourselves. The world of adults is severely confused, and has been for a while. Following Mollenhauer (1983/2013), it is unclear what kind of world to represent to children if that world is changing as rapidly as it does today. Yet, as he also notes, this was the same kind of situation educators such as Comenius saw themselves confronted with in the 16th century when they began to think about how to organise modern forms of education.

Additionally, and as Biesta (2015) argues, there is a layer in the educational process that is remarkably timeless. This fascinates me. I wonder why the confusion of the (so-called) adult world, in my experience and in the West, is related to a growing insecurity about how to raise children, accompanied by a turn to the post-positivist mode of science that is supposed to tell the confused parent exactly what to do. This is also directly relevant in light of my own background. Although arguably the most important aspect of growing up, of becoming mature, is a sense of faith or trust in oneself, my own educational experiences led me in the opposite direction. Certain events had set me off course, made me lose faith in myself, or my "self" – my "will", or what Spinoza calls my striving to persevere in my being. Although I have tried to control reality through the act of "understanding" ever since, it perpetually evades my grasp, leaving me feeling mindless and empty-handed. When the "self" is not expressed, it is depressed. Its world takes on the appearance of a humid oubliette, its profane air contaminated by dust-particles of rotten spirits from the past. The search for meaning is then a search for a way out, for the courageous human power of emancipation, or self-expression. The question of depression is a critical question, as there seems to be a specific kind of depression today that many people suffer from, such that we can speak of a depression epidemic (Van den Bergh, 2019).

Perhaps growing up in a confused world is part of the human condition, and it might be important to reflect on some of the confusion confronting us today. There is one example of a confused situation that stands out for me, one that bears on one of the most important issues of our time: climate change. In the past year we saw a large number of children "strike" from school on a global scale. They were following in the footsteps of one Greta Thunberg, who had taken on the part of look-out, standing on top of the ship of humanity and shouting to the masses below that we are aiming straight for the apocalypse. She took her sign of grim times to come from "scientists" who have been warning us about an eminent, global climate disaster for over a century.

What I find interesting about this situation is that what Thunberg was doing was to assert a *wrong*. This is a concept extensively discussed by Rancière (1995/1999). There is something wrong, Thunberg said – with the world, with us, and therefore with me. What I think we have to give attention to is not first and foremost to Thunberg herself, but to her parents as depicted in the documentary I Am Greta (2020).[23] How did they respond? Although they ignored it for a while, they eventually gave up their careers in order to accommodate their child's depression. They listened to her: she said that something was wrong, and they listened, and went on an adventure with her to find a solution. And the *aporia* around this situation became the question about whether what was going on was reasonable, or not. The question of reason in the way that I want to discuss it in this thesis relates to the question of how an individual body can orient itself toward all of the *aporias* it meets. This then relates to the concept of the 'ethos' of the educator (Masschelein et al., 2008). Perhaps it is possible, as Heidegger (1953/1996) suggested, to discover some structural characteristics of our being-in-the-world that bear on the question of education, of the intellectual adventure and what can be said about it.

Taking a step back into the spirit of Rancière's writings, another observation becomes apparent. For Rancière, politics can never be encapsulated into a system or even a written theory. Politics happens in the expression of a wrong, or a quarrel:

> Egalitarian effects occur only through a forcing, that is, the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic. This quarrel is politics. (Rancière & Corcoran, 2004, p. 5)

When a wrong or a quarrel has been expressed, which is the moment of politics, an organised way of dealing with that wrong may follow. This also happened in the same period as Thunberg's demonstration.

Truth as a question of caring for the world by confronting it, or of dismissing the call to care by ignoring our own power

The question emerging with all these matters is: how can we *discern* which story, if any, is showing us "truth"? Is one story more intelligent than the other? Are we intelligent enough to figure it out, and what do we need to do that? Be attentive? To what? And how? Is it really true that all the great stories have become useless? Or that we cannot create new stories? Can anyone really prevent us from creating stories, let alone great ones? What role

[23] Incidentally, the behaviour of Thunberg's father toward her is remarkably similar to what we can see in a very different documentary, namely the behaviour of the father of chess world champion Magnus Carlson (Magnus, 2016).

do gods, ideas, and brands have to play in all this? These are all questions that bear on the task of education directly – and educators can either pay attention to them or ignore them. But this is only one sense of the word "ignore" – Rancière argues for an *ignorant* schoolmaster, who is an attentive schoolmaster, one who is ignorant to the inequalities between different kinds of human beings. So it does not mean we have to be ignorant in all senses of the word. What we know is how to be an adventurer, how to confront the unknown. We do not know this in the sense that we know exactly what to do. We know – at least, some know – how to trust themselves, how to care. Some know how to work together with others, how to be empathetic, how to trust their own power of discernment, how to take their time, how not to be swept away, not to waver in the face of false messages from others. It is about the individual confronting a world of which they are a part.

My experience, my educational history is then a history of a two-fold confusion, pertaining in two ways – both personal and societal – to an adult world that did not take responsibility for itself. Entering adulthood, or what was supposed to be adulthood, the social world appeared to me as a shadow of itself, of what it could be, and this shadow loomed over me and took hold of me like an evil spirit. I did not simply lack a sense of self, but felt that my sense of self had been corrupted. The fundamental doubt about the confused world had turned inward, rather than being channelled outward in order to meet an unknown world with the confidence needed to confront it. Reflecting on both the personal and the societal events that I had observed throughout my childhood, I realised that, although they had at first seemed to break an unbroken world, in truth they had broken open my own false image of a world that had been broken all along. The cacophony of messages had become too much, especially because I did not have a sense of truth in myself to be able to adequately orient myself to all these matters.

I observe a general attitude of people in which they believe they have no power to change anything in the world. "There is nothing we can do, the forces that play in the world are entirely out of our grasp, us, who are less intelligent than those in power". This is something Rancière's works continuously agitate against, an attitude I want to follow. This is an aspect in which I was stultified for a long time, something I still struggle with. Because I trusted the general way of perceiving things, I suppressed my concerns regarding the injustices in the world and decided that they would not worry me. This is why I am fascinated by the rare instances of children who do something not many other humans seem to do: to stick to their will, to their striving to persevere. To stick, at the same time, to how they intuitively make sense of things. Yet in reference to the two documentaries mentioned above,

it seems that the capacity to persevere might be very strongly related to the question whether there are adults present to care for children and urge them to persevere.

Furthermore, I observe that children can be inclined to make sense of things in their own way, a way that is not as yet moulded by common sense, the common way of making sense. It seems that, usually, we have to submit our sense-making to that of those who introduce us into their life form, because we want to belong. This is itself problematised in a post-truth world where there is a mad salmagundi of life-forms. This is another *aporia* then, the one in which we have to choose between our own madness or that of all the others. To choose between losing our sense of self, or being misunderstood by the rest.

Somewhere along the road then, I left my own path altogether, decided to step out of society in terms of being concerned with any of the things that were wrong, to spend my days imitating the arenaceous ways of the ostrich, just like everyone else. As a teenager, I stopped caring for the world, and for myself. The decision to re-instigate my adventure, for a way to rediscover myself, has been intertwined with a broader search for sanity in an insane world. This was to rediscover what I had covered up in the past, what I had learned to ignore, that is, to stop paying attention to. But then the question arises: what if a person who has decided to step out of the social world, to disconnect from humanity, wants to find a way back in, only to find that the world has stepped out of itself a long time ago? Can we find connection in a world of empire that has destroyed so many old traditions, has made a joke out of the idea of embeddedness, has reduced life to an enterprise where the self is not a god, not an idea, but a brand? What should one pay attention to when their own intuitions are not to be trusted, because they follow in a straight line the encouragement to ignore what is good for him and to attend to what is bad for him? What would such attention look like?

Since my reading of TIS and delving in to Rancière's further works, the intertwinement of my personal and social search has become augmented by Rancière's texts, with my attempts to get a grasp on his conceptual framework. My question is whether the opinion of the equality of intelligence can teach me – us – something about the ancient question of how a teacher can teach what they have not been taught themselves. Can it function as a light that leads the way out of darkness – or perhaps as a point of darkness that leads the way out of a world of blinding lights? Can one reach maturity without being guided, without having a mature human being show us what it means to be an adult? Are "human beings" – if that concept still makes any sense – intelligent enough to escape an estranged sense of self, corrupted by spectres from the past, by shame, and guilt? My question is to see whether I am capable of being a subject. That is, whether I can "perceive", know, have ideas, discern, examine, "speak" – that is, *express* – think, and act. Can the researcher create a story that

makes sense to them, construct at least some kind of way of making sense in a world dominated by madness? Can they further express that sense to others in a way that makes sense to them in a similar way? Is it possible to figure out what is going on, and how to respond to it, how to be responsible? And how can education contribute to the development of these matters? The final chapter of this thesis will entail a modest beginning at an answer to that latter question.

Self-perception and capacity

Stultification as I perceive it entails a certain type of death: the death of a loss of self, of a trust in one's own feeling, one's own thoughts, knowledge of what one wants, self-expression, intuition. I know this state. Let me refer back to the experience with my teacher who said that I should not talk back to her. She called me the Dutch word "brutaal". This reminds me of the original French word for which stultification is the translation: *abrutir*. Brutify. It is to start perceiving oneself as a brute, an animal, a non-thinking being. Maybe that was what my teacher wanted in that moment? I observe that I do not always trust my own capacity to make sense of the world, and that there are moments in which I do or say something that is not in line with what I really believe. In Rancière's words, those are moments in which I have become distracted, distanced from my self. He writes:

> The principle of evil lies not in a mistaken knowledge of the good that is the purpose of action. It lies in unfaithfulness to oneself. "Know yourself" no longer means, in the Platonic manner, know where your good lies. It means come back to yourself, to what you know to be unmistakably in you. Your humility is nothing but the proud fear of stumbling in front of others. Stumbling is nothing; the wrong is in diverging from, leaving one's path, no longer paying attention to what one says, forgetting what one is. So follow *your* path. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 57)

In my experience, as soon as I stop giving voice to who I am, I no longer exist. This is a common state in a post-truth era plagued by depression and anxiety. Self-expression is the same as intuitive, wilful action, as I have argued. Whenever I do not voice myself, this equals suppression of my self, my own voice, which means mendacity, unreason. And, at the same time, it means depression – not the *pressing out* that is expression, but the *suppressing* that is depression. This is what happens whenever I pretend to understand something that I do not really understand. There is another example of *aporia* here. Rancière writes:

> The first vice is laziness. It is easier to absent oneself, to half-see, to say what one hasn't seen, to say what one believes one sees. "Absent" sentences are formed in this way, the "therefores" that translate no mental adventure. "I can't" is one of these absent sentences. "I can't" is not the name of any fact.

> Nothing happens in the mind that corresponds to that assertion. Properly speaking, it doesn't *want* to say anything. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 55)

But the truth can never be pinned down in words, and it has taken me several years to realise that these words do not convey a truth in the way that I once thought they did. There are sentences, paragraphs, chapters that I do not understand, and I *want* to say: I do not understand – and must therefore decide that this is not, as Rancière proposes, a sign of laziness. It is a sign of *incapacity* – not in an individual sense, but in a relational sense. I do not understand Rancière because what he writes is meaningless, and it is meaningless because I cannot make sense of it. Something is going wrong in the translation and counter-translation between his words and mine. And what is more, the same goes for many other texts I read. The strange thing is that everyone else concerned with these matters seems to be able to understand the texts, but not me. This makes me feel stupid – but I notice that I am not inclined to voice the incapacity I observe, because I assume that this would be contrary to what people expect of me, and, for some reason, that seems like an impossible task. Yet have we not learned from the impossible events discussed above that the impossible is possible? Could Rancière be right when he proposes that 'from the moment you assert that you are not afraid, you are not afraid' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, pp. 82-83)? This is at the same time to reject the impossibility imposed upon us by the imaginary boundaries of the social order. This also reminds me of Fisher's observations on depression. He writes that:

> … depression is partly constituted by a sneering 'inner' voice which accuses you of self-indulgence – you aren't depressed, you're just feeling sorry for yourself, pull yourself together – and this voice is liable to be triggered by going public about the condition. Of course, this voice isn't an 'inner' voice at all – it is the internalised expression of actual social forces, some of which have a vested interest in denying any connection between depression and politics. (Fisher, 2014, n.p.)

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to give an overview of the path that my adventure has thus far taken, and how the main topics of this dissertation have arisen out of it. I started out with a question about truth, research, education, and Rancière. All of these concepts still play a crucial role in this dissertation. While adventuring on this path I found that my reasons for asking the original question had not been as clear-cut as I had originally assumed. This led to my questioning of those reasons, of the question that I was asking itself, and of the very act of questioning, or doing research. This led me back to a reflection on myself and my

memories, which is designated by Mollenhauer (1983/2013) as an educational kind of reflection.

My question is now: how can one find their path, regain reason, be veracious and attentive, in a distracting and mendacious world that has educated them according to that world's own functionality in terms of competence culture, a culture in which the inequality of intelligence has become the brand or god that is the cause that affects us? Then: how does this question lead to a possible formulation of the problem of education today? Can we say something about the kind of "ethos" of pedagogues, teachers, educators that might help keep children on their own path? Can I say something about what the problem of education might be, and about the kind of questions that I believe we should be asking ourselves? These are question I will come back to in the final two chapters. First, let me go back to what I had set out to do. I wanted to investigate two concepts from TIS: "will" and "intelligence". The previous chapter dealt with the former. The next chapter will deal with the second: intelligence.

CHAPTER 5: INTELLIGENCE

> The book *is* the equality of intelligence. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38, emphasis original)

Introduction

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I developed the notion that Rancière's TIS can be understood as the painting of a constellation of concepts on the basis of which we can come to perceive the world through what could perhaps be called a "way of equality". That constellation expands throughout Rancière's other works, both written before and after TIS, though in different ways and with shifts in the kind of language deployed. This chapter zones in on a concept that will be considered central in this wider constellation: the "equality of intelligence". Understanding what this concept means and how it relates to other uses of "intelligence" is not a simple matter of comparing definitions; as the epigraph to this chapter indicates, Rancière (following Jacotot) does not always write about intelligence in the most prevalent current sense of the term.

In this chapter, I first comment on my reasons for devoting a chapter of my thesis to this topic. Then, I will explore some of the attributes of "intelligence" as discussed by Rancière and in the secondary literature. Next, I will look at the common sense of "intelligence", through a discussion of two articles by Spearman (1904) and Hand (2007). I will then explore further how intelligence differs for Rancière, and consider some of the ways in which it has been taken up in the secondary literature. In the course of this adventure, it will turn out that the way in which I am trying to understand Rancière's use of intelligence (and his formula of the equality of intelligence) is shifting. Ultimately, then, the meaning of the epigraph to this chapter will become manifest in an enactment of the equality of intelligence. This is itself a way of trying to understand the two central questions to this chapter: how can we understand intelligence qualitatively instead of quantitatively? And, following this, how can one verify equality when the language used to frame that verification is quantitative?[24]

Phrenologists

[24] My gratitude goes to Seán Henry for the formulation of that latter question, which, as he pointed out to me, was implicitly present in this chapter without my explicit consciousness of it.

The equality of intelligence was already explored to an extent in the counter-translation of TIS. However, in many conversations in which I introduced that notion, the response was that it is nonsense. A question therefore arose in me: What might Rancière be doing when he proposes a (seemingly) nonsensical notion of the equality of a concept which is generally believed to be *a priori* unequal? He himself acknowledges that he is dealing with something that appears to be an absurdity, stating that 'The circle of power … can only appear as a tautology or an absurdity' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 15), in which "power" seems to refer to the same thing as "intelligence" for him (in one sense of that term). This is important in light of his philosophical framework, in which he connects the nonsensical to politics. As noted, politics for Rancière is about a *dissensus*, breaking into the common ways of perception structured by the hegemonic *partage du sensible* (as further discussed in Chapter 7). Therefore, political acts do not make sense within this common framework.

As I want to show, my adventure into Rancière's works and secondary literature has taught me how the arguments made in the conversations that I referred to in the previous paragraph suppress the political stakes present in the question of intelligence. By this I mean that what Rancière brings into dispute is the very presupposition of inequality itself. The argument in the conversations I was a part of could be paraphrased by saying that to posit the equality of intelligence is to make a statement akin to "the Earth is flat". Although it may have seemed like a feasible idea in the past, I was told, science has since disproven it. This means letting go of the past – both in the sense of false beliefs and of history as a field of study worthy of attention by philosophers of education. On this view, history is itself believed to be something of the past. That is to say that history, as well as politics, has ended. Indeed, as Rancière argues, the presupposition of the inequality of intelligence is in some way related to a view of our era as one that is post-historical and post-political (Rancière, 1995/1999, 2004/2010; Säfström, 2010)[25]. Therefore, I believe it is relevant that the equality of intelligence is not simply a concept Rancière himself produced, but one he excavated during the years he spent relatively early in his career in "the archives", reading texts written by French working class authors in the nineteenth century. The equality of intelligence is

[25] When I say, "view of our era", I am not referring to the whole world or time in which we live, but a certain image of that era which, according to Rancière, can be found in philosophical discourse, media, and other sites of public discourse. Rancière's argument is not that "our era" is not political – on the contrary, it is just as political as the whole of human history, but this element is left out in those discourses he criticises. This has been relevant for me personally, because I grew up believing in that image of a post-political world, a world in which politics was more about refinement of that which is in principle already good. Believing in the image presented to me, I remained unaware of the massive inequalities and forms of oppression which are very much real in our world today (internationally, and even within my own country of the Netherlands). The article by Säfström referred to above discusses a similar observation about Sweden.

thus inextricably intertwined with history, and with the notion of time, or untimeliness (Ross, 1991; Rancière, 1981/2012).

In other words, from Rancière's viewpoint my interlocutors in the conversations mentioned above took on the same role – that is, they were the same kind of "figure" – as the "phrenologists" he discusses in TIS. This figure plays the same role in various forms in different historical conjunctures, as becomes clear when analysing how he discusses this figure in TIS. In his denunciation of contemporary proponents of the argument that science has once and for all proven the inequality of intelligence, he suddenly shifts to the voice of Jacotot denouncing the phrenologists of the 19th century. He then ironically calls both "protuberants".

> It is true that this terrain is now occupied by some fierce adversaries: physiologists. The properties of the mind, according to the most radical of them, are in fact the properties of the human brain. Difference and inequality hold sway there just as in the configuration and functioning of all the other organs in the human body. The brain weighs this much, so intelligence is worth that much. Phrenologists and cranioscopists are busy with all this: this man, they tell us, has the skull of a genius; this other doesn't have a head for mathematics. Let's leave these *protuberants* to the examination of their protuberances and get down to the serious business. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 47, italics original)

Rancière then goes on to argue that the fact that people have been trying to find arguments for the inequality of intelligence itself is an indication that this endeavour is not as innocuous as it may seem. His argument is that if there were truly an inequality of intelligence, it would not be necessary to pay attention to that inequality at all, since:

> … [s]uperior brains would not go to the unnecessary trouble of proving their superiority over inferior minds – incapable, by definition, of understanding them. They would be content to dominate them. And they wouldn't run into any obstacles: their intellectual superiority would be demonstrated by the fact of that domination, just like physical superiority. (Rancière, 1987/1991, pp. 47-48)

Though I do not think this argument is convincing in itself – since one could counter that the domination as it exists now is the result of the capacity of those with superior intelligence to prove it to those who are dominated – the point seems clear to me: inequality of intelligence functions as a way to justify social hierarchies between human beings with the claim that those hierarchies logically follow inborn hierarchies in capacity. This claim, he responds, is a "fiction" – a word he uses in a specific way, which is related to the word "story", and which I will discuss in Chapter 7 – yet one that has the very real effect of

constituting a hierarchical social world. It is a claim that can be found in 19th-century scientific theories of racism:

> The history of the concept of race is inextricably intertwined with attempts by the winners to explain or justify why they perceive themselves to be winners. (Sternberg, Grigorenko and Kidd, cited in Gillborn, 2016, p. 369)

For Rancière, this fiction is not only expressed through obvious cases of racism, eugenics, and other instances in which intelligence is linked to race, such as in the influential "The Bell Curve" (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), but in the very way in which the difference in intelligence is assumed to be a hierarchical form of difference. One very clear way in which this is realised is, for example, in the popular work of Robert Plomin (e.g. Plomin & von Stumm, 2018; Plomin, 2018). But I will look more closely at two other less extreme examples that, I believe, express well the common sense understanding of intelligence which Rancière's polemics target. This common sense is pointed at in the following excerpt, given by several other Rancièrian adventurers.

> The historical link of the notion of intelligence to psychology and tendencies to quantify it and use it as an 'objective' foundation for comparisons, differentiations and hierarchies, especially in schools, make Rancière's claims even more radical. For any educator, and probably for most readers outside the field, proofs of differences of intelligence between people are as abundant as they are irrefutable. Their abundance is clear yet their irrefutability rests on several assumptions that Rancière leaves in suspension. As we have mentioned before, the point is not to prove that all intelligences are equal, but to explore the consequences of what if they were equal. (Friedrich, Jaastad & Popkewitz, 2010, p. 69)

This excerpt begins with reference to a 'historical link of intelligence to psychology and tendencies to quantify it and use it as an 'objective' foundation for comparisons, differentiations and hierarchies'. What the authors mean becomes very clear when reading two articles. These articles are written a century apart, but, as I read them, they show the same way of understanding intelligence. The first is the foundational essay published by Charles Spearman titled " "General Intelligence," Objectively Determined and Measured " (1904).

"Intelligence" in Spearman

My reason for looking into this article specifically is that it laid the groundwork for the way in which intelligence is understood as a construct within the field of psychology, as well as being a lucid example of the intelligence discourse Rancière seems to be addressing. In his article, Spearman (1904) aimed at constructing a more rigorous, scientific

methodology than hitherto existed in the still young field of 'Experimental Psychology' in order to 'positively [determine] all psychical tendencies' (p. 205). More specifically, he aimed at one 'cardinal' (Spearman, 1904, p. 205) psychical tendency, which he called General Intelligence (or "general factor", denoted with "*g*"). His wish was to 'determine this Intelligence in a definite objective manner, and to discover means of precisely measuring it' (Spearman, 1904, p. 206). Ultimately, he wanted to pave the road for finding laws of the mind akin to those found in nature by Newton, which at that time were still believed to be universally applicable. He employed terminology and concepts from the natural sciences, and referred to the children he measured as "reagents". He developed a statistical measure with which to test his reagents, which is still used today, under the name of "Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient". As the name implies, it is used to measure the correlation between the rankings of two ordinal or continuous variables, such as exam scores on different school subjects. The variables measured here are always quantitative (thus hierarchical) and ontological (that is, supposing that the hierarchy actually exists "out there"), and this statistical measure was linked specifically to intelligence from its conception.

Also relevant to note is that this measure was directly tied to the field of education, because Spearman used it to describe the order of pupils' school performances. He distinguished between four different senses of the word "intelligence", with the first two and last two being similar. The first was based on the results of school exams – children who generally got better exam scores were considered more intelligent by him. The second was '[derived] from the same school order, but so modified as to exclude all influences of Age' (Spearman, 1904, p. 250). Here, an absolute rather than a relative difference could be obtained:

> A boy, for instance, who was 20th by examination and 22nd by age would be placed just above one who was 15th by examination and 16th by age, the former being two places and the latter only one better than would have been expected with greatest probability. (Spearman, 1904, p. 250)

Spearman goes on to describe in detail the kind of order obtained through this measure, and how to find out who the "top boy" in the school is. Intelligence, in other words, was conceived by him to denote how "good" boys in a school are in comparison to other boys. Here I should note that although he only writes about boys in this excerpt, later in the article he notes that there is no difference in intelligence between boys and girls, so his concept refers to children in general. This leads to the third sense of intelligence observed by Spearman:

> The third kind of Intelligence is that represented and measurable by the general impression produced upon other people. This forms the basis of the common broad assortment of the children by their teachers into "bright," "average," "dull" respectively. (Spearman, 1904, p. 251)

The fourth and last sense of intelligence is what Spearman calls 'common sense' (Spearman, 1904, p. 251). As with the third kind of intelligence, this fourth type is also estimated through observation of the child by others – this time not the teacher but other students – who observe and know the child. These two general different senses of intelligence distinguished by Spearman – that is, exam results adjusted for age, and general impression of others expressed in ranks – can be compared to the discussion of intelligence in Hand's (2007) article "The Concept of Intelligence" written a century after Spearman's text.

"Intelligence" in Hand

Hand's (2007) article is pertinent to discuss here, because of the remarkable resemblance his conception of intelligence has with that of Spearman – even though Hand purports to eschew a technical usage of the term in psychology, instead analysing the way in which intelligence is used in ordinary language. He reports on an adventure he undertook through the existing literature in educational theory to see in what way the concept of intelligence has been discussed there over the years. He concludes that such discussions are scarce, and that those who do discuss it most often operate from the way in which intelligence was originally conceptualised by Ryle halfway the 20th century. He sees three problems with that conceptualisation. First, Ryle proposed that intelligence is something that pertains to specific activities: one can be intelligent at cooking, at boxing, at doing surgery, and so on. Hand considers this to be a strange definition of intelligence, since, as he views it, 'to be clever at all, one is inclined to say, is to be clever across the board' (Hand, 2007, p. 37). Second, Ryle equates intelligence with competence, whereas for Hand intelligence is not about competence but about the speed with which someone masters an activity. Third, relating to the second point, if having competence means being intelligent, then it would follow logically that someone who lacks competence in certain areas is *stupid* – but, as with intelligence, someone being stupid is not something that can be surmised from them lacking ability. It is rather something that pertains to them wholly as a person.

Hand thus proposes that intelligence has so far been misunderstood in educational literature, and is therefore in need of a new, proper understanding of the word. He begins his analysis in the following way:

> Let us begin with some preliminaries. First, intelligence is a quality of mind possessed to different degrees by different people. We say of some people that they are highly intelligent, of others that they are moderately intelligent, and of still others that they are not intelligent at all. In this respect the quality of mind designated by the term 'intelligence' resembles such qualities of mind as ambition, generosity and sensitivity. People are more or less intelligent just as they are more or less ambitious, generous and sensitive. (Hand, 2007, p. 40)

This usage of intelligence understands it to be a quality of mind. Other qualities of mind entail ambition, generosity, and sensitivity. This is already an important observation, for it seems to me problematic to assume that a quality like "sensitivity" is a quality only of mind and as such, by implication, void of corporeality. It is my contention that the very dualism implied here needs to be questioned – and, further, that we should perform the same move in relation to "intelligence". For now, let me observe that the three-tiered understanding of intelligence is reflected in education in the very organisation of the school system. Moreover, it is, according to Hand, fairly easy to ascertain to which tier someone's intelligence belongs, namely by 'monitoring their learning in different areas of activity' (Hand, 2007, p. 41). This monitoring, Hand continues, is something that happens routinely in the school:

> Teachers observe pupils as they engage in learning tasks, assess their progress at regular intervals, and talk to them about what they find easy or difficult. Such observations, assessments and conversations constitute a reliable basis for the diagnosis of aptitudes and inaptitudes. (Hand, 2007, p. 41).

This monitoring, says Hand, must happen over time, and cannot therefore be adequately undertaken by using intelligence tests. The reason for this is that the question is not 'what a person can currently do, but whether the process by which she learned how to do it was an arduous one' (Hand, 2007, p. 41). Further, 'the quality of mind picked out by the term 'intelligence' is an *aptitude for theorizing*' (Hand, 2007, p. 41, emphasis added). Thus, intelligence is measured by the speed and ease with which competency in 'theory-intensive activities' (Hand, 2007, p. 42) is acquired. Hand has provided us then with a clear description of the ordinary sense of "intelligence". The speed and ease with which a person acquires a competency in theory-intensive activities are the indications with which we can ascertain whether someone has the mental aptitude for those activities, signifying whether someone is highly intelligent, moderately intelligent, or not intelligent at all.

So although there is a difference between Spearman's intelligence and Hand's intelligence – namely that, for Spearman, intelligence can be measured as a snapshot in time indicated by test results, whereas for Hand it can only be ascertained by measuring the speed of children's learning processes in relation to theory-intensive activities – they are still

fundamentally the same kind of concept. Both view intelligence as a faculty of the mind, which can be assessed in quantitative, hierarchical terms, that is, in terms of "more" or "less". Both view intelligence as a category of *perception* by teachers when they observe the children in their classrooms. And both consider this way of perceiving to be useful, because it can help teachers make adequate lesson plans for the children with different levels of intelligence in their classrooms. Now, in what follows, I will look at Rancière's usage of the word intelligence – and this will turn out to be less easy to analyse.

"Intelligence" in Rancière

Intelligence in the sense so far discussed is a hierarchical concept, which implies that the equality of intelligence would be the presupposition that everyone's intelligence is simply on the same level of that hierarchy. This sense of intelligence is derived from observing children's general level of ability (for Spearman) or an aptitude for fast acquirement of the ability to perform theory-intensive activities (for Hand). So from this sense of the term, showing that some people have more capacities or showing that some people learn theory-related capacities faster than others would already be enough to disprove the axiom of the equality of intelligence. The question could still be asked to what extent the difference should be attributed to innate factors and/or environmental factors. However, I believe this is beside the point, since Rancière (2017) states that 'equality … is qualitative, not quantitative' (para. 2). It is my belief, therefore, that something else is going on, and my first reason for taking off on an adventure into the concept of the equality of intelligence is to find out what that "something else" entails. In this endeavour I want to try and find some clarity amidst the equivocity I perceive in many discussions of Rancière's concepts.

Let me begin by going back to the excerpt from Friedrich, Jaastad and Popkewitz (2010) cited above. The authors state that, for educators and non-educators alike, 'proofs of differences of intelligence between people are as abundant as they are irrefutable' (Friedrich, Jaastad & Popkewitz, 2010, p. 69). They advance the observation that it is exactly that irrefutability which is challenged by Rancière. It is, however, not clear to me what sense of "intelligence" is being used here. The authors conclude that instead of proving that all intelligences are equal, the point is to 'explore the consequences of *what if* they were equal' (Friedrich, Jaastad & Popkewitz, 2010, p. 69, emphasis original). In the same vein, Magnusson forcefully argues that:

> … for Rancière, the equality of intelligences is meant as a *literal* presupposition, a *literal* possibility that all intelligences are equal: what if we operated in teaching and in the world *as if* we were all, really and truly, equally

> intelligent; in other words, if we operated precisely on the assumption that we are all equally capable of learning any subject matter, including "advanced math or physics"? (Magnusson, 2015, p. 220)

Yet my confusion remains, because this sounds as if we should act as if intelligence in the sense of Spearman's *g* is equal for all. That would mean that the presupposition of equality is aimed at a quantitative and not a qualitative equality. So I think that Magnusson is too quick to interpret Rancière in a literal sense. Or rather, to qualify that statement: it is not clear to me what she means by the word "literal" here. The way she understands intelligence in this excerpt is as the capacity to learn every possible subject matter. Yet that is merely one possible sense of intelligence, whereas using the word literal here would suggest to me that she believes it to be the one true sense. Moreover, it has been suggested to me in conversation with Bob Davis that Rancière's notion of the equality of intelligence is a metaphor, which makes sense to me in light of how I have read his deployment of this term[26]. So my question becomes: what does it mean to presuppose a qualitative, and not a quantitative, equality in intelligence? This is the question that will drive me further in this adventure.

"Intelligence" in relation to "language", "speaking beings", "literarity"

As an entry point into his attack on the fiction of inequality – as stated earlier, he uses the word "fiction" in a specific way here, which I will discuss in Chapter 7 – Rancière introduces the equality of intelligence as an axiom, hypothesis, principle, assumption, presupposition, opinion, or starting point. This is also how it is often introduced in the secondary literature around Rancière's works. One characteristic is then, as stated above, that it is a qualitative and not a quantitative concept. A second characteristic is that it is not an ontological claim that all people are equally intelligent, but rather, as Bingham puts it, a:

> … subjunctive[27] claim, one that sets up a presupposition by which subjects might formulate language and actions by which they participate in politics and prove, through verification, that equality is a fact. (Bingham, 2017, p. 1997)

[26] Metaphors are a central aspect of Rancière's works. He has analysed how metaphor always plays a fundamental role in the construction of realities – and thus in the reconstruction of reality in moments of politics and subjectivation. Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) revolutionary research has shown how much of our thinking happens in metaphors, and how using different metaphors shapes different realities for different people and peoples. Unfortunately I do not have space in the thesis to delve into this topic further.

[27] As defined by the OED: 'Designating or relating to a verbal mood that refers to an action or state as conceived (rather than as a fact) and is therefore used chiefly to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event'.

These two characteristics – that the equality of intelligence is qualitative, and that it is a subjunctive and not an ontological claim – seem to pertain to the way in which it is discussed in some of the existing literature. Yet, and as observed, there are also discussions of the concept in quantitative and/or ontological senses of the word. This ambivalence seems to be present even within TIS itself.

Some authors, in their discussion of the equality of intelligence, build on Jacotot's notions of translation and counter-translation expounded by Rancière in TIS. According to Derycke (2011), there is a 'double principle' (p. 46) at play: the equality of intelligences and the equality of all speaking beings. Other authors do not make this distinction, conflating both principles. For these authors, the equality of intelligence is then first of all a shared capacity for language. One example is the following excerpt:

> Equality, for Rancière, is always 'intellectual equality' and intellect or intelligence, far from being psychometric notions, refer to an 'ability to' (speak, understand). Assuming that everyone is equal implies assuming that everyone (regardless of qualifications or other indications) is able to. (Simons & Masschelein, 2011b, p. 83)

Rancière's concept of the equality of intelligence is introduced here through the notion of "ability". This notion also plays an important role in Spearman's concept of intelligence *g*. For Spearman, the difference in ability of the boys he observed was a verification of an underlying difference in intelligence. The shift made by Rancière, according to the excerpt above from Simons and Masschelein, is to go from an observation of a difference in ability as evinced by test scores to a presupposition of equality in two specific abilities, namely those of speech and understanding, and those abilities are assumed to be possessed by everyone equally.

In a similar example, Säfström (2011) defines the equality of intelligence as 'the shared ability of language' (p. 207). He further refers to Rancière (1995/1999) who states that this shared ability of language is a 'minimum of equality' (pp. 87-88), one that is present wherever an order is given by someone to someone else. Since the order is understood by the person to whom the order is given, there must be a minimum of equality between that person and the one who gives the order. Elsewhere, Rancière seems to refer again to this minimum of equality when he states that:

> Jacotot … introduced the idea of the equality of intelligences by arguing that there is a form of intelligence that must be presupposed as common, as equal, if society is to function or exist at all. (Rancière & Battista, 2015/2017, p. 313)

I observe here that the term "minimum" suggests quantity to me rather than quality – but first, I also observe that Rancière now speaks of the "equality of intelligences", and I

wonder if this means the same as the "equality of intelligence". Perhaps what he means is that although everyone has a different intelligence, there is an aspect of all those intelligences that must be presupposed to be shared by everyone. This might mean that he is not just saying that this aspect of intelligence is the same for everyone in the sense in which two objects might be identical to one another. Rather, the presupposition would be that everyone shares, in some way, the same intelligence. Related to this, in a particularly mind-blowing usage of the concept of the equality of intelligence, Rancière discusses it in terms of what he calls the 'communism of intelligence' (Rancière, 2010, p. 168). In a text written for a 2009 conference on the current state of communism, he ascribes two 'principles' to what he calls the 'egalitarian maxim' (Rancière, 2010, p. 168). The first principle has already been discussed above: 'equality is not a goal; it is a starting point, an opinion or presupposition which opens the field of a possible verification' (Rancière, 2010, p. 168). The second principle is that:

> … intelligence is not divided, it is one. It is not the intelligence of the master or the intelligence of the student, the intelligence of the legislator or the intelligence of the artisan, etc. Instead it is the intelligence that does not fit any specific position in a social order but belongs to anybody as the intelligence of anybody. Emancipation then means: the appropriation of this intelligence which is one, and the verification of the potential of the equality of intelligence. (Rancière, 2010, p. 168)

Intelligence is here understood as a common, something everyone can always make use of in any way they want, but which never belongs to them personally. What I further notice here is that there is, beside the positive sense of intelligence as a common, also a negative sense which Rancière is arguing against. This is the hierarchy between either the smart and stupid people (or, in relation to the classroom, the smart and stupid children), or between either the master and servant, or the educator (or any related term, such as pedagogue, teacher, or parent) and the student (or pupil, child, and so on). Social inequality and inequality in the pedagogical relationship overlap in the latter distinction. This is in reference to the Enlightenment concept of emancipation, in which one class of people is believed to possess the means by which they are able to emancipate another other class of people, the class comprised of those who have yet to acquire the correct way of perceiving the world in order to become fully human (Biesta, 2010). This is reminiscent of Hand's concept of intelligence. For him, there are intelligent and stupid people (and some class in between), signified by their aptitude in learning to do theory-intensive activities. Now, my discovery when adventuring through Rancière's works has been that precisely this notion is one of his most recurrent antagonists. And he has traced this image of the thinkers versus

the non-thinkers all the way back to the Ancient Greeks, in the philosophies of both Plato and Aristotle. Therefore, I will now take a look at what he has to say about Plato's philosophy, which he comes back to often throughout his works.

The noble lie

One of the characters most fiercely attacked by Rancière is Plato. In his "Republic" (-375/2004), Plato lets the character of Socrates enter a dialogue with a range of different people. At one point Socrates is conversing with Glaucon, Plato's older brother, on the role of education in the organisation of society. Plato lets Socrates conjure an image of a world in which there are essentially three kinds of people: rulers, auxiliaries (soldiers, who must both fight against the armies of other societies and uphold the laws within their own), and a working class. In order to instil this image in the minds of the city's citizens, Socrates proposes to tell them a *γενναῖον ψεῦδος*, usually translated as 'noble lie' (Plato, -375/2004, p. 99). A fundamental pedagogical question is being raised here: Should one class of people be responsible for educating the population in such a way that they adhere to an image of a society in which their place has been predestined from birth? This class of people is simply referred to by Socrates with "we", which he uses interchangeably with the singular "I" – implying, perhaps, that there is a fourth type of person or group of people: the pedagogues, those who teach all three other classes how to behave, and how to perceive the world and their own place within it.

The story that comprises the noble lie consists of two steps. The first has been called the 'myth of the earthborn' (Andrew, 1989, p. 579)[28]. It consists of:

> … [persuading] the rulers and the soldiers, and then the rest of the city, that the upbringing and the education we gave them were like dreams; that they only imagined they were undergoing all the things that were happening to them, while in fact they themselves were at that time down inside the earth being formed and nurtured, and that their weapons and the rest of their equipment were also manufactured there. When they were entirely completed, the earth, their mother, sent them up, so that now, just as if the land in which they live were their mother and nurse, they must deliberate on its behalf, defend it if anyone attacks it, and regard the other citizens as their earthborn brothers. (Plato, -375/2004, pp. 99-100)

[28] Another word to refer to this part of the story is 'autochthony' (Rowett, 2016, p. 68). This is interesting because I remember being taught in school about the difference between "autochtonen" (autochthones, or natives), those who are Dutch by birth and whose parents are Dutch by birth, and "allochtonen" (allochthones, or non-natives), those who are either not Dutch by birth or who have at least one parent who is not Dutch by birth. These terms are no longer in use in public discourse, though the same distinction is still being made with terms like "person with a Dutch background" and "person with a non-Dutch background".

The first aspect of the image painted in this part of the story is that all the things that happened during a child's upbringing and education – that is, the teachings they received – were like *dreams*, that is, they were mere images of true, Ideal reality. Rowett observes that, for the Socrates in "Republic":

> … dreaming is taking for real something that is a mere image or likeness of the reality in question. Socrates contrasts the dreamer with one who knows of Beauty itself, and is aware of both it and its instantiations in ordinary things. (Rowett, 2016, p. 72)

In other words, according to this image there are those who are awake and lucid and who perceive the essence of reality as it really is, and then there are those who only perceive a mere image of that reality. A major theme in Rancière's works consists of providing an alternative to this image, including a strong charge on theories of critical pedagogy which, on his view, aim at rescuing the dreamers from the dreamworld by showing them reality as it really is. In relation to intelligence, there is therefore, according to Lewis, a fundamental difference between Freire's understanding of that term and Rancière's understanding of it:

> Stated simply, for Freire, intelligence is essentially the critical capacity for unmasking, whereas for Rancière, it is a poetic capacity for translation. (Lewis, 2012 p. 89)

I will explore this further in Chapter 7 of this thesis. There I explore Rancière's discussion of 19th-century working-class poet Gauny, who, according to Rancière, reappropriated his dreams and thereby changed his reality.

In order for the plan to work, that is, in order for the dream to become a belief in a kind of truth about the world, Socrates adds a second step. This part of the story is called the 'myth of the metals' (Plato, -375/2004, p. 100). Socrates tells the people that while they were unknowingly being formed by "the Demiurge", he:

> … mixed gold into those of you who are capable of ruling, which is why they are the most honorable; silver into the auxiliaries; and iron and bronze into the farmers and other craftsmen. (Plato, -375/2004, p. 100)

What are the implications of this two-part story for Rancière? Important, I believe, is that it provides a justification for the unequal ordering of human societies. Plato believes a society can only function well if there are people who rule and people who are ruled. Because there is no clear natural difference in these matters, it is necessary to make people believe that such a difference actually does exist. The task of public education is therefore to create a stratified society consisting of a ruling class, a fighting and policing class, and a working class. Socrates only lays out what education should look like for the first two classes. The

education of the third class does not need much consideration: all a working class individual needs to be taught is how to perform one specific set of tasks, such as farming or smithing. The only other important aspect of the education of the working class is a negative one: they should *not* be taught philosophy, and they should be kept from concerning themselves with intellectual matters, most importantly politics.

It is important that those who are supposed to be destined to be ruled believe that this is their natural predisposition. The lie, says Socrates therefore, is not what "we" are teaching you, but everything you believe you yourself have experienced. While you thought that your experiences were real, you were actually "sleeping", being moulded by the fertile ground upon which "our" society lives, a society you are therefore tied to by blood. All other citizens are your "brothers", and your duty to them is to fulfil your role and serve your nation, whether that role is to rule, to fight and enforce the law, or to produce, for otherwise you betray your family. Subordination happens in two ways: those who fight and those who produce must do so on the orders of the rulers. The rulers, in their turn, must obey the principles bestowed upon them by their educators during their alleged long sleep in the Earth. This order will make "our" society prosper and become stronger than all the others. An essential aim of this form of education is to shun chaos and create order. Order, then, is equated by Rancière to hierarchy: 'There is order in society because some people command and others obey' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 16).

Education and alternative stories

The myth of the metals, says Rancière, should not be understood as an illusion that draws a veil over reality, which would be the idea that functions as the foundation of theories of ideology. He is therefore directly disputing these theories, with notable examples, as noted earlier, being those of Marx, Althusser, Bourdieu, and Freire. But he goes even further: he disagrees with a large part of the tradition of Western philosophy and the whole of the discipline of sociology, which for him are both inherently founded on the Platonic ideas described above, as well as major parts of historical science and, most relevant here, educational science. Rancière already wrote in his first book – a polemic against Althusser's brand of Marxism, Althusserianism, that it is fundamentally:

> … a theory of education, and every theory of education is committed to preserving the power it seeks to bring to light. (Rancière, 1974/2011, p. 52)

In direct dispute therefore with those theories, he proposes the following understanding of the function the myth is supposed to serve:

> It is a fiction that has to be believed in order for the community to work. A belief is not an illusion; it is a way of playing one's part. Plato does not demand that the workers have the inner conviction that a deity truly mixed iron in their souls and gold in the souls of the rulers. It is enough that they *sense* it, that is, that they use their arms, their eyes, and their minds *as if* it were true. (Rancière, 2010, p. 19, emphases original)

According to Rancière, as I understand it, the function of the noble lie is to make people adhere to these principles "as if" they were actually born with the natural predisposition to rule or be ruled. Moreover, it shows something of central importance to him: the intertwinement between perception and action. Rancière writes: 'it is enough that they sense it', and this is coupled by him to a "belief" which is not the same as a conviction. People hierarchically structure bodies (of others, and of themselves) as categories of perception, relating to the way in which they act toward those bodies and the way in which they act as a body. This is enough for those benefiting from society's unequal order. Moreover, this is not an illusory way of perceiving reality. It is the other way around: it is the way of perceiving itself which creates a certain kind of reality, because the way of perceiving is tied into a knot with forms of action and forms of expression. The notion of "as if" comes to play an important role in Rancière's works. And, according to Biesta and Bingham (2010), the equality of intelligence itself should also be understood as a noble or beautiful lie.

At this point in the narrative I recall what this chapter's adventure was about: to find a way of understanding Rancière's notion of intelligence. This is more difficult than the more straightforward common sense usage of that term in Spearman and Hand, but some things have already become clearer. Most importantly, Rancière's "intelligence" is a polemic against Plato's noble lie, which Rancière believes underlies the majority of educational theory constructed ever since. Continuing now on the adventure, I believe the next step should lead to an aspect of his style of writing which started to "glow" for me after adventuring through several of his works. This aspect consists of his usage of the metaphor of the theatre in his writing. For example, he writes of a 'dramaturgy unique to the philosophical text' including a 'setting the stage and assignment of roles' (Rancière, 1998/2004, p. 141) in relation to his discussion of Althusser's writing. I will discuss the relevance of this in what follows.

Playing a part (or no part): politics as theatre

For Rancière's Plato, the whole of society is like a theatre in which people are supposed to fulfil a predestined role. Rancière has in later works developed a related concept

that is often referred to as one of his most important concepts: the *partage du sensible*, which is about parts that are distributed and the part played by those who have no part. This was introduced in the Introduction and will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 7. This group of people has no part to play, which is at the same time to say that they are not included in the idea of what it means to be human. Or rather, the part they have to play is to play no part, to serve and to keep silent. To speak – that is, to express oneself as an equal to all others – is therefore immediately an act of emancipation. In this sense, and in line with the notion evoked earlier that the equality of intelligence refers to a common capacity for speech, it is about more than a "lie", since almost everyone can indeed speak (where speech is understood broadly as forms of expression, not necessarily to speak with one's mouth).

To say that language is an ability shared by all, then, is a way to say that we can all communicate with one another as equals, regardless of what class we are supposed to belong to. And he proposes the equality of intelligence as a polemic against leftist theorists who claim to search for equality, but actually start off from an unequal perception between themselves and others less enlightened.

So there are social inequalities in which groups of people dominate and/or oppress other groups of people by symbolically presenting themselves as superior. The same observation pertains to this social dynamic: it is only because, as Säfström (2011) proposed above, there is a minimum of equality, that is, a form of intelligence that must be presupposed as common, or equal, that these unequal relationships are able to exist. Yet I do not regard this as entirely satisfactory, because a quantitative term is yet again introduced. A minimum of equality implies for me that more of it is also possible, while it does not make sense to speak of more or less equality if equality is qualitative. This is also a point Rancière seems to make in TIS, when he proposes that intelligence is taken to be something immaterial, which means it cannot be 'susceptible to more or less' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 48).

Säfström further connects the quantitative understanding of equality to the qualitative one – where the latter is understood as the poetic condition of spoken language – in the following way:

> This minimum of equality needed in language is the poetic condition of all spoken interaction according to Rancière, and confirmation of equality is therefore always a confirmation of this poetic condition for all language. (Säfström, 2011, p. 207)

In the way I read this, intelligence is used in a sense that is very different from Spearman's *g*. The latter is about giving a score that signifies results which trump the results

of another person in a given subject, not unlike the Elo rating system used in games like chess. There is no denying that some people are better at playing chess than others, just as there is no denying that some are better at, for example, doing arithmetic or memorising the conventional spelling of English words with greater accuracy than others. It is also possible for one person to be better at the game of argumentation than someone else. It seems to me that the latter is one of the reasons why Rancière so strongly emphasises a distinction between rhetoric and poetry (the latter of which, as noted, he connects to "reason"). This is not a distinction of polar opposites. Rather, rhetoric is speech understood in a hierarchical sense: 'rhetoric is perverted poetry' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 84). Everyone is the 'poet of himself and things', and:

> … perversion is produced when the poem is given as something other than a poem, when it wants to be imposed as truth, when it wants to force action. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 84)

There are ways of speaking and writing within which hierarchy is nested from the outset, which is one of the main themes Rancière keeps returning to throughout his work. This is a hierarchy between the two interlocutors, in which one wants to impose their will on another. It is also a hierarchy between two ways of perceiving the world, or truths. It reminds me of the situation in George Orwell's "Animal Farm", in which, after the revolution against the humans on the farm has taken place, the pigs appropriate for themselves the position of authority with their superior skill in convincing the other animals that they have exclusive access to knowledge about the right path toward the future:

> The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership. (Orwell, 2008, p. 17)

So the equality of intelligence is manifested in language in which one speaks without wanting to force action in someone else. And to assume the equality of intelligence is to assume that everyone has the capacity to speak poetically – in a way which does not want to force action, but to communicate as equals. Education, moreover, would then be a space in which such forms of expression take a central role. But it is about more than speech: it is also about knowledge. Or rather, and to be more precise, it is also about the realisation that knowledge always has a poetic nature, that it is like a dramaturgy, a theatre where the words play certain roles connecting in such a way that they can express *a* truth, but never *the* truth. So there is also no one with the superior knowledge claimed by the pigs in Animal Farm.

Unconditional exigency as a form of radical encouragement

At this point it has become possible to say that when Rancière writes about intelligence, he is doing something very different from, for example, Spearman or Hand. Indeed, when considering the many ways in which the concept of the equality of intelligence is used throughout Rancière's works, as well as other literature that deals in myriad ways with those works, it is clear that the question of the meaning of the concept is not answerable in any single definition. To search for the meaning of the concept, to my mind, has also become a search for an answer to the question of what sense of "meaning" we are dealing with here. This ambiguity is present even in the very use of the word "concept" in this context, as stated above. The concepts that are dealt with here are not clear-cut. They are 'moving paths traced on maps of shifting relationships' (Rancière, cited in Battista, 2017, p. xxxii). Panagia (2018) goes even further in problematising the role played by concepts in Rancière's works when he posits that 'solidarity, emancipation, and equality aren't concepts, in other words; they're practices' (p. 4).

So perhaps the equality of intelligence, for Rancière, should not be understood in the same way as intelligence for Spearman and Hand – because that way of understanding is itself performative in nature. And what it performs is inequality. So Rancière's understanding of the equality of intelligence does not just entail a different understanding of intelligence but a different sense of understanding itself. Therefore, it also calls for a radically different way of perceiving each other in educational spaces. For Spearman, as for Hand, the inequality of intelligence is one of the most obvious things there are: every teacher perceives and thus knows that their students have different intelligences. Rancière's teacher, on the other hand, *ignores* this perception and ignores this knowledge. The ignorant schoolmaster, instead, is someone who requires others to start making use of their power of expression and to create their own poetic forms of knowledge. Moreover, I believe that the ignorant schoolmaster does not actually have to be a person – it is anything that compels others to make use of their power. Rancière states that:

> … the master is he who encloses an intelligence in the arbitrary circle from which it can only break out by becoming necessary to itself. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 15)

So while Rancière speaks of a mysterious "he who" in this citation, I think that an impersonalised "that which" would be more accurate. It is about the urgency of showing to ourselves that we have a "power to". Distinguishing between various senses of "power", Haugaard writes that:

> … power to denotes an actor's capacity for action. Power over entails getting others to do things that they would not otherwise do (i.e. A has power over B

> to the extent to which A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do). (Haugaard, 2010, p. 432, italics removed)

Related to this, Lewis (2012) has argued that universal teaching resembles what he calls a "Neo-Kantian Categorical Imperative" (p. 78). He writes:

> The ignorant schoolmaster's function is to enunciate a categorical imperative to which the student's will must conform. It is categorical in that it applies to everyone equally, and it is an imperative because it is a command to express one's will despite one's belief in unequal intelligences, despite certain obstacles, and despite the apparent powerlessness of one's ignorance. (Lewis, 2012, p. 78)

In universal teaching a distinction is made between two relationships: one between wills, and one between intelligences. According to Lewis' Rancière, the will is a universal, equalising capacity. The relationship between the will of the master and the will of the student is founded on a 'universal and *equalizing* capacity', while intelligence is 'particular, contingent, and privative' (Lewis, 2012, p. 78). The schoolmaster is a 'purely formal' command, a 'sovereign order to obey the egalitarian maxim by exercising the will' (Lewis, 2012, p. 78). This command or imperative is to 'follow *your* path' (Rancière, 1991, p. 57). This notion of the ignorant schoolmaster as a command is captured perfectly in Rancière's phrase 'unconditional exigency', which means that:

> … the emancipatory commandment knows no compromises. It absolutely commands of a subject what it supposes it is capable of commanding of itself. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38)

We can also now try to understand the responses given to me in the conversations mentioned at the beginning of this chapter through the lens of the framework thus constructed by Rancière. In these conversations, the inequality of intelligence is always exemplified through a comparison of two different figures. The first figure is that of "the genius", and "Einstein" is often its representative example. The second figure is that of either "the person with Down's syndrome" or "the person with severe autism". The proof is then given through an exercise of the imagination. First, the two figures have to be imagined side by side. Then an attempt has to made to make them overlap under the common category of being "intelligent". When this procedure fails, the end result is considered to be clear: there is an inequality of intelligence. Rancière seems to be arguing that this hierarchical understanding of "intelligence" plays a central role in dominant ways of thinking about education – even if not always as a foreground actor. That is, its role might rather have to be understood as that of unknown agitator, pushing buttons in the background of our thought

around concerns that are ostensibly unrelated to it – like power, boundaries, and politics, and the denial of nature.

The "equality of intelligence" as a form of *dissensus*

Biesta (2017) argues that a Rancièrian form of education, following from the assumption of the equality of intelligence, would be a kind of educational practice which expresses democratic freedom, understood as a form of life – reading the subject matter together – in which the participants are pulled out of their own story and into a being together in equality. In other words, the emancipatory teacher is then explicitly not post-political and not post-historical – meaning also that intelligence and its meaning is not settled – and they play an active role in the thought processes of their students, in the sense that the stories created together are in dispute with Plato's foundation story of hierarchy. The being together in equality is thus not about reaching consensus. It is rather about meeting others as equals within a space of *dissensus*. Dissensus is often noted to be one of Rancière's central concepts. Dissensus is:

> … a conflict between *sense* and *sense*. … a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies'. (Rancière, 2004/2010, p. 139)

It is a 'demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself' (Rancière, 2004/2010, p. 38). This formulation is itself, I believe, a form of dissensus, because the formulation "a gap in the sensible" does not make sense to me. I will discuss the notion of dissensus more in-depth in Chapter 7. Here I note that I do believe this formulation plays a central role for Rancière. His notion of the gap occurs many times throughout his works. It is a translation of *l'écart*, which is also often translated as interval. Badiou (1998/2005) characterises Rancière's theory as a 'theory of the gap' (p. 115). Furthermore, it relates to the notion of the "whole", which I also discuss further in Chapter 7. As Badiou summarises Rancière's notion of politics:

> Politics exists (in the sense of an occurrence of equality) because the whole of the community does not count a given collective as one of its parts. The whole counts this collective as nothing. No sooner does this nothing express itself, which it can do only by declaring itself to be whole, than politics exists. (Badiou, 1998/2005, p. 115)

This is in turn directly related to the notion of the equality of intelligence. The whole of the community (as perceived by those who are perceived in that community as human, or as those who are worthy of being served by those not perceived as human) considers those

who play no part to have no real intelligence. And those who are thus considered are expected to believe themselves to have no intelligence in the sense discussed above. So those who are perceived in this way can only emancipate themselves by refusing this fiction in the perception of themselves as equally intelligent to everyone else. Dissensus is then not simply about different ways of making sense of the world. It is about the specific difference between making sense of the world from a perspective of inequality or from a perspective of equality.

Panagia (2010) therefore describes dissensus as something that is aimed at two things. The first is the claim that someone has an unequal intelligence to someone else. The second is that the supposed inferior is not worthy of being seen. Dissensus is then 'at once a dissent from inequality and an insensibility (i.e. an inability to be sensed, noticed or accounted for)' (Panagia, 2010, p. 96). In fact, dissensus and (democratic) politics are fundamentally about the same thing: 'democratic politics occurs when certain elements in society that are deemed insensible are challenging the governing political order' (Panagia, 2010, p. 96). The important point here for me is that this argument relates directly to that of the "ignorant schoolmaster" as that which denies the inequality of intelligence. The pedagogical space infused by emancipatory ignorance is therefore always inherently political (though in the specific sense in which Rancière uses that word). One reason that this is such an important argument to explore is the rise of inegalitarian movements, in recent years often euphemistically described as "alt-right". But a second reason is that even in so-called progressive academic circles, a tendency persists to forestall equality by the abovementioned, seemingly innocuous arguments of the type "science has already proven that we are by nature unequal". An important question is what the influence of such a presupposition could have on the relationship between teachers and students. For Rancière it seems clear that such an influence could have a very deep impact on the perception of the student of their own capacity to think, leading, in many instances, to stultification.

There is a paradox here which bears directly on the notion of an emancipatory, egalitarian pedagogical space. The equal capacity to make sense is an important aspect of the equality of intelligence. But then, is a teacher not still steering the intelligence of the child in a certain direction, towards the equality which the teacher deems to be important to perceive? Does the teacher thereby not posit that their own intelligence is superior? Should the presupposition of the equality of intelligence entail the belief that others are deploying an equal intelligence even when they believe in an inequality of intelligence?

Perhaps, then, there is a certain contradiction performed here by Rancière. On the one hand, he urges relentlessly that we are all capable of making sense of things by ourselves. On the other, he then disturbs the sense we have made by claiming that things could be

perceived in a different way than we thought. If we feel generous, we might call him a gadfly for being so annoying. If we do not, we might think he is simply "mad" – just like those who, on Rancière's account, responded to Jacotot positively because of the efficiency of his method, as long as the underlying principle was understood to be no more than a mad provocation. But it seems to me that he is really aiming at that power that we either believe we have, or we do not have. It is about the *unconditional exigency* mentioned earlier: the educator demands, without a sliver of doubt in the child's power or intelligence, that they make use of that power, which is at the same time to wilfully express themselves, to be a manifestation of the power of the god or idea that is their "self", connected to all others through the equality of intelligence. Perhaps this is what 'the ideal community inscribed in the materiality of things' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38) refers to.

Liminality

Now, the adventure into the equality of intelligence takes an unexpected turn. I have somehow returned to the topic of the earlier chapter on the will. The unconditional exigency is a demand placed on the will to make use of their intelligence. And my sudden observation is that this is what I myself am doing by writing this thesis, and by confronting Rancière in my questioning of what he means when he writes of the equality of intelligence. This, in turn, relates back to what I wrote earlier in the chapter: that asking about the meaning of the equality of intelligence is at the same time asking about meaning itself. The search conducted in this thesis is itself a meaningful endeavour. I recall the observation made earlier by Panagia (2018): that for Rancière, a word like "equality" (and thus, perhaps, the "equality of intelligence") is not a concept, but a *practice*. So perhaps, then, whereas the meaning of the inequality of intelligence was clear, because we could find it easily in the definitions given to it by Spearman and Hand, the meaning of the equality of intelligence is less clear, because it can be found in the very endeavour of the search for its meaning itself. The meaning is not a definition reached at the end of the search: the meaning is the performance of the search itself.

In this way, the search can be considered to be explicitly educational, in the sense proposed by Todd (2014), when she locates a specific kind of feature in the relationship between teacher and student. For this she builds on Conroy's (2004) use of the notion of *liminal education*, in which education is conceived as a relation that allows for transformation of the self within the 'liminal space in between body and spirit' (Todd, 2014, p. 233). Spirit is here understood by her as a sense of limitlessness, and educational practices are conceived as ontological spaces imagined through the metaphor of liminality, or

threshold. The way I understand the search for the meaning of the equality of intelligence is as holding the potential of a transformation of the self. Such a transformation takes place in the clash between ways of perceiving the world. What I want to emphasise here is the idea that this shift takes place within the individual and within the wider sphere within which that individual lives at the same time. Moreover, perhaps this notion of liminality can be connected to Rancière's notion of the gap. So by attempting to reach an understanding – *begrijpen* in Dutch, related to *grijpen*, to grasp – I am reaching for a different world. The equality of intelligence is the space between the worlds where I meet Rancière's words and confront them with the world I know.

The impossibility to understand: frustration and poetry

So this adventure on which I am embarked takes the form of a meaningful endeavour – a search for meaning, for the meaning of meaning – in an attempt to understand Rancière, in this chapter specifically his and Jacotot's notion of the equality of intelligence. But this endeavour – of understanding, or grasping – does not come without some deep problems. An important point of focus is the effect Rancière's works have on me – which at different times is frustration, perplexity, fascination, admiration, anger, feelings of bamboozlement, and more. Noting this effect is as much part of the aim of this chapter as the argument that will be made in it, perhaps even more so. This emphasis of effect over argument takes serious Panagia's proposal that:

> … we would be well served to move beyond the inherited orthodoxy of reading for argument so as to be more attentive to the critical potential in stylistics. (Panagia, 2018, p. 66)

So to take the equality of intelligence seriously in relation to Rancière's works is to try and be attentive to its aesthetic affect, which is somewhat akin to a tilt-shift photograph, a sudden change in perspective. This is important, because as Panagia also teaches us, Rancière:

> … does not partake in the philosophical enterprise of conceptual clarification for the purposes of procuring sense and understanding. His resistance to the idea of proper fit between words and meaning makes that genre of writing unavailable to him. (Panagia, 2018, p. 64)

The equality of intelligence proposed by Rancière forms the basis of a logic incommensurate with the logic of hierarchy. And once more it turns out that searching for the meaning of the equality of intelligence is to search for something very different from when one searches for the meaning of intelligence in the way in which Spearman or Hand

did it. This refers back to the observation that it is about a different way of understanding, that is, a different way of understanding understanding. Panagia further observes that what is often taken to be Rancière's main political work, *La mésentente*, is translated as "Dis-agreement" – but that the word more closely resembles "Misunderstanding", or a 'missed listening' (Panagia, 2018, p. 70). So a disagreement or *mésentente* is 'not a contradiction but a "missed understanding"; it is a dissonance of consensus, or dissensus' (Panagia, 2018, p. 70). He finally remarks that the symbol on the book's cover, the ≠, would be a better translation than dis-agreement. He notes that Rancière deliberately does not make sense, since:

> … Philosophy wants *le bon sens*—the common sense that is also the good sense, the proper sense, the sense of propriety that comes with politesse—for understanding. But Rancière's style of impropriety divines a mode of participation in a commons "without a common measurement. (Panagia, 2018, p. 72, italics original)

At this point in the adventure I can say that my experience is in line with this observation. My impression from reading both Rancière's texts and texts about Rancière's texts is that to "get" Rancière's texts – that is, to "grasp" their meaning – seems to be possible only as an appropriation. This is not in the sense related to "proper", but in the sense of a free and loving making one's own, or a seizing, a taking hold of and in this act to have a sudden and powerful effect upon that which is grasped. Yet this is not a form of control, not the possessive kind of seizing but the "tending" or "attending" to where one claims for oneself the capacity or ability to understand, which, ultimately, is an act of pretending – from the Latin *praetendere* – to stretch out and hold before – a stretching out and putting forward of that which is first grasped and then held lovingly. Or it is an explication, to develop, set forth, exhibit and, in this sense, an unfolding of what was implicitly present in the text.

Rancière proposes that poetry is like the politics of a spider, who weaves elements together, thereby creating a community between all the different poems written and not written, and a sensibility toward everything in the world as a mute poem (Rancière, Rohrbach & Sun, 2010). Imagining a spider's web conjures the following question: could words be the knots tying the strings together that make up the web? A web of dreams? Could intelligence be the tool used for the act of tying and untying? Could politics be this act? And then: what about education? More specifically: what about the school? Could it be a material configuration constituting the freedom to weave, a space and time in which the web of dreams can be woven and rewoven in powerful leisure? Could it be a shimmer of pretence, a wavering, stretched out over the years, between appearance and reality, the possibility of subjectivation verified time and again? An intellectual adventure?

The equality of intelligence as an intellectual adventure: poetic explications

In the previous chapter I proposed that my adventure in this thesis started off from the belief in the possibility of certain ground. From that ground I set out on the search for an answer to a certain question (about the relationship between Rancière's understanding of truth and education). Yet it ended up being a search for the certainty of that ground itself. I did not find it. The ground from which we begin, as Rancière seems to suggest, is something that can only come to after the fact. We can reflect on an act and ask: why did we act the way we did? We may find the answer to this question only after the act, though even then we can pretend that it was already known to us before we began. This plugs into Rancière's notion of "subjectivation". He defines this concept as:

> The production, through a series of acts, of an instance and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. (Rancière, cited in Lane, 2020, p. 2)[29]

This definition took me some time to unpack. Such unpacking allows for an "explication", an unfolding of the various elements that are folded into the concept – an unravelling of a woven knot – though, importantly, only *subjectively*, that is, to 'me', the adventurer passing by the word and making sense of it at a certain point in time and space. Subjectivation is a creative endeavour – an act of *poetry* (the *poet* is a *maker*, an *author*). This is also an act of emancipation, an escape away from the "hand" that "grasps me" – that is, the mind that understands me – that, by grasping the incorporeal concept of "me" (or "you", from the perspective of the one whose metaphorical hand is grasping me) a stage is set upon which I am supposed to act, or perform, in the manner "prescribed", written as a script for me to act out without my co-authorship. Subjectivation is therefore a spiriting away from a prescribed social identity in the act of rewriting the story about "me". This happens through the verification of a capacity for enunciation – a seizing or ability to understand that is verified in the act of *saying*. Verification here has to be understood 'in the literal sense of

[29] I have adapted Lane's translation of this sentence, which he made as an improvement on the one used in the official translation of Rancière's work *La mésentente*. That one is often cited but uses the word "body" instead of "instance", which is strange because Rancière does not use the word body in the original French text. Though I do note that he does often use the word "body" in strange ways, and I have not been able to really understand his usage of that word in those instances. Lane's text does make interesting observations about Rancière's notion of the "quasi-body".

making true, that is, acting as if it were true in order to see what follows from it' (Biesta, 2017, p. 64).

According to Aristotle, in Rancière's (1995/1999) reading of him, an expression made by a body can be read either as signifying the expression of an intelligent subject (human) or a simple reaction of a non-intelligent subject (brute). As becomes clear immediately from reading the first chapter of Aristotle's *Politics*, he had specific ideas about which bodies count as human and which bodies would count as brute. The human would be the Greek, wealthy man. The brute would be everyone else. This initial split, which problematises the distinction between human and animal, then constitutes the 'given field of experience'. It constitutes the distinction we make between the ways we read the movement of bodies. In one "hand" we grasp/understand the movement of a certain kind of body as intelligent, in the other we grasp/understand the movement of another kind of body as unintelligent. Two categories of perception: a type of body that expresses thought and a type of body that "only" voices base emotion. Descartes reiterated this notion when he equated the true essence of human being with our mind, discarding the corporeal as unimportant. Importantly, the distinction thus maintained is not the result of the application of universal logos but a presupposition that constitutes the application of a certain kind of logic. The universality of this logic is a pretence. What is stretched out is a hierarchical distinction that informs the logic of the police, a *partage du sensible* that preconditions the way we perceive or interpret the movement or positioning of bodies – including our own. Since in this hierarchical logic a subject position is refused to a body whose movements are considered to be signs of brutishness, subjectivation must be founded on a logic incommensurable with the logic of the police order.

Understanding by following an implied world beyond references

Now, there is something I have noticed that makes understanding Rancière often very difficult: he alludes, implies, refers without reference. Take, for example, his references to Fénelon (who was the author of Télémaque, the book Jacotot gave to his students for them to learn French) in TIS. Who is that, anyway? He was an archbishop and tutor to the grandson of Louis XIV, who, had he not died prematurely of measles, would have become king himself. His "Télémaque", which was written for the education of the young prince in order to teach him about the virtues of being a good ruler, but was probably stolen and published by an anonymous clandestine, would become the second-most read book in 18th century France (Hanley, 2020). So perhaps the reference to Fénelon is not obscure for one who knows what one is supposed to know about history. But that the text – like many of

Rancière's works – is allusive is still clearly shown in the paragraph, and even more so in the one that follows. It is only by going into the "Telemachus" that we learn what "Salente" is: the newfound city of king Idomeneus, who has been misled by flattering counsellors into making all the wrong decisions and is on the verge of leading his city straight into ruin. He is saved by the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, appearing as a figure called Mentor – the origin of the name for the mentor figure. She teaches him how to be a mild and just ruler. First, she suggests that he:

> … take then all these superfluous artisans in the city, whose arts would serve only to disorder morals, and make them cultivate these plains and hills. (Fénelon, 1699/2020, p. 95)

She shows the new king the importance of negotiation and diplomacy as a means to prevent unnecessary wars with other nations. She also teaches him that a just ruler does not simply ask of "his" subservients to refrain from effeminate activities like art or craftsmanship, but, leading by example, follows the path of austerity himself as well. When Louis XIV, "the Sun King" – remembered for both his propensity for fighting bloody wars and his excessively lavish lifestyle – realised Fénelon's intention to teach such outrageous things to his possible heir, he promptly relieved him from his duties as tutor (Hanley, 2020). But the book would be widely read as a great work of political philosophy, and it was this book Jacotot gave to his pupils in order to prove to them that they were intelligent beings.

Then comes the next allusion. After Idomeneus, with Wisdom by his side, has made the reforms necessary for his city to prosper, 'great numbers of people came from all parts to settle. The trade of that city might be compared to the ebbing and flowing of the sea' (Fénelon, 1699/2020, p. 161). This then might explain the evocation of the same imagery by Rancière in the following excerpt:

> Thus, the crossing of paths on the way to the working-class city and the heights and depths attained there suggest that the ebb and flow of popular movements reflect something other than the versatility of "preindustrial urban crowds," the strong influence of the petty bourgeoisie, or the imbalances of a class "in formation." Being always in the process of taking shape could be a permanent characteristic of the working class. At every stage it might look like a transit point, so that the eye of the expert gets lost in trying to differentiate the true proletarian laborer from the belated artisan or the disqualified member of the tertiary sector. (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 28)

The metaphor of the sea will return in "On the shores of politics" (1992/2007), in which Rancière argues that 'the whole political project of Platonism can be conceived as an anti-maritime polemic' (p. 1). It is therefore also an implicit invocation of Socrates and Glaucon, who, in the beginning of Plato's "Republic", have gone down to the port and are

about to return upward to the city of Athens when they are stopped by Polemarchus's servant and are invited to the home of Cephalus instead. There, Socrates will tell his noble lie in which God put gold in the soul of the rulers and iron in the soul of the artisans, a fiction recognisable also in the wisdom of Fénelon's Minerva. Rancière continues:

> Our focus here, then, is, and has been for some years, a place of passage and meeting where the sons of peasants who were set on the road to the cities by revolutionary enthusiasms cross paths with high-born people reduced to the proletarian level by some recent political disgrace, with workers who had been temporarily turned into businessmen by *assignat* fever and then returned to their original state, or with soldiers who were forced in 1815 to take to the unknown or forgotten byways of the workshops. (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 28)

So instead of the hierarchy of the soul, and its analogy, the hierarchy of the metals in the just city, we get here an alternative vision, one in which people from both the golden and the iron classes go up as well as down, meeting each another halfway – a picture of an assembly of weaver-poets that is always in process, an assemblage of the many which is analogous to a soul that too is always in flux, not a static subject but a spider weaving their web, spinning yarn made by dreams and improper signification. We can then immediately perceive this assemblage in the act of writing; the historian-worker – and I am referring to Rancière here – who goes to the library every day, searching 'for things to leap out and tie in suddenly with something else, to outline a trail, cause a harmony to ring out' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 49). He goes into the library and searches, at first, for evidence of:

> … the "real" working class, the "real" workers' discourse, the "real" labour movement, the "true" workers' socialism, all that you could imagine and hope for as authentic. (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 33)

– but gradually learns that such an authentic essence remains forever elusive. My reason for sharing these quotes is not the search for the person behind the words. It is in order to conjure up the figure of a man – "Rancière" – who goes to the library and toils with his typewriter, weaving his web, including the thread of the ebb and flow of a people in movement, and does not explicate that he got the imagery from Fénelon.

Grasping and the confrontation with the strange

So there is a feeling of frustration for not understanding what is going on. There is a part of me that cannot find peace before being able to *grasp* the words and know what they are all about. This question of grasping, or understanding, is an interesting one. For how do we know when we hold in our metaphorical hand – our mind – the whole of the message

living on the pages of the book? New meanings emerge even after years of reading. Rancière's repeated invocation of Aristotle as a starting point for his polemic against the tradition of political philosophy is a response to a general tendency he perceived after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a tendency to interpret that collapse as the triumph of democratic values. 'This tradition,' he writes, 'considers politics to be the result of an anthropological invariant' (Rancière, 2004, p. 4). This invariant could be 'the fear that compels individuals to unite' (Rancière, 2004, p. 4) or 'the possession of language that permits discussion' (Rancière, 2004, p. 4).

When reading Rancière, then, I have often felt lost, wondering *what is going on*. This question has come to constitute the attitude taken on in the inquiry. This means, first, a turn away from a search for the meaning of the equality of intelligence in terms of a definition. In this sense I am tempted to agree with – though not entirely convinced by – Masschelein (2011) when he states that this kind of search for definitions is 'an old philosophical dream, dreamt by analytical philosophers' (p. 360). Though my own background has little to do with analytic philosophy, perhaps this dream is nonetheless a part of the constitution upon which I am inclined to approach the world. My desire is to understand in the sense of: to know, to *grasp*. This old dream – at least in some sense – is rejected by Rancière.

As said, in order to distinguish between "hierarchy of intelligence" and "equality of intelligence" means a shift in "meaning", where the meaning of the word meaning itself makes a shift from the familiar to the unknown. It is not just a search for a different meaning, but a different meaning of what that search means at the very same time. For me it seemed therefore that the "strangeness" – taking the form of a persistent difficulty to find meaning – that I perceived in Rancière's texts needed to become a point of attention before I could make sense of them. Or rather, as itself a means of making sense of them. The question, to put it more clearly, is one of relationality, one that – and this will turn out to be a very important insight in itself – is of the same kind as the meeting of two strangers. The texts are, to me, a stranger, just as I am a stranger to them. We are two strangers meeting, that is, translating and counter-translating each other. Following Todd (2020), this search for relationality can itself be understood as an educational search. This means that my endeavour to find meaning – in the double sense described above, that is, to find the meaning in Rancière's texts, but also to find "meaning" through Rancière's texts – even when those texts are not directly about education, is always also a search for the meaning of "education" and an educational kind of search.

Even if there is no "clear understanding" of Rancière's works, the sense or meaning we make of them is not, I believe, up for grabs. There can be bad understanding. But what I

find very important is that there is a tension in the word "understanding" itself. This is then an *aporia*, a fork in the road. I am turning on the word understanding – turning to 'Aisthesis', which, as Rancière (2009a) writes, is:

> … a Greek word which means both feeling and understanding, which means the connection between a capacity of feeling and a capacity of understanding. (Rancière, 2009a, p. 121).

The point is that a "Rancièrian education" as Lewis (2012), Panagia (2018), and Todd (2020) have taught me, can be adequately described as an *aesthetic education*. In my confrontation with Rancière's texts, in seeing what a subjective turn toward the equality of intelligence would mean, I found that this is a turn toward feeling, toward affect, toward sensibility. The equality of intelligence is a "mode of sensibility". Perhaps this is then some indication of the meaning of the phrase: 'The book *is* the equality of intelligence' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38, emphasis original).

In the following chapter I will continue my adventure by returning to a topic already discussed: the will. But this time, the will is discussed from the perspective of *my* will – more specifically, my will to understand. My presupposition, following earlier adventures in the thesis, is that such a discussion is inherently educational in nature. The chapter is therefore intended as yet another enactment of an educational adventure.

CHAPTER 6: THE WILL TO UNDERSTAND

> We knew the old words but now we are no longer sure they mean anything. And we are not keen to learn the new ones: we do not trust them, they are irrelevant to us. Moreover, we are sad and tired. All we feel is rage and impotence. Will we be capable of trying all the verbs once again? Reading, writing, conversing, perhaps thinking. (Larrosa, 2010, p. 702)

The above excerpt is taken from an article in which the author reports on his relationship to Rancière's TIS. Recalling how he felt a 'strange blend of confusion and bedazzlement' (Larrosa, 2010, p. 686) when he first read the book, he then reveals that he never feels like he has properly read the book, even after having worked intensively with it for years. He adds that he would not consider such a "proper" reading to take the form of an understanding, but rather of a sense 'of finding behind the words and representations the power whereby words set themselves in motion and become acts' (Rancière, cited in Larrosa, 2010, p. 686). These sentiments echo my own experience with delving into Rancière's works. My adventure, stemming from a fascination that urged me to read the book as carefully as I could, began with the counter-translation of TIS, which I conducted before reading other works by, or about, Rancière. This would provide an opportunity to form my own relationship to the book before finding out how others had read it, or how it related to the wider breadth of Rancière's oeuvre. This was not my first engagement with the book, since I had already taken it up in the research experiment which I describe in the Introduction. In that experiment I asked a group of children to go on a research adventure, based on a question that fascinated them. In my own role as their "ignorant schoolmaster" I attempted to follow Jacotot's principles of universal teaching (as I understood them at the time). My initial excursions into the book, in Rancière's own words, had therefore been an attempt to read the book and its meanings in terms of the ways in which its words might set themselves into motion and become acts.

This chapter – as does the thesis as a whole – consists of a similar attempt, though undertaken in a different way. My aim is to follow some of the threads in Rancière's other works as a source for my own theoretical research adventure. This adventure is the act in which the words set themselves in motion. Again following the principles of Universal Teaching, I will let my fascinations be the guide into unforeseen paths. As discussed in an earlier chapter, "will" has been a central thread which has fascinated me. As Conroy (2004) has argued, it is of central importance to any society bearing the name "democratic".

According to him, such a society has to be open to practices of dissensus, especially against what he calls the 'too powerful communicative form of the commodity economy' (Conroy, 2004, p. 19). Such an openness to dissensus, he continues, depends:

> … on the existence of discerning individuals and communities who are psychologically and socially equipped to act out of their own volition. (Conroy, 2004, p. 19)

He adds that education has the potential to play a central role in the development of such individuals and communities. Perhaps it is in light of such considerations that the will can be understood to comprise such a key thread within the conceptual constellation Rancière weaves in TIS. Dissensus, moreover, plays a central role in Rancière's conceptual constellation, and I believe the notion of will is closely related to his analysis of acts of dissensus. My own will – or rather, my self as will, moved/fascinated by Rancière's works – has led me into an adventure of trying to understanding Rancière's works, but my sense of understanding is different from his, and I have increasingly felt a friction between those two senses of understanding. My original plan was to take a few months for understanding Rancière in order to become an "expert" at it, after which I would then commence on the actual adventure, equipped with a thorough understanding of Rancière's philosophy. But what I had expected to be a difficult yet relatively smooth journey turned out to be a plunge into what has often appeared to me as an endless cave of confusion and uncertainty. This chapter therefore commences from a sense of confusion infused with a striving to understanding – in a return to the theme of the will, but this time it is my own will to understand which drives the chapter.

Difficulties with understanding Rancière

After adventuring deeply into TIS, I went to other works written by him. On the one hand, I recognised some of the ways in which I had interpreted TIS in the books written later by Rancière. For example, in his work "Dis-agreement" (1995/1999) he makes a now famous distinction (among those who study his works) between what he calls "politics" and "the police". In this distinction I recognised the distinction he makes in TIS between reasonable communication and rhetoric, as discussed in Chapter 2. In another concept often considered central to Rancière's philosophy – the *partage du sensible* (Rancière, 1995/1999; 2000/2004) – I recognised what I had termed "ways of perceiving" (of equality or inequality) in my counter-translation. It seems to me that these later works of Rancière are therefore to an important extent reformulations of what he had already explored in his earlier works. This observation is also made by Deranty when he states that:

> The famous analyses offered by Rancière in *La mésentente* and *Aux bords du politique*, are simply the conceptual development and reappropriation of Jacotot's revolutionary politics of education. (Deranty, 2003, n.p.)

And, again, by Myers:

> … *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* … contains all of the key elements that appear in his later, more obviously political treatments of axiomatic equality. (Myers, 2016, p. 47)

Beside these points of recognition, there were also many aspects of the writing of Rancière which I increasingly felt incapable of understanding. And this incapacity began to appear to me as contradictory to both Jacotot and Rancière's axiom of the equality of intelligence and the way it has been taken up in the literature, as in Simons and Masschelein:

> … equality, for Rancière, is always 'intellectual equality' and intellect or intelligence, far from being psychometric notions, refer to an 'ability to' (speak, understand). (Simons & Masschelein, 2011b, p. 83)

My reason for bringing up this excerpt once again is to indicate the friction between my own experience – a persistent failure to understand – and the assumption that I should be able to understand Rancière's written expressions. Therefore, the adventure has taken an unforeseen turn: instead of taking up a well-supported understanding of Rancière's works as the foundation for the rest of the thesis, the difficulty to understand has become itself one of the primary objects of reflection. Here I recall my original research question: "Can Rancière's understanding of truth as poetics be an emancipatory force on the boundary between research and educational practice?" The notion of "understanding" was taken up in that question in an unproblematised manner. Yet by learning that the question was of a much more enigmatic nature than I had at first assumed, the ground that had thus far supported me crumbled and the adventure became a free fall into a labyrinth of empty space. In other words, I *got lost* – which is a form of "post-qualitative" research methodology (Lather, 2007).

The process thus far described consists of the following set of steps. It begins with the attempt to understand Rancière. The failure to do so leads to a deep sense of frustration and even insecurity about my own capacity to figure things out "properly" (recalling Larrosa's use of this word). This sense of frustration in turn forces me to reflect on the experience of understanding or not understanding. In the free-fall of this reflection, in which ground does not exist and everything seems lost, an urge arises to shift and act as if all of this is good for something; as if, as it is said, the goal was always the path and the getting lost itself, rather than reaching any preconceived goal. In this case, it was the meaning of the word

"understanding" which began to fascinate me. I began to boggle at the fact that the word is used all the time in the literature, while its meaning in the context in which it is used remains unclear. An example is the article of Larrosa: he states that a proper reading of TIS would entail not an *understanding* but an *insight* into how the words can lead to action. Yet why is this not also a proper definition of understanding? And if it is not, then what does understanding mean for him instead?

Veracity and reaching for adequate understanding

This observation might be in line with what I tentatively called "Rancière's understanding of truth as poetics" in my initial research question. What this means is itself difficult to point to – perhaps it is simply that the meaning of texts is always open to interpretation and that there is no ultimate authority on what a text "really" wants to say. But whenever I reach such a conclusion, there is always a kind of "itch", something that tells me there must be something deeper to be found. Maybe it relates to what Lather calls an 'epistemological paradox', which consists of a:

> … knowing through not knowing, knowing both too little and too much in its refusal of mimetic models of representation and the nostalgic desire for immediacy and transparency of reference. (Lather, 2007, p. 136)

A writing that takes this paradox into account would then lead to the production of:

> … a text that both reaches toward a generally accessible public horizon and yet denies the "comfort text" that maps easily onto our usual ways of making sense. (Lather, 2007, p. 136)

What I take Lather to mean here is a proposition to let go of the desire to know in a "proper" way what someone is pointing to (metaphorically speaking) when they use a word or phrase. In this context, understanding someone would be a kind of knowledge; that is, the knowledge of what they intended to say or "point to" when they wrote what they wrote. An epistemological paradox, then, would refer to a fundamental aspect of reading, where one perpetually fails to understand someone's words. In that case, an understanding reached through reading can *never* be a "proper" understanding. Doing research from such a "post-qualitative" perspective then, to make a shift to Rancière's vocabulary, always entails a certain kind of "wrong" reading, a wrong understanding, a wrong appropriation of the words used by the author. I might even be reading the word "wrong" wrong here; shifting the meaning of the word "wrong". A wrong reading as a twisting of the words we have before us; an appropriation where the proper use is *wrung* and distorted and thereby given fresh life in an unpredictable turn toward a future that spirits away from the controlling grasp of the

past. Referring to the excerpt from Larrosa's text from the beginning of the chapter, reading would then always be a "trying again" of the old words on the page in a way that is at the same time a knowing too little (not knowing in an entirely proper way what an author meant) and a knowing too much (appropriating the words, taking them up to lead to actions unforeseen by the author). A reading against the backdrop of two "horizons": a "generally accessible public horizon" *and* the reader's personal experiential horizon.

So it seems that to understand Rancière properly would be to misunderstand Rancière entirely, for he wants to evoke a willingness toward impropriety. Yet this conjures a paradox: if to understand Rancière properly is to understand him improperly, then to understand him properly is to understand him improperly, and therefore to understand him properly after all. So perhaps it does not matter what he wants, since that is entirely beside the point. The point is that I believe Spinoza was right when he proposed that understanding leads to more power of expression and action, which in turn leads to an increase in love for the things with which we are affectively engaged, and therefore to more joy and community. So it is that, after a long adventure, my fascination for Rancière's call for impropriety has led me to the following realisation: what I wanted all that time was clarity and understanding, and not more confusion and the sense of powerlessness accompanied by it.

Thus it seems to me that the problem with banking too much on the impossibility of reaching a universally true, "proper" understanding of words is that it runs the risk of foregoing any attempt at precision of language altogether (I recall from an earlier chapter Mollenhauer's proposal that education entails a search for precise language). Perhaps this is to overlook Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) renowned demonstration of the role played by metaphor in language: many of our concepts are of the nature of metaphor, so our understanding of things can only be done approximately in terms of other things. Yet my sense of "understanding" involves the notion that there is a difference between concepts and material situations, and that to understand a concept is to know what kind of situation, experience, or event that concept is pointing to. So clarity, for me, involves empirical knowledge (see also Hacking, 1992).

Yet there is a plethora of literature in which a concept like "stultification" is used without ever really exploring how one can recognise it and in what ways it might develop, in others or in oneself. This danger is increased by Rancière's own (seeming) interdiction against explication/explanation, which is itself a result arising from an absence of an inquiry into what this particular concept actually refers to. In order to "verify" the explanatory value of Rancière's theory, I believe it is crucial to ask where and how we can perceive

stultification taking place; how it happens; what it means for the stultified individual. I further disagree with remarks such as the following one:

> In his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière has shown in much detail how educational practices based on this logic of emancipation lead to stultification rather than emancipation. (Biesta, 2010, p. 40)

What Biesta is arguing for here relates to a distinction crucial for understanding what Rancière's philosophy of education (and his philosophical project in general) is about: the distinction – the *disagreement* – between his own project and that of critical pedagogy. I will inquire further into this distinction later in the chapter. Here I first observe that, for a long time, I took these kinds of remarks as evidently true rather than probing them in order to verify their accuracy. The reason is simply – but crucially (and slightly embarrassingly) – that I believed the authors on account of who they are rather than on what they actually write. That is to say, I did not pay attention to the "itch" I felt that something was not quite right – although the itch kept on unconsciously urging me never to be satisfied with what I myself wrote either. Now I realise it was trying to tell me that I was writing on the basis of presuppositions I did not agree with – and, crucially in light of this chapter's theme, which were not in line with what I wanted to say and do. The problem with the Biesta quotation is that, first of all, Rancière does not show anything in TIS (which implies for me a report on empirical observation) and, second, that he does not provide specific details about the concepts he uses. Finally, I believe that Biesta is reaching a conclusion too quickly in saying that educational practices based on the logic of emancipation against which Rancière argues are necessarily "stultifying". This is a causal claim which cannot be made with such confidence.

There is then a crucial point I want to make here, which may come a bit too early since I have yet to explore further the distinction between Rancière and the paradigm of critical pedagogy. Biesta (2010) explains that, on Rancière's view, critical pedagogy is founded on a maddening contradiction: it wants to contribute to the emancipation of the oppressed, but in the process of this undertaking sets up a hierarchical (and therefore stultifying and thus itself oppressive) relationship between the liberatory teacher and the oppressed student. The primary aim for the teacher or researcher, according to the critical pedagogue, is to "demystify" – to dispel the ideological shackles which keep the oppressed student in their oppressed state. But in the relationship thus framed the student will remain *dependent* on the teacher and will therefore never really become free. In order to escape from this contradiction, a teacher or researcher who wants to be emancipatory must forego any such 'positions of mastery' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 125). This is a

theme which runs throughout Rancière's works – not just in his writing on education, but also on other fields such as politics, research methodology, writing and literature, or performative arts.

Rancière's own works, he claims, are not merely a relentless argument for the presupposition of equality, but also almost always an explicit attempt at writing in a uniquely egalitarian style (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016). In a way, then, an emancipatory teacher or researcher can never have the emancipation of another person as an aim (either explicitly or implicitly). This would in and of itself already be to take on the position of mastery that Rancière wants to eschew. Yet of what does the kind of "mastery" about which he warns us actually consist? Without falling into the trap of wanting one proper and universal meaning, can more precision of terminology be reached? Moreover, is the way in which Rancière writes, and in which those who claim to follow him in his anti-explanatory arguments also write, really an eschewing of such a position of mastery (see also McCreary, 2021)? And are they not themselves demystifying the student by warning them about the demystifying yet stultifying logic of critical pedagogy?

In other words, my proposition is that the categories introduced by Rancière may very well be as fruitful as I originally thought they were – but that the way in which they are taken up in the secondary literature does not always capture what they are (in my view) actually referring to (or it is simply not explored at all). Rancière proposes to take up Jacotot's notion of "stultification" as the state from which emancipatory forms of education liberate someone. Stultification can then be read as a term related to, but not synonymous with, "oppression". So I wonder if there is a difference between these terms and what that difference might be. Knowing more about this difference might be a way to get a clearer image of what emancipatory forms of education or stultifying forms of education might look like. In this state of wonder I am inspired by Rancière himself, who gives the first indication of what a defence against stultification might look like when he writes that:

> … what is essential is to avoid lying, not to say that we have seen something when we've kept our eyes closed, not to believe that something has been explained to us when it has only been named. (Rancière, 1987/1991, pp. 58-59)

This relates directly to the shift he makes from discourse of objective *truth* toward subjective *veracity* – and I have attempted to take the notion of veracity here expressed up into my own way of engaging with Rancière's works. Further, in relation to Rancière's philosophy more generally, I believe that it is important not only to get clarity on some of the main concepts he introduces – such as the concepts of "police" and "politics" – but also

on some of the terms he uses in an almost off-hand manner – such as "the social", "ways of being", "temporalities", "the gap", and "a thing being different from itself". The knowledge of what these terms are referring to is almost always presupposed in the secondary literature, yet never explicated. And this observation in turn problematises the blanket interdiction against explanation: the question is not simply whether explanations are stultifying, but how we can recognise the kind of situation or experience which Rancière seems to be pointing to when he claims that explanations are stultifying. Here I also note that I believe explanations are not the same as explications, even though those translations of his French *explication* are used interchangeably. To explain, in my view, is to present an interpretation as objective knowledge. To explicate – literally to "unfold", to disentangle, or to display – is to excavate what is implicitly "folded into" an expression, and so there are infinite possible explications of any given expression. All of Rancière's works are an explication of his one work: "Proletarian Nights" (1981/2012). All texts written about Rancière's works are yet more explications of those works, leading to further explications, in an endless exponentially expanding multiplication of meaning. This is itself my own explication of Rancière's term "literarity", which I will discuss further below.

Coming back for a moment to my will for clarity, I am also struck by remarks which can be found in public discourse on education, such as the following one in an interview published in a Dutch newspaper:

> As a teacher I can have enormous influence on the life of a child. This should *not* be done on the basis of gut instinct: it must be done on the basis of scientific insights.[30] (Miedema, cited in Remie & Veldhuis, 2021, n.p., my translation)

I believe it is important to make a connection here with Rancière's own notion of what it means to do research, something he explores in "The Names of History" (1993/1994). Although he focuses there on history, I believe the argument he makes applies to educational research as well. It is that these kinds of sciences are – once more in line with the observation that words never have a "proper" meaning – always, in part, narrative, containing an element of the poetic. Yet this is not an argument against scientific inquiry. Asking further about this will be important for me to be able to discuss my understanding of Rancière and what he might teach me (and potentially the reader of this thesis) about research and/as education.

Further relating to the *will to understand*, as I will call it from now on, are also terms used in the philosophical tradition of which Rancière is a part – such as terms coming from

[30] 'Ik kan als docent ontzettend veel invloed hebben op het leven van een kind. Dat kún je niet op basis van je onderbuik doen, dat moet op basis van inzichten uit wetenschappelijk onderzoek'.

Marxist or poststructuralist philosophers. In this endeavour, in which I want to understand a certain discourse, I recognise then one of the fundamental assertions by Jacotot: that any learning process functions on the same basis as 'the most difficult of apprenticeships' (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 3): the learning of the native language as a child. The urgency to be able to participate in the language community leads the child to accomplish an incredible feat: to persist, despite repeated failure and frustration, in mastering a language. Similarly, then, what I want is to be able to participate in a language community of which I consider Rancière to be a part. This community is repeatedly *implied* by him, as well as by many other authors. This is done by him in very ubiquitous phrases such as "As we know, …", "It is well known that …", and "Obviously, …".

What I want, apparently, is not only to gain more understanding of oppression and stultification. It is also to become part of this mysterious clique of knowers who seem to share a common horizon, enabling them to understand – paradoxically – all the difficult language employed by Rancière and others in discussing a plethora of themes that seem to form a common universe of understanding. But then, if Lather's epistemological paradox is to be taken seriously, perhaps this common universe is always to an extent illusory, since there are never simply proper understandings (agreement on a common universe) but always understandings that are somehow 'wrong' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 21). This is itself a wrong usage of the term, because he defines it differently from how I am using it here. But given my understanding of his works, that should not be a problem. There is always, at least to some extent, *mésentente*, misunderstanding, or a "not having listened properly" to what someone else said. Moreover, this is not simply an observation Rancière makes: he signifies it as the very foundation of what makes politics possible. We can refuse to understand the order someone else wants to give us by asking us if we understood them, refuse to hear the proper meaning assigned to their words and act in improper and nonsensical ways. Yet my feeling remains that there is also another kind of understanding – one which is not posed as an order but as an invitation along someone's adventures. For example, we can understand why it is warranted to say that we are in an ecological planetwide crisis, or why capitalism and exploitation are two sides of the same coin, or what it means to say that bodies can be 'outside the truth' (Rancière, 1993/1994, p. 20).

Literarity and poetic understanding

So here then we find ourselves in the midst of a long tirade regarding what this chapter is about: my will to understand, driven by a sense of urgency. An urge to understand – instigated by the observation that the world is wrong, that education is wrong, that the

university is wrong, that things are wrong and that we are standing idly by and letting it happen. But also a will to generosity: to give Rancière the benefit of the doubt whenever I feel that what he said was not as deep as it seemed, if I disagree with it, or if I think it just does not make much sense at all. This generosity, it should be noted, sometimes goes too far. That is to say that in what follows I sometimes just get stuck on Rancière for too long, without really getting anywhere. At the same time, the process leads to the discussion of unforeseen and unexpected themes, which is an important point in light of the kind of research methodology deployed here. For example, in relation to a question asked earlier – what Rancière's invocation of a "poetic" understanding of truth might mean – there are two concepts which could give clarity on the matter: "the poetics of knowledge" and "literarity". The latter, as Chambers has remarked, is a fundamental concept in Rancière's conceptual constellation. Chambers (2012) defines it as 'that which philosophers always seek to, and always fail to, contain' (p. 88). Interesting to note is that, after he makes this remark, he proceeds to embark on an excavation in Rancière's works of the exact meaning of the term "literarity" (as he does with other concepts as well), in an attempt, perhaps, to contain it. This is at least what Ingram accuses him of doing when he writes that:

> … to offer a clear, sympathetic, and comprehensive treatment of Rancière's thought, laying to rest misreadings and misunderstandings that continue to circulate around it, as Chambers has surely done, is at the same time to betray that thought. (Ingram, 2016, n.p.)

Indeed, Chambers spends pages scrutinising the right and wrong ways in which Rancière's term *subjectivation* has been translated. He quite harshly admonishes Julie Rose, the translator of Rancière's *Disagreement* (1995/1999), for having this and other words wrong, accusing her of practising 'sloppy scholarship at best' (Chambers, 2012, p. 92)[31]. He argues that the word should be translated into English simply as "subjectivation", and that a translation such as "subjectivization", which Rancière himself has used when writing in English:

> … only exacerbates and deepens the potential misunderstanding caused by the English translation of *Disagreement*. A reader coming to Rancière's work only in English translation would be forgiven for being somewhat lost. (Chambers, 2012, p. 101)

I agree with Chambers that some translatory choices should have been made with more care; I have also made similar observations in Ross' translation of TIS. But I disagree with

[31] This is particularly striking as he claims that she has used the 1962 Sinclair translation of Aristotle's *Politics* verbatim without attributing or citing her source. Yet this is simply not true, since she does clearly state that she has used this translation in endnote 2 of the preface (Rose, 1999, p. 141).

Chambers when he seems to believe that these awkward translatory issues are the reason for why a reader might get lost in the works of Rancière. This is to overlook, as I have tried to argue above (while discovering it myself at the same time), that getting lost, misunderstanding, reading things wrong, and a potentially deep sense of frustration are part and parcel of any Rancièrian adventure.

This leads me then back to the topic at hand. In all of this there was something else that got lost: my own sense of self, and the knowledge of what I wanted to accomplish in the first place, which was to understand Rancière – where I now observe that my will to understand Rancière was really driven by a deeper will to understand the world in which I find myself, and the injustice which I had wrongfully been educated to ignore. And I have tried to understand Rancière by meandering along a path which could not be predicted beforehand, and which might lead nowhere.

Following the path

Recalling my earlier discussion of fascination, I observe here that my will to understand what happens when I was fascinated led to a memory of another text, in which the concept of *glow* was discussed, a concept remarkably similar to that of fascination. In both instances, it is not the case that an 'autonomous, rational and well-intentioned individual' (MacLure, 2013, p. 659) makes a deliberate choice to follow a certain fascination. There is rather an interplay between that which fascinates and the one who is fascinated. This is an interplay where agency seems to exist in two places at once, in a kind of shimmering flux between the actors in play. MacLure further describes this moment, in which some research datum begins to "glow" and comes to appear as fascinating, as an *event*. This is interesting to me, because the notion of the event also plays a small role in Rancière's works. Simons and Masschelein (2011a) write that 'Rancière states that he is no thinker of the event, but of emancipation' (p. 6). Yet Rancière describes emancipation exactly as a kind of event: a microevent. He writes about his methodology – which has inspired me in the way I conduct my own research – that it includes:

> … a certain attention to what we might call all the microevents, a way of relating the issue of the event, of what happens, to a transformation in the landscape of the sensible. (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 65)

My fascination, as said, encompasses a will to understand what is going on in the writing of Rancière – one of the main aims of this thesis. His statement that his methodology includes attention for microevents is an important observation in this endeavour, because it

has inspired me to turn to a work central to his project as a whole: "Proletarian Nights" (2012). This is Rancière's second book, originally published in 1981. I believe that the book is the wellspring from which all of his later works have arisen; everything he writes is already there, though in a more raw or unpolished shape. It is very difficult to understand, but brilliant. In Chapter 7 I will discuss a microevent he discusses there and which plays a role in many of his works: the emancipation of Gauny. This event is linked to the notion of subjectivation as discussed by Rancière. Gauny's moment of emancipation will show itself, I believe, as exactly one in which he becomes aware of his own will to resist the oppression that had so far dominated not only his body, but also his imagination and his "soul". In this moment he becomes aware that the way in which he himself is wronged is actually part of the wider wrong of society – something which, perhaps, Marx would later call class struggle?

Trying to understand the times: Neoliberalism, colonial tendencies, control, misrecognition

Here I enter uncertain terrain. An important part of what Rancière writes is in critical response to other theories, and Marx plays a major role here. My will is to understand that which he criticises as a means of understanding both the negative aspect of his philosophy (the critique of others) and the positive aspect of it (that which he proposes in place of that which he criticises). And this will to understanding has been tempered – I have held myself back in striving for that which I wanted. Here is then an example of the "struggle against ourselves" evoked by Larrosa earlier. The will to understand invokes a certain way of thinking – that of modernity, Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, colonialism, and Eurocentric ways of thinking (Andreotti, 2011). The will to understand, it has been said, is linked to a will to control; to control nature, to control human beings. Lather, for example – and in agreement with the notion of anti-representational ways of thinking described by MacLure – has written extensively on a scientism that has come to dominate the field of education and educational research (Lather, 2007; St. Pierre, 2011; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). In order to counter the scientistic tendencies, she proposes to return to Nietzsche's notion of gay science, which:

> … is based in the very splintering of the mechanisms of control and the resultant incredulity about salvation narratives of scientific progress, reason, and the overadministered world. (Lather, 2007, p. 8)

Lather further connects this scientism to a 'neoliberal governmentality' (Lather, 2007, p. 65). Rancière, too, recognises neoliberal governmentality at play, writing about neoliberalism that:

> … What we might have thought was nothing more than an economic theory has become a generalized worldview capable of changing all of our perceptions. (Rancière & Battista, 2015/2017, p. 320)

The notion of the overlap between my individual soul and that of the way in which we are collectively governed is present here again. This notion has fascinated me. Part of what I am doing, of what I have been trying to do throughout my adventure, is to find out in what way a certain kind of thinking has taken root in me. It is crucial for me to recognise the necessity not only to critically assess the state of the world in which I find myself, and more specifically the state of education within that world, but also the ways in which that world, and in which that education, have each taken hold of me. But this recognition – coupled with other educational experiences in my past – has manifested itself in a very deep sense of mistrust of the ways in which I think, perceive, want. Are these a sign of exactly the way of thinking I want to get away from? And do they prevent me from imagining a kind of education emancipated from the neoliberal governmentality evoked by Lather? Part of my endeavour is to find trust again in my own capacity to know which of my own thoughts, intuitions, and beliefs I want to uphold, in a way in which I combine both new insights taken from the teachings of theory and a remembering of the things I knew to be true but have been taught to ignore in my own educational experiences. Yet there is something important to be observed here: that perhaps what I am doing is precisely the kind of move Rancière challenges in his critique of the critical paradigm. He summarises the main premise of that paradigm in the following way:

> If the social machine captures us, it is because we do not know how it captures us. And if we do not know how it captures us even though it is right before our eyes, it is because we do not want to know it. All recognition is a misrecognition, all unveiling a veiling. (Rancière, cited in McNay, 2014, p. 160)

What Rancière then criticises in the critical paradigm is the sense of suspicion it evokes, which is one I recognise: how can we ever trust our own intuitions if we also know ourselves to be driven by nefarious forces? So here I am trying to understand Rancière's critique of critique, while observing the way in which I am inclined to critique my own intuitive way of being critical. There is an *aporia* to be observed here: while adventuring, I should take into account the danger of wanting to control, the colonial tendency potentially manifesting within me; but also remember Rancière's warning that a perpetual suspicion of my own thoughts can by stultifying.

Critical theory critiqued by Rancière

Rancière's form of education clearly aims at what he calls emancipation. "Emancipatory pedagogy" is another name sometimes given to what is called 'critical pedagogy' (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014, p. 76). It might therefore make sense to say that Rancière's philosophy of education finds a home in the tradition of critical pedagogy. Yet according to several commentators, in order to understand Rancière's own perspective, it is important to see in what ways this perspective differs from that of the traditional critical paradigm in education. That paradigm is founded on the thought of Freire, and several authors have therefore made a direct comparison between the thought of Freire and Rancière (e.g. Bingham, 2010; Biesta & Bingham, 2010; Friedrich, Jaastad & Popkewitz, 2011; Galloway, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Vlieghe, 2013, 2018). In these discussions, Rancière is painted as someone whose work resembles Freire's thought in some ways, but also quite radically diverges from it in others. This divergence is then at the same time a divergence from the basic assumptions and methods of the tradition of critical pedagogy as a whole. It also entails a different understanding of what emancipation means, as well as of that from which someone who becomes emancipated escapes (oppression and/or stultification).

As said, a crucial role in Rancière is played by the words of Marx. But the Marxist method of critique also lies at the basis of at least two major theoretical movements which Rancière critiques. The first is that of sociology, which Rancière critiques as a whole, and often specifically in the works of Bourdieu (see Rancière, 1983/2003, 2006, Ross, 1991; Pelletier, 2009; Lane, 2013; Robbins, 2015; Olivier, 2017). The second is that of Critical Theory, and its offshoot Critical Pedagogy which originates in the works of Freire. Strange as it may seem, I had forgotten that I wanted to find a way to understand these movements. I was distracted from my will, even though it had been mentioned so often in the literature I read. Rancière's project has been in response to the Marxist project since the beginning. The very first lines in the very first book he published were these:

> This book is intended to be a commentary on the lesson in Marxism that Louis Althusser gives to John Lewis. It is a reflection on what this lesson wants to teach us, and on what it actually teaches us, not about Marxist theory itself, but about the present reality of Marxism, that is to say, about what constitutes the discourse of an acknowledged Marxist in 1973. (Rancière, 1974/2011, p. xix)

This book was the first of Rancière's works that I read after finishing my critical summary of TIS, simply because it was the first book he wrote and I wanted to read all his books in order of publication. Yet I quickly found that I had no idea what was going on there. The name "Marx" was only vaguely familiar to me. So in reading Rancière's critiques, I had never fully understood what they were about, feeling unable to really know what was going on in them. This made me feel unable, incapable of knowing how to proceed further. It was

my memory of what I was trying to do which finally reinvigorated me. It was only through writing my way through these thoughts that my memory has come back to me.

Furthering the excerpt above, expressing his view of the main premise of the critical paradigm, Rancière further observes the way in which that paradigm has informed critical forms of theatre:

> It is always a question of showing the spectator what she does not know how to see, and making her feel ashamed of what she does not want to see, even if it means that the critical system presents itself as a luxury commodity pertaining to the very logic it denounces. (Rancière, 2008/2009, pp. 29-30)

So here is a second indication of what Rancière perceives to be the logic foundational to the critical paradigm. It is a logic in which someone – the spectator of a work of art, as in the excerpt, or the student – cannot see what is really going on. This incapacity is coupled to a lack of will: they cannot see, because they do not want to see. This logic, however, has somehow been appropriated by exactly those forces which the spectator or student is said not to be able to see. That is, the spectator or student is made to feel ashamed of the fact that they cannot see how they are ruled by the god of capitalism – the commodity – but the critique which induces the shame is itself presented as a commodity to be consumed. Interestingly, this sense of shame evoked by Rancière is recognisable for me – making me fascinated by the possibility that Rancière could be observing something important here, something that says something about myself in overlap with the world. Maybe, then, he can teach me something about oppression and how to fight it.

Oppression, in the sense in which I will use it, has to do with that state in which an individual or a group of people is made to act out the will of others in a way that is detrimental to themselves. Critical pedagogy fundamentally wants to be an anti-oppressive form of education, as evident in the title of its foundational work, Freire's "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1968/1970). Rancière's work, too, is anti-oppressive – and, as said, my aim is to find out the different ways in which he conceptualises this endeavour. Of special relevance here are also the observations of Foucault (1975/1977), who showed how our will is influenced by processes of discipline through institutions such as the school. This disciplining is a form of power, it is a way of making individuals certain kinds of "subjects" – a concept I will explore further below. Rancière writes that 'what I've constructed has been both in reference to, and in reaction to, Foucault' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 83) and that 'if, among the thinkers of my generation, there was one I was quite close to at one point, it was Foucault' (Rancière & Hallward, 2003/2017, p. 138). But he also states that:

> … Foucault saw thought at work in the techniques of power. But where he was interested in power, I was interested in resistance; I wanted to see thought as also being at work in the practices of those who resist power, in polemical practices, in political struggles. (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, pp. 50-51)

Rancière, as these excerpts show, is influenced by Foucault's theories – but he also wants to move away from what he perceives to be a deterministic outlook on the way individuals internalise a subjugation systems of power. He sees in Foucault's discussion of the panopticon, in which a centralised power is able to observe everyone at all times, a continuation of a model already constructed by Althusser, one of Rancière's own teachers and one of the most prominent Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. In Rancière's understanding, this model, in which the Marxist concepts of alienation, ideology, and false consciousness play an important role, understands individuals as passively accepting a false image of reality – an image which needs to be dispelled by the intellectual who knows reality as it really is (Rancière, 2008/2009; 2016b). This process of dispelling false images is what Quintana describes as 'a demystifying logic of suspicion' (Quintana, 2018, p. 4). She further adds that:

> … such perspectives impede us from considering the unforeseeable and incalculable ways in which bodies can reinvent themselves from the positions, roles, and practices that they are subjected to. (Quintana, 2018, p. 4)

This is a critique of Foucault – but also of the critical paradigm and critical pedagogy. As I see it, Rancière's understanding of oppression is different, and so is his understanding of the event in which someone escapes from oppression: emancipation. It is about the reinvention of bodies – and, as discussed, the emancipatory role of education is to engage the will of the student to do so. The ignorance of the emancipatory teacher is an act of will, which can further be described as an act of unseeing, or unlearning (Rancière, 2015a), which I will discuss in the following section.

Untology and public intellectuals

Unlearning is an act of will that follows directly from the axiom of equality, since:

> … the essence of equality is in fact not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division. (Rancière, 1995/1999, pp. 32-33)

There are readings of Rancière that underline this understanding of education. Dunne (2016), for example, introduces the word 'untology', referring to Rancière's notion of dissensus. Dissensus is here understood as a 'displacement or break in a given set of places

or identities' (Rancière, cited in Dunne, 2016, p. 574). For Dunne, this is what education is essentially about: 'Education *is* untology' (Dunne, 2016, p. 571). This is closely intertwined with Rancière's notion of politics, which entails a suspicion toward identity as a way of being that is static and/or predefined. Instead, a political act or event for him is one of subjectivation, in which an individual or a group 'inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 37). "Community" then seems to refer to any kind of social order in which one's place can be preconfigured, that is, one's role preassigned. Possible examples could be nation, a religion, or a family. Such an act is a 'rupture in the process of social domination' (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 158) and can as such never be predicted or prescribed beforehand. This notion of subjectivation has been taken up extensively by Biesta (among others) as a fundamental aspect of what education is about. An educational space is then the space in which actors can take on roles they were not preassigned, act in ways not preconceived. Biesta and Bingham write:

> As a practice of subjectification, educational emancipation, like politics, happens in ways that one cannot anticipate, in ways that cannot be anticipatable, in ways that, in short, cannot be conceptualized. As a practice of subjectification, educational emancipation begins not through the conceptual preparedness of the educator, but rather through the efforts of the student to verify his or her equality through intellectual apprehension. (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 52)

Here I want to observe that, for Biesta and Bingham, subjectivation plays a role in the process of education specifically through what they call the effort of the student. In parallel with the definition of the human being as a will served by an intelligence, this effort is an act of intellectual apprehension, the will putting its intelligence to work. The notion of effort re-occurs multiple times in TIS, for example in the following passage:

> The belief in intellectual inequality and in the superiority of one's own intelligence does not belong to scholars and distinguished poets alone. Its force comes from the fact that it embraces the entire population under the guise of humility. I can't, the ignorant one you are encouraging to teach himself declares; I am only a worker. Listen carefully to everything there is in that syllogism. First of all, "I can't" means "I don't want to; why would I make the effort?" Which also means: I undoubtedly could, for I am intelligent. But I am a worker: people like me can't; my neighbor can't. And what use would it be for me, since I have to deal with imbeciles? (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 40)

In this extract, the will to make use of one's intelligence – the will to express, to adventure, to be – is intimately tied in to a certain understanding of identity. This is clearly visible in the sentence "I am only a worker", in which the identity taken up is further qualified as a negative one – "only" a worker. Emancipation, Rancière seems to be

proposing, is thus about a kind of paradoxical *being who we are not* – that is, to be other than who we are supposed to be in the eyes of others.

There is thus a relationship between will and identity, which makes a specific kind of sense in light of the thesis that we "are" will: being as will in its emancipatory mode is to spirit away. To become emancipated is, etymologically speaking, to escape from the hand that holds me. As observed before, a central difference between Rancière and other critical thinkers lies in the role of the teacher. There is a notion of the role of the teacher or pedagogue as a "public intellectual", as discussed, for example, by Giroux, one of critical pedagogy's most prominent figures (who also uses the term "transformative intellectual") (e.g. Giroux, 1997, 2004). This is a question of how a teacher or pedagogue can and should act publicly, as someone who tries to observe things and intervene in situations of injustice, related to education, from the axiom of equality. What it means "to act publicly in such a way" is a question that, in my current understanding, lies at the heart of the dispute between Rancière and the critical pedagogues. The way in which this intellectual is understood by those like Giroux is criticised by both Rancière and in the secondary literature about him. This is exemplified in this following proposal:

> As public and transformative intellectuals, teachers have an opportunity to make organic connections with the historical traditions that provide them and their students with a voice, history and sense of belonging. It is a position marked by a moral courage and criticism that does not require educators to step back from society in the manner of the "objective" teacher, but to distance themselves from those power relations that subjugate, oppress, and diminish other human beings. (Giroux, 1997, p. 224)

It seems to be precisely this point which is criticised by Rancière – he locates the stultifying logic in this notion that the teacher can be some outside of power relations, teaching those who are still inside of it what the world is really like. That is the essential Platonic move so often attacked by him. This draws many commentators to Rancière's thought. Biesta, for example writes that:

> … As a critical theory of education, the emancipatory interest of critical pedagogies focuses on the analysis of oppressive structures, practices, and theories. The key idea is that emancipation can be brought about if people gain an adequate insight into the power relations that constitute their situation — which is why the notion of demystification plays a central role in critical pedagogies. (Biesta, 2010, p. 43)

He further adds that such demystification is related to the Marxist notion of ideology. Biesta then cites Marx, who states that ideology refers to the observation that all thought is socially determined, but also, and importantly, that it is thought 'which *denies* this

determination' (Marx, cited in Biesta, 2010, p. 44). The implication then becomes that emancipation can only happen when someone is liberated by someone else from their mystified state, the mental state in which their thought is captured by ideology.

Now, here I reflect on the fact that I have read these things many times – but that I shockingly do not actually really know what such themes like ideology really are. Reading about these things immediately from a perspective of scepticism therefore makes it difficult for me to assess to what extent I agree with such scepticism. I do feel that if someone has knowledge or insight about the way in which someone else is oppressed, providing them with that knowledge or insight can be very helpful in that person's process of emancipation, so perhaps some of this critique on the critical paradigm is to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

In relation to this, I also personally, having focused for so long on Rancière and having been educated on the basis of his pedagogy of ignorance, feel a lack, a negative experience of ignorance. So the ignorance that I had been taught to value, and the perspective which I wanted to pursue for this study, was simultaneously something that I became quite suspicious toward. To put it differently, I had learned that an emancipatory teacher is ignorant, but experienced my own ignorance as an obstacle for being, for knowing what I wanted and for what I could want. And what I want is to be able to counter a certain kind of discourse of which I became conscious in 2016: the discourse of *borders* and *boundaries*. This is why I want to know more. But then, this wish to know more may very well be exactly what Rancière is addressing. Which is why, in turn, the will to knowledge becomes something to inquire about in relation to the notions of identification and subjectivation. Still, it is this will which drives the adventure forward. Crucially, the adventure has come to entail a realisation that the will to understanding is not only cognitive, it is affective, and so exploring the affective has also become part of the adventure.

Ignorance, stultification, domestication

My will to understand is then clearly not simply a form of academic or professional pursuit. It is personal, too, and it is tied in directly to the themes at hand. In other words, it turns out that I cannot think about oppression and stultification in an abstract sense without considering the way in which I myself have become oppressed. Moreover, I have very slowly begun to realise that I actually believe that there is a form of ignorance that is itself oppressive – that is self-oppressive, because it is an ignorance of my own will. So in the way I see it, there are two forms of ignorance. The one is the ignorance of the emancipatory pedagogue, which is to be ignorant of inequality and to refuse to explain who people are on

the basis of what we are supposed to know about them. This seems itself to fall into the trap of thinking that anyone can be outside of relations of power. That said, the other form of ignorance is the ignorance of the stultifying pedagogue – I will explore the concept of stultification in relation to the will below – which is the result of a deliberate refusal to perceive what is going on. This is also an ignorance of inequality, yet in a very different sense. It is the second kind of ignorance through which I have often kept myself stultified. I know I am not alone in this – it seems that there is a large number of (white, middle-class) people in the West who have been coming to the slow realisation that we have been ignoring the world outside of our own (apparent) utopia, as well as the dystopian side of that supposed utopia itself. It is in this context, too, that I think we can understand the epidemic that was already going on long before the Covid-19 epidemic, namely what Van den Bergh (2018) refers to as the "depression epidemic". Depression, in my experience, is a multifaceted experience. It is suppression of my own experience, my own will. This suppression is what I think Rancière might be referring to when he speaks about the police order. I believe this order often works through subtle gestures, like remarks stating that there is nothing to do, nothing to know, or that "we" (people like us) are simply incapable of really understanding anything that is going on. It results in a feeling of incompetency, of not being able to do or say anything meaningful. This incompetency is perceived to result either from a natural lack, or from the lack induced over time, a feeling of always running behind, a deadly sensation which finds expression, for example, in Pink Floyd's song "Time". It is allowing the nihilism of the social order to dictate who we are. It is to identify with that nihilism and that incapacity and the general sense that the state of the world is predetermined, coupled to an interdiction against attempts to change anything about it (Rancière, 2009b).

And all of this, it seems to me, is tied into Rancière's criticism of the educational (and philosophical, sociological, historical etc.) movements (and others) mentioned above, including the critical paradigm, and what Rancière calls liberal or libertarian forms of education. According to him, all of these ultimately follow the model of Socrates in Plato's works, who represents the figure of the anti-emancipatory educator *pur sang* for Jacotot. Plato, then, as stated earlier, is his most fundamental antagonist. He writes:

> The Socratic method remains a bit everywhere [*sic*] in our schools the model of a liberal, if not libertarian, education. In that sense, it is of capital importance that Jacotot should have turned things around. What he does is show that the key point in what he calls 'stultification' isn't the subjection of one will to another; for Jacotot, the problem isn't to eliminate every relationship of authority so as to have only a relationship between two intelligences. (Rancière, 2005/2017, p. 175)

So in a way, it seems that oppression, understood here as a will subjecting another will, is not what Rancière ultimately aims at when he talks about emancipation. He is clearly against oppression, but, as I understand it currently, he seems to be saying that stultification is that which prohibits an individual from resisting the forms of oppression they may be a part of. It is, perhaps, more related to a kind of internalised oppression, a sense of inferiority that has seeped into the foundations of one's sense of self; of one's mind, which is fundamentally, for Spinoza, the idea that we have of our own body, an idea that echoes in the description of Gauny's moment of emancipation discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis. It is therefore a sense of fundamental incapacity, a lack of the power of our own body to act and express. In Freire's (1968/1970) critical pedagogy, emancipation finds its meaning in three main aims: humanisation, conscientisation, and establishing a problem-posing education system. But for Rancière, these aims still follow his notion of the Socratic logic, which is to say that he believes that the supposed liberator of the oppressed individual will keep that individual in a state of stultification as long as that individual believes they need the liberator in order to be free.

So I want to ask again the question: (how) can we understand the difference between oppression in the critical paradigm and Jacotot's notion of stultification? And does the difference as he sees it really hold up? Freire proposes that 'oppression is domesticating' (Freire, 1968/1970, p. 51). If oppression is a form of domestication, then it is not immediately clear how it differs from stultification, since to see someone as a brute (as in stultification, *abrutir*) is to see them as an animal, a non-human. Moreover, it seems to me that in a scenario of domestication, the will and its subjection to another will always play a role. That is, domestication is a word used ordinarily for an animal that has been made subject to the will of humans. What does it mean, in this context, to say that teachers and students are both wills served by intelligences, and that the relationship between them should primarily be understood as one between the two wills?

Again I observe that this constellation of concepts if not as straightforward as it may seem, and this is shown in some of the ways in which it is discussed in the literature. Dunne, for example, writes that:

> … An intellectually emancipated person can say that the purpose of education is not for one will to exercise dominance over another will or for one intelligence to exercise dominance over another intelligence, but to become conscious of the equality of intelligences. (Dunne, 2016, p. 582)

Yet here I read TIS differently, in a way I think also shown by Rancière in the quotation above regarding the Socratic method. That is, it seems to me that for Jacotot and Rancière

the relationship between wills is more demanding than how Dunne seems to understand it. For Rancière it is, as mentioned in Chapter 5, about 'unconditional exigency: the emancipatory father is not a simple good-natured pedagogue; he is an intractable master' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38). So the educational situation is one in which the will of the teacher makes a demand on the student, while leaving their intelligence entirely to its own devices. Here I reiterate that I do not think that will and intelligence are separated in the way Rancière proposes.

Power, structures, and self

Recalling once more my fascination for the notion that we are a will, what follows is that the teacher somehow makes a demand on the student to "be": with being not understood in terms of static identity, but in terms of subjectivation. This also brings about a point of tension: it makes clear that the pedagogical relationship, as Hellemans (1989) has argued, always entails an element of *power*. And this element of power stands in tension with, but is not contradictory to, the will to equality (see also Biesta, 2021). I am reminded here of a remark made by Butler (2018) in the first of her Gifford Lectures. One of the main themes in those lectures is interdependency, which, Butler argues, is a situation everyone is always in, yet one that is denied by liberalism's exaltation of individualism. She notes that the social organisation of life always entails a being given over to others, stating that 'We are, from the start, handled against our will' (Butler, 2018). This points for me to the observation that educators can be in a position of power in which they, at least sometimes, have to decide against the immediate desires of the child. The question is whether they can do so, perhaps paradoxically, in order to encourage the child to do what they themselves are not aware they can want. It seems to me also that dissensus should be a natural part of the pedagogical relationship – in many cases, the child "talking back" to the teacher is seen as insolence and reprehensible. But perhaps the clash between wills means that a child asserting themselves as a will is the best possible way for them to experience the meaningfulness of their own expressions. So the task of an educator might be to speak to that part of the child that wants to be – to even incite disagreement in the child. This is then a form of encouragement toward subjectivation, as discussed earlier in the thesis. What I noticed there is that subjectivation is about a capacity for "enunciation". The notion of the will is then intertwined with a notion of enunciation, or expression. To call on the child to "be" is to call on them to express themselves, as Jacotot did when he asked his students to talk about their intellectual adventures.

As noted above, this is also to keep the child from being distracted. Distraction is an absence of self, the opposite of reason, which we could call unreasonable, stupid, or stultified. Recalling the notion that actions can stem from our own will or from something else, attention would equate to a willing relationship of care, and distraction, as I want to argue, would either equate to, or intertwine with, a certain notion of violence. One of Rancière's crucial insights here, I believe, is that in both of these modalities intelligence is still present. Stupidity – I repeat this because it is one of the main insights I take from Rancière – is a result of the work of an intelligence, an intelligence distracted by the absence of will/self.

There is a play here then with three complex notions: *will*, *being*, and *expression*. But I have come to understand the self and the will as being part "I" and part "we", part individual and part social flow. We always *want* in relation to the social structures within which we are embedded. How we might understand that relation seems to be an often discussed educational question. As Sankey (2007) explains, there is an important tension here between "modern" and "post-modern" conceptions of the self and its relationship to the social – and, importantly, linguistic – structures within which that self is embedded. The modern conception of the self, observes Sankey, is in line with Descartes' notion that the self is primarily a thinking substance, and Kant's notion of the universal transcendental self. This is, he notes, a 'radical individualism' (Sankey, 2007, p. 545). Through the philosophy of Heidegger, who conceived of human selves as 'beings-in-the-world, enmeshed in social networks' (Sankey, 2007, p. 545), arose the post-modern conception of "the self", which further emphasised the embeddedness of the self in the social, in historical narratives (Rorty), and in discourse and historically analysable social practices (Foucault). On this view, it seems, there is no "private self", and who we are is entirely determined by social and linguistic structures. But according to Sankey, the post-modern emphasis on social embeddedness is a pendulum swung too far. Instead, he argues for 'a middle road that allows for the individual self and the notion of personal understanding, while embracing our social and cultural embeddedness' (Sankey, 2007, p. 545). This view is in line with my understanding of Jacotot's presupposition about the self. Furthermore, it seems to me that Rancière's notion of subjectivation can be meaningfully connected to this view as well.

Suddenly I wonder if my interpretation of Rancière is correct (even if a completely "proper" reading is impossible). Here is what he proposes:

> The anteriority of linguistic signs changes nothing for the pre-eminence of the intellectual act that, for every human infant, gives them meaning' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 53).

He then cites de Biran, a contemporary of Jacotot, who states that 'Man only learns to speak by linking ideas to the words he learns from his nurse' (de Biran, cited in Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 53). Further, Rancière then recounts one of Jacotot's critics, who, writes Rancière, 'scolded this French professor who, after Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Harris, Condillac, Dumarsais, Rousseau, Destutt de Tracy, and de Bonald, still dared to maintain that thought preceded language' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 60). It seems to me that this is the same theme as the one discussed by Sankey. Which is to say that perhaps the postmodern as it is often discussed today is not so much post- as it is running behind a few hundred years. This also, for me, gives significance to Ross' description of TIS as "untimely". What I also notice here is that Rancière, in following Jacotot, uses language designated by Sankey as modern. Sankey writes that the:

> … post-modern critique … has sought to deconstruct and eliminate not only the modern worldview, carefully crafted by modern scientific genius, but every worldview and metanarrative, including notions such as 'self', 'reason', 'purpose' and 'meaning', which have generally been thought to be necessary for a worldview. (Sankey, 2007, p. 545)

There is now then an understanding of the will/self that is always becoming in relation to historical and discursive structures, which still gives a primary role to play for the individual in the process of giving meaning to expressions and actions. Two important questions arise for me here. The first is what these structures may look like. That is, "structure" has become a word often used in common discourse, but what it refers to often remains elusive to me. The second question is how we might understand the relationship between our self and the structures around us. A split in the road, then. Which way to turn? The first question is, I believe, a very important one to answer. As Todd already wrote in 1996:

> I think there is a need to move beyond *accepting* that oppression is internalized, that identities are social constructions, and ask ourselves to look at models that explain *how* identity is simultaneously constructed psychically and socially. (Todd, 1996, p. 10)

Apparently, there are "structures" and these structures can be constructed – they can also be deconstructed and reconstructed, concepts often used in reference to the thought of Derrida – and they are related to the notion of oppression. In other words, the way in which people are domesticated is discussed by using the metaphor of structures. Structure, furthermore, is a concept in which "the social" (another word of which it is very difficult to grasp what exactly it refers to) and the psychical converge. Domestication is a way of behaving as well as a belief. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, Rancière relates these structures

to the aesthetic and the sensible, using concepts like the *partage du sensible*. My focus here is on the relationship between the self as will and the structures in which the self/will is embedded. Todd proposes that this relationship takes the form of a conflict – something that seems to be strongly in line with Rancière's works. Todd writes that:

> … social structures do not simply and directly *determine* identities. Instead, identities are forged in continual conflict and ambivalence with these structures; for we *can* imagine something other than what society or the symbolic prescribes for us. (Todd, 1996, p. 6)

Identity taken to refer to what we might call our "self" – I read Todd as suggesting that this self is constituted by the social structures within which we live, yet not fully determined by them. Instead, we come to be in a conflictual relationship with those structures. In my adventure into the labyrinth of the will, something important has now been added: the notion of conflict, for which my inspiration has been inspired by my reading of Rancière's works, in which I have found some of the most crucial concepts to be disagreement, dissensus, and misunderstanding. In my further exploration regarding these themes I want to ask whether Todd's proposition can be further qualified in terms of intensity. That is, it might be the case that the self is, in the course of time, in a conflict with social structures to a lesser or greater extent. If this is true, then what follows is that the question whether our actions are determined by forces external to us or by ourselves (self-determination) becomes obsolete at the moment where we fully identity with those external forces. Todd further places emphasis on the role of imagination in the process of self-determination, and more specifically in the role it might play in what she calls a trans/formative kind of pedagogy. A crucial role is played here by the concept of indeterminacy, which plays a similarly crucial role in Rancière's works.

Now, having gone on a number of adventures, the task becomes to start working toward a preliminary conclusion to them. Therefore, the next chapter will entail a re-weaving of some of the threads picked up during the adventures, in order to try and construct a coherent whole. This will then function as the stage for the final, concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7: THE WEIGHT OF WORDS

Introduction

This thesis has been an exploration of the question of how, if at all, Jacques Rancière's works can be an emancipatory force within the contemporary field of education. The approach taken was that of an *adventure*, a notion from Rancière's book TIS. That book, in which Rancière narrates the adventures of the nineteenth century educator and philosopher of education Joseph Jacotot, was an opaque portal leading into another world, and my adventure began by entering that portal. This chapter contains a reflection on the adventure through the world behind the portal. Originally intended as a conclusion to the thesis, it turned instead into the second-to-last chapter, which sets the stage for a concluding chapter that will follow it.

First I will give some coordinates for navigation through this chapter. I will begin by applying to my own thesis what Rancière sees as the central activity of a critic: to identify 'what's happening' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 65). I do this by performatively noticing that my adventure has taken place on the following five terrains – which interlock, interlace, oscillate – simultaneously:

- adventuring into Jacques Rancière's writings
- reflecting on adventuring during the adventure
- learning about things in the world by following Rancière's gestures
- discovering the self as will
- the aesthetics of writing

Throughout this chapter I will spiral my way from one terrain to the next in this order, trying, though not always succeeding, to stay within the terrain currently under consideration. This will itself be yet another adventure, in an attempt to weave together some of the different threads I picked up during my adventures. Through this process, I will reflect on what I have learned – and not learned – about education from Rancière and from reflecting on my adventures through his works. My reading will entail an analysis of those works in terms of his arguments regarding education, an account of the claims and proposals I believe he makes, and a discussion of the extent to which I agree with him.

First terrain: Adventuring into Jacques Rancière's writings

Setting the stage

On the first terrain, the adventure consisted of sustained attention given to Rancière's thoughts as expressed in his writings, as well as on the further reflections on those writings by other adventurers into Rancière's world, especially those concerned with questions regarding education. My aim here was to understand Rancière's works as a whole, in order to be able to embed the meaning of TIS within the context of that whole. Having become an expert at Rancière's thought would allow me, I hoped, to explain the ideas in TIS on a deeper level than I had reached during earlier excursions – the latter of which had led to my initial experiment with his texts in the Children's Home. This was thus an adventure with the explicit aim of (more thoroughly) *understanding Rancière*. My adventure literally was a form of re-search: I followed Rancière in the searching adventures he himself had conducted. Through this endeavour I hoped to reach an understanding of Rancière's claims about education in order then to be able to accurately explain them, and, ultimately, to have obtained valuable knowledge about what a good educator believes and does. By reflecting on what the adventure has meant to me, I want to make a contribution to the already growing body of literature written about Rancière's works by philosophers and theorists of education.

Method: Counter-translation, spirals, and woven threads

This adventure began with a revisiting of TIS while writing a critical summary of that book in the form of a *counter-translation*. The latter term came from the book itself, in which Rancière proposes the following:

> All words, written or spoken, are a translation that only takes on meaning in the counter-translation, in the invention of the possible causes of the sound heard or of the written trace: the will to figure out that applies itself to all indices, in order to know what one reasonable animal has to say to what it considers the soul of another reasonable animal. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 64)

My thesis has been an expanding counter-translation of Rancière's works. Rancière describes the process of translation in the excerpt as an *invention of the possible causes of the written trace* following from the *will to figure out*. This formulation is significant in light of my aim of understanding Rancière, because it expresses something about what he believes an "understanding" consists of. If someone's words are, generally stated, an expression of their thoughts and feelings, then an understanding of those words by another person is not a replication of those thoughts and feelings: it is an *invention*, something new and unpredictable. Rancière further notes that Jacotot operated in a universe with no 'opposition

between understanding and guessing' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 177). This way of understanding understanding – as a process of invention and guesswork – is infused with Rancière's method of inquiry, which has been dubbed a 'method of equality' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016). This is a method in which research and education converge. It is a method which Rancière began applying early on in his career, and he states that it was 'already Jacotot's method, even if I didn't know its name: learning something and then relating all the rest to it' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 39).

When he conducted his own doctoral research, Rancière's adventure consisted of a number of years spent in various archives containing the writings from nineteenth-century working class authors. The book he published as a result of this, which I have already made allusions to in earlier chapters – "Proletarian Nights" (1981/2012) – is fascinating to read after having read some of Rancière's later works, because it depicts perfectly one meaning of the sentence: 'everything is in the book' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 23). Everything he would later write about is already in there, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. But in a way one could read only that book and know everything there is to know about Rancière's thought – his later works are footnotes, that is, explications, of this one book. In any case, it was during those adventures that he encountered references to Jacotot in various sources, such as working class magazines and letters, about parents who had sent their children to be taught by him.

Rancière also found another author who is often – 'almost obsessively' (Quintana, 2018, p. 4) – evoked in many of Rancière's later works: Gabriel Gauny. The latter's description of an experience he had during one of the brutalising days of exploitative labour that his life's circumstances compelled him to endure functions as a wellspring for Rancière's theory of *emancipation*. It was an "as if" experience. Gauny was laying the floor of a mansion in which he himself would never live, and he imagined himself to be the owner of the mansion for a fleeting moment in time. I will recount the description of this experience in my discussion of the fourth terrain on the discovery of the self as will – since it was a moment in which Gauny believed that 'his powers are his own when no will but his own activates them' (Gauny, cited in Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 82). I have learned that Rancière's thought, as well as his method, is, in important respects, affected by his unexpected encounters with, and subsequent reading of, the works of Jacotot and Gauny. The latter is described by Reid (2012) as Rancière's 'alter ego' (p. xxxi) who preached 'the revelation of a different world and the initiation of a new kind of relationship between beings' (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 116) – a revelation which, for my Rancière, characterises the experience of emancipation, and an initiation which characterises the experience of politics.

The unexpected nature of Rancière's encounter with these figures is of direct importance for his methodology, as well as his thought. Contingency plays a major role on the stage of Rancière's texts, manifested in its many twists and turns and the 'spiralling logic' (Dasgupta, 2013, n.p.), which comprises not just the substance of his arguments, but also the style in which he formulates them. I have, in turn, followed a similar method, in which I let what fascinated me in the texts I read be the guiding force for how the adventure would continue. In this way, the process took the form of a spiral, a sandstorm rising up and up toward unforeseen horizons. Rancière describes the movement of emancipation and politics as:

> … that of a spiral that, in the very resemblance of the circles in which the same energy is consumed for the benefit of the enemy, achieves a real ascent toward a different mode of social existence. (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 82)

This is again a way for Rancière to describe Gauny's moment of emancipation, in which the latter reappropriated his own power to perceive the injustice inherent in the apparently common-sensical hierarchical structuring of society. I felt at home in my own way of applying the method of contingency, which directs the adventure into unforeseen directions, since my attention never manages to stay focused on the same thing long enough for me to write consistently in the same direction.

Another way of describing the adventure that ensued after entering the portal into Rancière's world is as the unwinding of an infinitely knotted rope, or like the unravelling of ever more threads comprising an edgeless woven canvas. As Bell (2017) observes, Rancière published a book in 2014 titled *Le fil perdu*, translated as *The Lost Thread*, and derived from the French expression *perdre le fil*: to lose one's train of thought, or, literally, to lose the thread. This implies once more the importance of contingency in his method. However, Bell also invokes the notion of the "red thread", a running theme that is present throughout a narrative or collection of narratives. My adventure in this thesis – the unravelling of the many threads running through Rancière's oeuvre – has turned out to reveal that his writings work on both of these levels at the same time; there is contingency *and* structure. That is, those writings often seem to follow no singular thread, instead weaving the threads that comprise the many themes he writes about together in almost arbitrary fashion. As Sachs (2017) puts it, and in line with what I have already observed above, Rancière, 'rather than present an argument sequentially, […] develops a network of ramifications and cross-references' (p. 55). Yet at the same time there is a clear red thread woven throughout – in a word, the theme of *equality*.

Understanding understanding

In my adventure, I followed threads woven by Rancière in a fascinating, but also complex and at times incomprehensible web of contingently encountered themes. However, in my aim of understanding Rancière I was not in the first instance considering myself to be in the process of inventing something new. The adventure toward understanding – which failed many times, as I will discuss further below – therefore essentially took on the form of a contradiction: my own understanding of understanding was different from Rancière's understanding of understanding. Yet in line with Todd's proposition that 'education is fundamentally about change and transformation' (Todd, 2011, p. 509), I entered the process with a willingness to be transformed by my reading of Rancière's writings. This was a stubborn willingness, however: the adventure consisted of a powerful confrontation, in an attempt to manifest 'the power of translation that makes one speaker confront another' (Rancière, 1987/1991, pp. 63-64). The potential transformation further bore on the very act of reading itself: reading Rancière would, potentially, transform my disposition to read, understand, perceive and think in a certain way. Such a state of potential transformation can, perhaps, be compared to a state of *liminality* as discussed in Conroy (2004) and Todd (2014). In this state there was a constant oscillation between sensing that I might be caught too strongly in old dispositions on the one hand, and sensing that I had fallen into the trap of pretending to believe in things I did not actually believe in on the other hand. For example, I read parts of a work by Panagia (2018) in which he discusses Rancière's works in terms of his *style*, arguing that it is the 'literary operations' and 'stylistic arrangements' (p. 2) that matter most in Rancière's texts, and not his arguments. Panagia states that:

> … Rancière's writing … is not oriented toward the making of a justifiable argument whose purpose it is to give reasons to think or act in a particular way. It is instead a writing that puts on display an arrangement of perception and sensation. (Panagia, 2018, p. 15)

This statement stands in tension with a belief I hold, which is that one of the reasons to read theory is precisely that it can teach me something about how to think or act in specific ways which I would not have come up with myself. This, in turn, I observe, stands in tension with understandings of the equality of intelligence as the capacity to understand by ourselves. In this sense, theory is a potential way to expand the horizon of meaning structuring our mind, to widen the boundaries which limit what we are able to think and do. A case in point is that I would never have written the previous sentence in the way that I did if I had not read Rancière's works. His intelligence has steered mine in a different direction. Crucially, I observe here that by steering my intelligence in a different direction, my will

had simultaneously been steered in a different direction – thus once more problematising the strict distinction between will and intelligence. That said, I can recognise what Panagia states here, in the sense that Rancière seems to eschew any direct prescriptive statements. That is, even if he might want his readers to think or act in a certain way, he never tells them directly what it is he wants them to think or how he wants them to act. Still, it does seem to me that the stylistic arrangements of his text, as well as the substance of what he writes, is always an expression of his will to induce a shift toward a mode of perception – a term I will come back to – of equality; an invitation to shed our passion for inequality (contempt) and start perceiving ourselves as part of a universe of equals.

Panagia (2018) also proposes this to be Rancière's aim: to shift his reader's sensibilities and perceptions through the way he arranges the words in his texts. He therefore claims to read Rancière in a way which is 'attuned to Rancière's critical sensibility' (Oliver, 2018, p. 987). This way of reading, according to Panagia (2018), privileges 'description over prescription' (p. 16). However, there is something duplicitous about this claim. After due reflection, I found that I had entered Panagia's book with the belief that it would explain Rancière to me. I further noticed that I had been diligently following Panagia's claims as if they expressed the truth about Rancière's thought. Therefore, I also believed him when he made the following statement (contradicting himself by making a prescription, though I did not notice it at the time):

> We would be well served to move beyond the inherited orthodoxy of reading for argument so as to be more attentive to the critical potential in stylistics. (Panagia, 2018, p. 66)

However, reading for argument was exactly how I began to approach Rancière's texts. The confrontation thus consisted of a clash between different ways of reading, between different forms of being sensitive to the material before me. Following this, the adventure was also a search for what Rancière might mean when, following Schiller, he depicts poetry as a 'new art of life, an education of each and all' (Rancière, Rohrbach, & Sun, 2011, p. 242). An art of reading, of education, where reading a poem – *any poem*, whether it be a book written by Jacques Rancière or the muteness of a stubborn child – might serve 'as a point of departure for a web of sensations', that is, as a:

> … fragment of inactive and impersonal life that leads to the two-and-thirty palaces of the imagination, which is linked more and more, but also interminably, with the life of all. (Rancière, Rohrbach, & Sun, 2011, p. 246)

Here I recall my discussion in Chapter 2 of the (unexplained) equivalence Rancière makes between speech and expression. Poetry is here not only understood as an activity in

which words are used as a form of art, but as something that is present in communication between two individuals. Furthermore, it is not only understood as a form of expression, but also a form of reading or listening.

My confrontation was an entry point to an adventure reaching for the meaning of Jacotot's phrase that 'everything is in everything' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 19), elsewhere translated as 'all is in all' (Rancière, Rohrbach, & Sun, 2011, p. 246). The word "meandering" is pertinent here: it is about a disposition that is open to the contingency of what the path leads to, affecting the imagination toward the endlessly connected webs of meaning created by others over time, in order to expand the boundaries of what we can perceive and think.

But it seems that I have gotten ahead of myself: having lost the thread led me into other terrains. Let me go back to where we were. I wanted to read Rancière in terms of argument and claims, so I will begin by reiterating several of the main proposals about education he takes up from Jacotot. Then I will argue that in wanting to understand Rancière, it seems that what I wanted was *contrary to what I think he implies I should want*. This, however, is in *agreement with what he seems to want*, because in disagreeing with him, I am agreeing with his proposal that the distance sustained in confrontation and disagreement allows for the equality of intelligence to take place between two reasonable individuals.

Explanations and how they may lead to stultification

The first proposal about education made by Jacotot and Rancière that I want to look at is that one can teach what one does not know. The second is that explanations lead to a process of 'regression ad infinitum' (Rancière, 1991, p. 4), where a text needs to be explained to a student before they can understand it, which means that the explanation itself needs to be explained, and so on without end. This induces a sense of helplessness in the student, who comes to believe that they can never make sense of (that is, to understand, or know the meaning of) something on its appearance, but that they always need someone to assist them in reaching beneath the appearances to reveal a hidden meaning to them. In this way, explanations lead to a state of *stultification* in the student. Stultification is a translation from *abrutir*, and could thus be understood as the process of rendering someone a "brute" or animal – in other words, to induce in someone the idea that they lack the human capacity of rational thought, or at least do not possess it on the same level as others who are more intelligent. Stultification is then the result of that process: an affective state in which one has come to perceive themselves as an inferior being. This could also simply be described as a loss of enthusiasm (Spångberg, 2015). The stultifying process of explanation involves a

teacher in arranging 'the elements of knowledge to be transmitted in accordance with the supposed limited capacities of those under instruction' (Rancière, 2010, p. 3). The subject matter is then taught in a process that goes 'from the simple to the complex, from the part to the whole' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 7). Rancière further proposes that teachers generally believe that this process is central to what it means to teach. Yet in his view – or rather, to be more precise, in a view he expresses while writing from his Jacotot's perspective – they fail to see that 'to explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 6).

This denouncement of explanations is taken up by several hardened adventurers into Rancière's works in their espousal of a Rancièrian way of thinking about education. Chambers, for example, states that:

> … Rancière's critique of mainstream and dominant pedagogies from the nineteenth century to the present always centers on those pedagogies' presupposition and verification of the principle and logic of inequality. The work of the teacher, traditionally understood, is to explain, to explicate, to tell the students the lesson, to show them the meaning of the text. … The master is the master because he or she can explain the texts that the students are otherwise presumed not to understand on their own; thus, teaching in this traditional sense *presumes*, just as it simultaneously *demonstrates*, the inequality of intelligence between student and teacher. (Chambers, 2012, p. 30, emphases original)

So the principle and the logic of inequality are manifested by teachers in the explanations they give to students of the texts the students read. Chambers further cites Rancière – who is here speaking from Jacotot's perspective – in affirmation of this claim: 'Explanation, or the ordinary routine of pedagogic practice, was above all a display of inequality' (Rancière, cited in Chambers, 2012, p. 30). Biesta, on a similar note, writes that:

> … what is communicated through the act of explanation is not the explanation itself—in order to understand, the learner still has to figure out for himself what is being explained to him—but the idea that explanation is *indispensable*, i.e. that the learner is unable to understand *without* explanation. (Biesta, 2011, p. 33, emphases original)

Stultification on this view happens because, by explaining, the teacher *implicitly* demonstrates that the student would never have been able to understand that which is explained without the explanation. They thus come to understand something else entirely: that they do not possess the power to understand without help from others. A distinction is thus created between the "master" and the student, who cannot reach understanding without the help of the master. The point is made powerfully again by Ross, who states the following:

> At the heart of the pedagogical relation is the representation of inequality as evolutionary epistemology: the people who can never catch up with the enlightened elite, or who can never be completely modern. People who are trapped, without knowing it, at one stage along the trajectory of progressive time, and who are destined to remain there, imprisoned in this other time, that of the child, or that of the primitive. (Ross, 2009, p. 26)

It is thus clear that Rancière's proposal of equality is applicable to *all* forms of relationships, including those between adults and children. Rather than viewing children (even young infants) as unequal to adults, and in need of education before they can be considered equal, he wants to view everyone as entirely equal from the outset. There is no "catching up" to do, because everyone is already on the same level. As discussed before, it is thus not important for Rancière whether someone speaks (literally) for them to be considered equal to all others. He is also working on the level of the implicit, but in a way contrary to that of explanations. Rather, he is implicitly arguing against Aristotle's speech/noise distinction, saying that, even in a baby's cry, we can perceive expressive power, and a will to communicate.

In the image formed on the basis of what has been discussed so far, the "master" is someone who knows and is therefore intelligent, while the student is someone who does not know and is therefore not intelligent. There, are in other words, two kinds of human beings.

Two forms of humanity

Stultification happens on the basis of the belief that there are enlightened "masters" and simple-minded "students". I will use this sense of the word *master* interchangeably with the word *expert*. This illuminates the connection between Rancière's educational thought and his political thought: he critiques the deployment of experts in the suppression of the political voice of those who are perceived to lack the expertise needed to participate in politics (Rancière, 2005/2006). It is also to avoid the gendered connotations of the word master, which I will discuss again further below. However, it should be noted that "master" also has other senses, as explored, for example, in Simons (2008). Simons puts forward two different ways of thinking about what it means to be a teacher. The way in which he does this reminds me of the way in which Gauny conceived of different relationships between human beings evoked above – in this case, the relationship between teachers and students.

The first way of perceiving the teacher – which Simons (2008) believes to be the prevalent way – is as an *expert*. The expert, he proposes, is someone who acts and lives in service of their students, who has grand visions for the future which they bestow upon their

students, and who, for these reasons, effaces themselves[32]. It is someone who has vast amounts of knowledge and relates to that knowledge in an impersonal way, always careful not to lose themselves in the knowledge they possess. The second way of perceiving the teacher is as *someone who seeks mastery*. The teacher who seeks mastery is someone who is fully present in their engagement with, and fascination for, their field or craft. Instead of the distanced and personal relationship to that field or craft, they put themselves into play. Through this kind of engagement, they want to inspire their students to become *interested*: a "being together" with the subject matter.

Central in the state of mastery, for Simons (2008), is not the knowledge someone possesses, but their effort to embody a certain *ethos*, a way of being which expresses care, love, and passion for that which they teach. The ethos of this kind of teacher is further marked by a sensitivity for the subject matter. They do not believe their primary task to be the bestowal of knowledge upon their students, but rather to invite the student to accompany them in their attention, concentration, and dedication toward the subject matter. They do this by giving instructions and exercises which show how to properly engage with the subject matter, in a careful manner. Following Rancière, Simons further notes a central distinction between these two figures of the teacher. The expert is someone who relates to their students by presupposing the latter's dependency on their own level of expertise. The teacher who seeks mastery relates to their students in a very different way: in the community they may find in those moments where their mutual engagement with the subject makes them, even if briefly, lose track of time.

In the explanatory pedagogical logic, the master as expert is thus the one who has knowledge, and the student is an ignoramus, someone without knowledge. Moreover, the expert does not only have knowledge, but also has knowledge about how to obtain knowledge – a knowledge which, again, the student does not possess. Rancière writes:

> In pedagogical logic, the ignoramus is not simply one who does not yet know what the schoolmaster knows. She is the one who does not know what she does not know or how to know it. For his part the schoolmaster is not only the one who possesses the knowledge unknown by the ignoramus. He is also the one who knows how to make it an object of knowledge, at what point and in accordance with what protocol. (Rancière, 2008/2009, p. 8)

This distinction between knowing how to know and not knowing how to know is reminiscent of Rancière's discussion of *methods* in TIS. The expert is someone who knows

[32] Indeed, the Google dictionary uses the teacher in the example for their definition of the word "efface": 'to efface oneself is not the easiest of duties which the teacher can undertake'.

the right method in order to get to knowledge, and has applied that method in order to gain adequate knowledge. The knowledge of the right methods is, again, knowledge the child or the layperson does not possess. In light of this, Cornelissen writes that:

> … the master whose explanation is directed at making students understand and who, in doing so, transforms things into objects of knowledge, practically verifies the assumption that there is a difference between the student's method of chance (figuring out riddles) and the reasoned appropriation by the teacher. (Cornelissen, 2011, p. 19)

This distinction alludes to the distinction made by Descartes between scientists following the scientific method and ordinary people – such as a child learning a language – following the method of 'trial and error' (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 18). In Rancière's own words, he states that:

> Jacotot uses Descartes to refute the idea that there is a methodical intelligence over against the 'anarchic' intelligence guided by chance, to suppress the opposition in Descartes between reasons and 'stories'. (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 176)

Rancière takes up this distinction by suggesting that it creates a hierarchical stratification consisting of two kinds of people, or 'two forms of humanity' (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 176). On the one hand, the people who know the right methods through which to obtain knowledge, who have followed those methods, and who therefore possess adequate knowledge. On the other hand, the people who do not know the right methods through which to obtain knowledge, have therefore only been groping in the dark, and possess only inadequate knowledge. There is here a convergence between two hierarchically or vertically organised polarities: the polarity between the expert researcher or scientist and the layperson, and the polarity between the expert teacher and the child. As mentioned above, Rancière has highlighted that one of the aspects of Jacotot's radical views was the latter's abolition of the distinction between understanding and guessing (Rancière et al., 2005/2017). This abolition thus pertains to two processes equally: scientific research and the learning that happens in education.

In a lucid reformulation of his pedagogical claims, Rancière reiterates his view of what it essentially means to be an expert (Rancière, 2015a, 2016b). The expert is someone who has – or is perceived to have – an understanding of a certain field (or discipline, body, subject) of knowledge. This understanding is a *totality*, and the expert is someone who has access to the whole totality of the field. The layperson or child is someone who lacks this access. Stultification happens in the moment where 'an opacity has now set in' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 6) – that is, where the person lacking expertise comes to think of themselves

as someone who, because they have no access to the totality of knowledge in a field, needs someone else to grant them access before they can start their adventure in a topic or activity which piques their curiosity. They have come to believe in the following message:

> You are before an opaque fragment of an unknown totality. You cannot learn anything unless you understand its connection to the whole of which it is a fragment. (Rancière, 2016b, p. 591)

Since it is only the expert who supposedly knows the whole totality, the child cannot understand any one thing without an expert to explain to them how that thing connects to the totality of which it is a part. That is: their adventure cannot commence without the presence of an experienced guide. But the totality itself is unpresentable, so that it is only implicitly present in the singular expressions of the expert – expressions which, at the same time, imply that only the expert possesses the power needed to access the totality. Instead of the presupposition of a power of translation belonging to teacher and student equally, there is instead a presupposition of a powerful expert and a powerless student.

It is in regard to this, then, that Rancière, following Jacotot, proposes that there is an explanatory order, constructed on a stultifying framework and emanating from the presupposition of the *inequality of intelligence*. He calls this presupposition an *opinion* in TIS, a word which acts as a precursor to the notion of the *partage du sensible* which Rancière developed in his later works and which I will discuss further below. He writes:

> An opinion is not what we have been told it is: a vague judgment present in our minds—and notably in uneducated minds—about things of which we have no clear knowledge. Instead, opinion is the very framework within which we are educated and acquire knowledge. (Rancière, 2016, p. 590)

This excerpt shows how the way Rancière uses the word opinion is once more an allusion to Descartes. For Descartes, the word "opinion" referred to the unmethodical, ignorant manner in which the uneducated masses reach their knowledge (Rancière et al., 2005/2017). He contrasted this to the true, factual knowledge acquired through the empirical method followed by scientists. Rancière is purposefully using the word in a different sense. Instead of using it in the way Descartes used it – that is, in contrast to true, factual knowledge – Rancière uses it to denote the very framework of perception which, according to him, allowed Descartes to create the hierarchical distinction in the way he did in the first place.

Rancière is, in this sense, a Foucauldian kind of archaeologist, whose task, according to Packer (2011), is 'to try to reconstruct an understanding of the past by asking what made it possible to make these statements but not others' (p. 345) and whose interest 'lies not merely in what can be said but in how what we can say organizes what we can see' (p. 347).

So Rancière is certainly strongly influenced by Foucault – yet he also departs from him. He describes how, at some point in his life, he began to experience Foucault's work as 'completely suffocating as a discourse, giving the impression that we lived in an unbreathable world entirely governed by strategies of power' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 51). He states that 'where he was interested in power, I was interested in resistance' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 50). And, finally, he states that:

> … what I've constructed has been both in reference to, and in reaction to, Foucault; I wanted to say that, in any given world of experience, there are several ways of systematizing this experience precisely because that world is made up of several worlds, of several lines of temporality, of several lines of possibilities. This also has consequences for the way we think about political rupture as well as artistic rupture. (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 83)

What Rancière has excavated in Jacotot's philosophy is the discovery of a framework through which people are perceived as more or less intelligent. He traces this framework all the way back to Plato's philosophy, in the latter's fiction of the metals (to be further discussed below). When Jacotot and Rancière propose the equality of intelligence, then, it is in order to present it as a wholly different framework from the one comprised by the opinion of the inequality of intelligence; as the rupture of a world within another world, which, for Rancière (1995/1999), is the essence of politics.

The equality of intelligence plays a lead role in a substantial portion of the literature concerning Rancière's philosophy of education. It is also a theme that meets with reactions ranging from confusion to scepticism in those who ask me to explain Rancière's philosophy of education to them. Noticing that such explanations were more difficult to provide than I thought they should be, I decided to devote a chapter to the theme of intelligence, in an attempt to understand better what Jacotot and Rancière mean when they propose the need to take on the opinion of the equality of intelligence. I will discuss some of my thoughts on this matter in what follows.

The equality of intelligence reconsidered

After analysing the concept of intelligence in Rancière's works and the secondary literature around those works, I found that the word takes on a variety of different meanings. One of the ways in which Rancière sometimes uses it is as the volume of knowledge possessed by someone. In this sense, he proposes that those who consider themselves superior to others, often consider themselves to be superior to them in *intelligence*, where

intelligence then means to have *knowledge* of a totality. In light of this, Vlieghe summarises the attitude of the "stultifying teacher" as someone who acts:

> … according to the belief that there (obviously) exists a difference in intelligence between the knowing teacher and the ignorant students. Teachers should therefore progressively enlighten students' minds by carefully explaining what they cannot understand by themselves, until they eventually reach the same level of intelligence. (Vlieghe, 2013, p. 187)

Elsewhere, he writes that:

> Stultifying doesn't mean that these teachers intentionally want to keep their students at a lower level. On the contrary, they have the best of intentions and will do all they can explaining things to their students, leading them from ignorance to true intelligence. (Vlieghe, 2018, p. 922)

The strange equation between intelligence and knowledge which is sometimes present in Rancière's works is thus taken up implicitly by Vlieghe, as it is at times by others as well (e.g. Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 141; Hallward, 2008, pp. 27-28). Here I also note in passing that, in the way in which Vlieghe uses the word "understanding" in this extract, it seems to be an activity consisting of the acquisition of knowledge (or intelligence, since he uses the two synonymously). This is an activity which the stultifying pedagogue assumes the student cannot perform by themselves, which is why they magnanimously assist the student in order to make up for the student's own incapacity.

Vlieghe continues by summarising the attitude of the emancipatory teacher as someone who:

> … does not presuppose that the student is in need of explanation to understand a subject matter, but that he or she is able to understand it on his or her own. In that case, equality is no longer regarded as a goal to be reached, but the affirmation of a basic condition. It is only on this condition that true emancipation, which is eventually self-emancipation, takes place. (Vlieghe, 2013, p. 188)

After much thought, I have come to think of this view as problematic. To assume that someone is able to understand everything by themselves can be very stultifying if and when that turns out not to be true. In Vlieghe's interpretation, in order to refrain from the demonstration of inequality through the stultifying practice of explanation, the teacher should presuppose that a student does not need the teacher's explanations in order to reach understanding. Similarly, in an excerpt cited multiple times in this thesis because it keeps fascinating me, Simons and Masschelein state that:

> … equality, for Rancière, is always 'intellectual equality' and intellect or intelligence, far from being psychometric notions, refer to an 'ability to'

> (speak, understand). Assuming that everyone is equal implies assuming that everyone (regardless of qualifications or other indications) is able to. (Simons & Masschelein, 2011b, p. 83)

Here, intelligence is understood not as the amount of knowledge someone possesses, but as an ability to speak and understand. In my view, these cannot be seen as separate in the way Simons and Masschelein propose, since even the ability to speak depends on the knowledge someone has of the language with which they attempt to express themselves. This confusion recalls once more my discussion of Rancière's equation between speech and expression. It seems that Simons and Masschelein take up this equation without further reflection, which leads to them to state that we could reasonably assume that everyone is able to speak. This is an absurdity since, obviously, not everyone is able to speak. However, it makes more sense when we consider that they use the word "speech" metaphorically to refer to expression, and that this further means *any* form of expression including, for example, a crying infant, who expresses basic feelings to their parents of, for example, hunger or cold. However, there is a problem, since there is still an inequality in the ability to understand someone else's expressions, as every parent whose children do *not* have words will attest to, in their attempts to appease to their infant's ceaseless cry for attention.

Later I will come back to this in discussion of the importance ascribed by Jacotot and Rancière to the process through which children acquire language. Furthermore, in order to understand someone else's expressions – as I have found during my adventures into Rancière's difficult works – can be dependent on having the knowledge needed to create meaning out of that which we try to understand.

Oscillations toward the second terrain

Leaving that critical note in suspension, I will now briefly summarise what I have discussed so far. There are two opposing "opinions" or presuppositions. The first is the presupposition of the inequality of intelligence, underlying a stultifying attitude toward teaching in which the teacher believes themselves to possess knowledge of the totality of their field. Because of this belief, they also believe that someone who has no such knowledge is not able to understand anything if it is not explained to them. The second is the presupposition of the equality of intelligence, underlying an emancipatory attitude toward teaching where the teacher, regardless of how much knowledge they possess, believes all students to be able to understand something without the interference of the teacher's explanations. They are thus an "ignorant schoolmaster" – not because they necessarily lack knowledge, but because the knowledge they may or may not possess is not relevant to

whether the way they teach is of a stultifying or emancipatory nature – and because they ignore the presupposition of inequality between themselves and their students. As Rancière puts it:

> The ignorant position is obviously exacerbated when the master really does not know what the student is supposed to learn. … Fundamentally, however, 'ignorant' means ignorant of inequality. Every normal pedagogical experience is structured by reasons of inequality. The ignorant schoolmaster is the one who does not know that and who communicates this ignorance, that is to say, this will to remain ignorant of inequality. (Rancière et al., 2005/2017, p. 179)

The contradiction

It seems, then, that my aim from the outset in this thesis has been to become a stultifying "master". What I wanted, first, was to understand a totality – Rancière's thought – in order to become an expert at it. Then, second, to be able to explicate the meaning of a fragment of that totality – TIS, or Rancière's "philosophy of education" – in light of my understanding of the whole, as I am doing in this chapter. Next, I wanted to continue from there in order to connect what I had learned to my reading of other thinkers and, in this way, develop a way of thinking about education. In this way, the totality of Rancière's thought would turn into a fragment of, and a portal into, a larger totality. It does seem to me that this process is in line with the first principle of Universal Teaching, the one which Rancière himself also applies as the leading principle of his methodology: 'one must learn something and relate everything else to it' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 20). Here I stress that it was my *will* to understand – or rather: *me, being a will* to understand, in allusion to the fourth terrain – which drove me in my striving through the lands of Rancière's world and beyond. Inspired by his proposal that everyone should be able to understand another person's expressions, my will specifically was to understand his written expressions. The will to understand thus played a crucial role in the research adventure: it functioned as its always present and underlying driving force.

However, a problem arose time and again: Rancière's writing (as well as his speech, in the significant amount of lectures and conversations that can be found online in English) turned out to be very difficult for me to understand. This was a significant issue, and it necessitated a change of plans. Instead of first becoming an expert in Rancière's works by reaching an understanding of them, in order to then use what I had learned as a basis for further thought, I had to stop in my tracks, consider what was happening, and turn the attempt to understand itself into the object of research.

Second terrain: Reflecting on "adventuring" during the adventure

What was I doing? Or: what was happening? Adventuring into Rancière's works provided an opportunity for me to reflect at the same time on what it might mean "to adventure". Or, in other words: being in the process of thinking about education by teaching myself about Rancière's writings (or letting myself be taught by them) allowed me to reflect on that process itself as something that can be called educational. From the outset, my interest lay in education as both a field of practice and of research. Accordingly, my reflections on the adventure were a way for me to inquire about what education may or may not be – where *education* is further understood as a form of *research* (or vice versa).

The adventure was thus a test, so to speak, of Rancière's educational principles through an application of those principles and a simultaneous reflection on what I observed myself doing. By trying to understand Rancière without a teacher to explain things to me, I was at the same time testing the claim that I could understand things by myself, without the explanations of a teacher. In this way, I discovered the tension already mentioned between my own understanding of understanding and Rancière's understanding of understanding. As McCreary has put it in a recently published article:

> Rancière appeals to his reader to understand his work not by unveiling its ideas or demystifying its theories, but rather by collaborating in its adventure. (McCreary, 2021, p. 744)

This view corresponds with the theme of depth and appearance already touched upon above: the stultifying master – the expert – is someone who can travel beyond the opacity of the veil covering a fragment, in order to explain the meaning of the fragment in relation to the whole of which it is a part. Trying to understand Rancière by uncovering the meaning hidden in his texts would therefore be in line with the ambitions of the stultifying master. Was that what I was doing? Following the latter kind of understanding observed by McCreary, I *did* understand Rancière: I perceived his book as an invitation to go on an adventure of my own, one which follows him but spirals away into other directions as well. But I did this by aiming for the first kind of understanding, for an "unveiling" of the ideas he had expressed – a search, in other words, for discovery, for uncovering something hidden, that is, for *explicating* something *implicit*. There was a clear tension between this aim and the remark made by Rancière earlier in the chapter, namely that a counter-translation of someone's words is always of the nature of an *invention*. This would mean that my ideas about his texts will never converge with the ideas he may believe to have expressed in the text. Yet I held on to the belief that it is possible to understand someone's ideas adequately

or inadequately, that they could be expressing something which is important to understand correctly in order to learn from their experience.

My aim, however, was thwarted by the fact that the meaning of many fragments in Rancière's texts remained, for me, opaque. There were several reasons for this. One is Rancière's ubiquitous allusions to a totality of which I have no adequate knowledge. His works are written against the horizon of a world of meaning, a world which is always implicitly present in his texts, and with which I am only partly familiar. There are many references to ideas, authors, theories, and so on, which I do not know and which he does not explicitly elaborate. Some examples, in random order, are: structuralism, Hegel, pragmatism, theories of aesthetics, constructivism. Without knowledge of the totality implicitly present in his works, many of the fragments presented to me by Rancière were impossible for me to comprehend. A second reason is that Rancière writes in a strange idiom which frequently does not make sense to me. Rancière himself underscores this strangeness in reference to TIS when he states that:

> … there is a kind of linguistic strangeness in my book that makes it very difficult to read. Readers have to do something; they have to muddle through a kind of strangeness. These are not the words that are usually used for speaking about matters of education and politics. (Rancière, 2008, p. 174)

Though this observation refers to TIS specifically, it most definitely pertains to most of his other works as well, even if his idiom in those works is not infused with Jacotot's words, as in TIS. As explored early in this chapter, the strangeness of Rancière's language is part of his argument, in the sense that his style is itself part of his argument. He thus also has the expectation of a certain way of reading, since:

> … the book was addressed to people who try to find not a new doctrine but a new way of dealing with words—with words and meanings. (Rancière, 2008, p. 174)

This part of the difficulty of understanding Rancière's texts thus relates to the call for a different way of reading, and a different understanding of understanding, and of what language does and does not do.

A further observation I have made is that, in the language he uses, Rancière often alludes not only to a totality, but also to a plural subject who possesses knowledge of that totality. There are many examples throughout his works, such as his pervasive use of the phrase "of course". Let me here mention another example: in an oft-cited article titled "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" Rancière begins with the following three words: 'As we know' (Rancière, 2004, p. 298). What we know, he continues, is the 'cogency' (Rancière,

2004, p. 298) that the question in the title of the article has taken on during the last ten years of the twentieth century. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Rancière observes, human rights had come to be viewed as:

> … the charter of the irresistible movement leading to a peaceful posthistorical world where global democracy would match the global market of liberal economy. (Rancière, 2004, p. 298)

The tension I felt when reading this came from the fact that I did *not* know about this supposedly irresistible movement (though I could sense the irony expressed by Rancière); or what he meant by a posthistorical world; or how global democracy had been supposed to match the global market of liberal economy; or even, really, what the notion of liberal economy refers to. This lack of knowledge conjured up images of people expecting me to know these things, since I have a Master's degree, which implies that I am a "master" who is supposed to know the totality. As a result, feelings of shame and embarrassment surfaced. I felt like an ignoramus: it was frustrating.

I mentioned my frustration to someone, and he explained to me that the notion of the posthistorical was an allusion to the American political scientist Fukuyama's notion of "the end of history". In 1989 – shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and one year after I was born – Fukuyama argued that history had come to an end, because the last and final stage of the political and economic organisation of the world had been reached: Western liberal democracy. Fukuyama claimed that:

> … the triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism. (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 3)

This is the idea which Rancière expressed irony towards, though he does not mention what he is alluding to, so that the reference remains implicit. Immediately following the previous excerpt from his text, Rancière writes:

> As is well known, things did not exactly go that way. In the following years, the new landscape of humanity, freed from utopian totalitarianism, became the stage of new outbursts of ethnic conflicts and slaughters, religious fundamentalisms, or racial and xenophobic movements. (Rancière, 2004, p. 298)

Here, again, Rancière seems to assume that the way in which history had unfolded itself in the fifteen years between Fukuyama's article and his own – not at all in the peaceful manner implied by Fukuyama, but rather by a perpetuation and even intensification of violence – was *well known*. My question remains with this statement: who is the subject of

this “well-known” knowledge evoked by Rancière? Is he implying a distinction between those who know and those who do not know? Maybe implicit in the phrase is an invitation to join the knowers. Could it be that the knowledge of injustice is exactly what is missing in the Western hegemonic worldview? I believe this is the case: there is a lack of knowledge about what is going on, though it does certainly seem true that this lack, or “ignorance”, is often not the result of an incapacity but of a lack of will: not a passive state of lack, but an active choice to ignore.

It seems to me, in other words, that the world presented in a statement such as Fukuyama’s – which he has revised himself in recent years – implies an image of the West, and thus of Europe, as a utopia. Utopia was originally conceived by More (1516/1997) as a perfect island state where violence does not take place; something that only happens in inferior countries, away from the island. Maybe this is the kind of world implicitly presented to Europeans in media and in education: a world where violence exists, but only elsewhere, where the lives of people matter less than ours. This image was exemplified when a member of Britain’s leading aristocracy (“Prince William”) exclaimed, regarding the violence waged after the invasion of Russia’s army in Ukraine, that it is ‘almost unfathomable. For our generation, it’s very alien to see this in Europe’ (Mountbatten-Windsor, 2022). Though backlash did follow this statement, it seems to me that it is an indication of a more widely held view shared by many Europeans and Americans, for whom war is something that belongs elsewhere (either in space or in time). This was precisely the image called on by Ukraine when, after the invasion by Russia, they kept emphasising that Ukraine was in the middle of Europe – implying that this was not supposed to happen there. Such an understanding of utopia would agree with Rancière’s own observation, in a text he wrote in 1988, that:

> … utopia is not the elsewhere, nor the future realization of an unfulfilled dream. It is an intellectual construction which brings a place in thought into conjunction with a perceived or perceptible intuitive space. (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 15)

Although it is not clear to me what Rancière means by ‘intuitive space’, the excerpt nonetheless makes some sense to me. On the one hand, there is the “utopian totalitarianism” which imagines a perfect future society to be realised over time. On the other hand, there is utopia as a place in thought which can be perceived in the world in which we live – that is, the way in which we make sense of things in the world is perceived in conjunction with the imagined place we hold in our mind. For example, the image of a world in which the West is conceived to be the force of good battling the armies of evil is brought into conjunction

with the notion that American interventionist wars across the globe are of a less nefarious nature than the invasion waged by Russia into its neighbouring country.

A completely different example of the second kind of utopia is the way in which Verburgh et al. propose to view the school, namely as an *impossible reality*:

> Rather than looking for a utopia in the future, we point to a utopia intrinsically linked with thinking about the school, not as a desirable yet unrealizable vision, but as a fascinating and inescapable starting point. Our thesis is that the idea of the school, and what a school stands for, always was and is based on a utopian idea. The utopian idea that school is built upon is succinctly worded as follows: 'Everyone can learn everything.' This is clearly an impossible reality, which means that the school as the place where actually everyone is enabled to learn everything is a real utopia. (Verburgh et al., 2016, p. 263)

This view of the school as a utopia, defined as an impossible reality that is at the same time a starting point from which to think, is an expression of Rancière's presupposition or opinion of the equality of intelligence as a starting place. Such a space relates to the image conjured by Simons of the teacher as someone who seeks mastery and invites the student to do the same. Jacotot and Rancière's view is, in my reading, more commanding than simply an invitation. For them, the master (in the sense of "emancipatory teacher") is someone who 'encloses an intelligence in the arbitrary circle from which it can only break out by becoming necessary to itself' (Rancière, 1991, p. 15). Here, intelligence seems to refer to a person. And in the way I read this, the emancipatory teacher can be anyone or even anything that forces a person to reveal themselves as someone who is not a brute but someone who operates in a world in which everyone shares an equal capacity for thought.

Having spiralled into a small side-adventure of thought, then, I could reflect back on my own frustration and what it had led to. The frustration took on the form of a demand, urging me to persist in seeking out the prerequisites necessary for understanding – that is, figuring out – Rancière's words. Here, reflecting on my own frustration – which was coupled by fascination, another allusion to the fourth terrain – I noticed a similarity with the frustration of a child who wants to speak but does not yet know a language with which to do so. They want to know a totality – a language – in order to be able to express themselves and communicate with the others around them who already know the totality. This is an important theme in Rancière, because he offers the scene of the child learning a language as the prime example of the fact that we can – and, in fact, do so naturally from a very early age – learn and understand without an expert to explain things to us. Deploying a different sense of intelligence from the one above, he states that:

> … what all human children learn best is what no master can explain: the mother tongue. We speak to them and we speak around them. They hear and retain, imitate and repeat, make mistakes and correct themselves, succeed by chance and begin again methodically, and, at too young an age for explicators to begin instructing them, they are almost all— regardless of gender, social condition, and skin color— able to understand and speak the language of their parents. And only now does this child who learned to speak through his own intelligence and through instructors who did not explain language to him— only now does his instruction, properly speaking, begin. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 5)

In this excerpt Rancière describes the shift from the child learning a language by themselves to the moment where stultification begins to take hold: the moment where the teacher as expert interjects between the child and their adventure, establishing the idea in the child that they cannot adventure without anyone else to assist them. Here it seems to me that Rancière is using the word "speech" not metaphorically but literally. The same argument would apply to other forms of communication such as sign language. Still, where expression seems to have been something very general for Rancière, here he is referring specifically to the human capacity to learn language, a capacity not possessed by other animals. This might mean, though, that the equal capacity for language still exists unequally between adults and infants, because it only exists potentially for infants. Perhaps equality only becomes manifest some time after birth, when children start to engage linguistically with those around them.

Similarly then to when I learned a language – a process which took me years and was extremely difficult and frustrating, yet I, like almost everyone else, succeeded because I really wanted it to. Here, too, I wanted to act on my will to understand, to know the totality in order to be able to participate in the linguistic community of which I sensed I was not a part. Yet I felt that I lacked the knowledge necessary for my will to go further, from understanding to action. It is in light of this that I am especially moved by the following words of Jacotot, cited by Rancière:

> "Man is an animal who can tell very well when a speaker doesn't know what he's talking about" ; " that ability is what unites us as humans". (Rancière, 1987/1991, pp. 31-32)

This statement implies to me that it is possible to know, and that it is sometimes better not to speak than to speak without knowing what one is talking about. Yet this in turn seems to imply a tension with the important role played by ignorance in Rancière's works, and, especially, his proposal that everyone can participate in political action. This is contrasted by a belief which I suppose to be prevalent, namely that one needs to know what one is talking about before one can participate in politics. This is certainly a belief I have observed in myself, which is why I have often refrained from participating in political discussions or

demonstrations. I did not believe myself intelligent enough – in the sense that I did not know enough of what was going on in order to say something meaningful about it. Yet now it also seems to me that to justify inaction on the basis of an ignorance of what is going on can, at the same time, be a justification for an active decision to ignore what is going on. Moreover, in light of my reading of Rancière, it seems that more can be said as well. A question Rancière seems to raise is: what knowledge counts? Take the remark by Mountbatten-Windsor cited above. He seems to be speaking from a place of knowledge: the knowledge that Europe, unlike other parts of the world, is not a place where war is supposed to happen. Yet this is at the same time an ignorance of – a choice to ignore – the necessity for a different kind of war to be waged so the super-wealthy can keep their wealth. Rancière's works (notably Rancière (1993/1994) and Rancière (2006) on the "poetics of knowledge" and the "aesthetics of knowledge" respectively) taught me about this doubling of knowledge/ignorance.

It was perhaps inevitable, but the shift toward the third terrain happened without my realisation. A recurrent character on the stage constructed so far has been my wish to reach an understanding of the totality of Rancière's thought in order to better understand a fragment, his educational thought. Rancière's thought generally relates to politics, aesthetics, and the way in which these two themes blend together – often in reference to historical periods and events. Engaging with his political and historical thought urged me to learn about things in the world by following his references to things in that world. It was thus on the third terrain that I began to engage with the relationship between political events, knowledge, and the question of the truth of what was going on.

Third terrain: Learning about things in the world by following Rancière's gestures

As discussed in Chapter 4, one of the main motivations for me to conduct my inquiry into Rancière's works specifically was the way in which he discusses the notion of *truth*. I had encountered some fragments, some events that implied a muddled status of truth in our times. These events were significant, but I did not feel capable of understanding what they meant without knowing more about the totality of which I supposed they were a part. One of those fragments was the Brexit vote, and the other was the election of Donald Trump as the new president of the United States. Before this, in the same year (2016), another event happened which I had somehow managed to forget about (and thus ignore) until recent developments reminded me of it: the Dutch referendum concerning an Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine. This agreement had already been

approved by the government, but through a public advisory referendum the people in the Netherlands decided to pull out, though the government ultimately decided to ignore the result of the referendum.

All three of these events, consisting of public votes and thus connected in some way to the notion of "democracy", had something in common: they were preceded by blatant disinformation campaigns. All three entailed a whirlwind of truths and non-truths, knowledges and ignorances. Not long after the president's election, his counsellor Kellyanne Conway uttered the phrase "alternative facts" as a euphemism for the president's many obvious lies, while the president himself began to refer to everything he disagreed with as "fake news". With this, they showed how the meaning of truth had become a point of contestation in public debate – or perhaps this had always been the case, in which instance the relevance was that it became clear to me in that moment. Others also recognised the significance of what was happening, and the word "post-truth" became a way to describe our times (Harsin, 2015; Oxford Languages, 2016; Peters et al., 2018). In the years that followed, news media showed how both the Brexit referendum and the vote for the US presidency had been manipulated by a company called Cambridge Analytica, which took private information from social media accounts – most notably Facebook – in order to send targeted ads influencing and steering people's opinions and perceptions (Cadwalladr, 2017; Rosenberg, Confessore & Cadwalladr, 2018; Granville, 2018). It was said that 'our democracy was hijacked' (Cadwalladr, 2017, n.p.).

These observations might explain, to an extent, why events that had been dismissed as virtually impossible by many 'serious commentators' (Wijnberg, 2017, n.p.) had happened anyway. They can also once more be understood as fragments pointing to a larger whole. Harsin (2015) describes this whole as a 'regime of posttruth' (p. 327), in allusion to Foucault's notion of "regimes of truth". This regime consists of deliberately produced "truth markets", in which:

> … populations corresponding to beliefs and opinions are planned, produced, and managed by big data-driven predictive analytics and resource-rich strategic communication. (Harsin, 2015, p. 330)

These markets were clearly tapped into in the aforementioned electoral events. The campaigns leading to the votes were only some of the campaigns influenced by Cambridge Analytica or its parent company SCL (BBC, 2018). Describing our times as a post-truth era can thus be coupled with the observation that we live within an *attention economy*, which is:

> … constituted by two types of transactions: those in which consumers give new media developers their literal attention in exchange for a service (such as a

> news feed or access to pictures of friends), and those in which developers auction off consumer attention to advertisers. (Castro & Pham, 2020, p. 2)

The ways in which our attention is constantly captured thus range from an overwhelming abundance of ads aimed at selling products, to influencing our political views, to the very way in which we perceive the reality of which we are a part. Influencing and shaping public opinion is not in itself new, however; even if the ways in which it is done are. Ross (2009) recalls an article written by Rancière after the American invasion in Iraq, in which he:

> … wrote about the seamless integration of capital, state, military, and media power achieved in the United States during the months preceding the invasion. (Ross, 2009, p. 16)

She connects this to a covert CIA operation put in place in 1983 by President Ronald Raegan titled 'Perception Management', which consisted of a set of 'media techniques later to be perfected by the George W. Bush administration' (Ross, 2009, pp. 15-16) and which aimed at swaying public opinion within the country to support its hegemonising foreign policies in Central America. She then explains the significance of her encounter with Rancière's works in relation to her observation that perceptions were shaped in order to establish *consensus* among the population, in a time in which 'consensus first comes to be taken for granted as the optimum political gesture or goal' (Ross, 2009, p. 16).

For me, Ross' explanations in turn clarified something about what Rancière is doing, and also *why* he is doing it. Like Ross, he observed how intimately perception is connected to politics, and he has consistently striven to construct a language with which to more adequately give meaning to this connection. This also sheds more light on the importance of *attention* in relation to education as discussed in TIS. The shaping of consensus works by capturing the attention of groups of people in a certain way, forming a connecting between them in the way in which they perceive the world and themselves.

Crawford (2015) analyses our times – which he terms the 'age of distraction' (p. 12) – through the multiplicity of distractions that we are called upon to navigate on a daily basis. He observes a resulting fragmentation of our mental lives, coupled with a diminished capacity for maintaining a coherent sense of self. This certainly echoes my reflective observations in this thesis, especially in Chapter 4. He further relates this to the way in which we have come to understand the self in line with the liberal tradition: in terms of a 'resolutely individualistic understanding of freedom and rationality' (Crawford, 2015, p. 21). Included in this highly individualistic understanding of the self is the idea that our preferences are the

expression of an authentic, independent self, and the freedom to satisfy one's preferences is an irrefutable right belonging to all. Furthermore, Crawford argues that:

> … the resolutely individualistic understanding of freedom and rationality we have inherited from the liberal tradition disarms the critical faculties we need most in order to grapple with the large-scale societal pressures we now face. (Crawford, 2015, p. 21)

Furthering the insight that our times call upon us to navigate a multiplicity of distractions, Crawford (2015) further observes a diminished engagement with activities that 'structure our attention' (p. 27, emphasis removed). He calls these activities 'ecologies of attention', defined as 'narrow and highly structured patterns of attention' (Crawford, 2015, p. 27). He argues that the growing absence of these kinds of practices coincides with a fragmentation of the mind.

One example he gives of such activities are rituals provided by traditions, but he more emphatically draws our attention to the importance in this regard of *skilled practices*. This, for me, connects to Jacotot's view of skilled practices as forms of expression, as language. It will also connect to my discussion of fascination – because what Crawford proposes about skilled practices is very close to what I believe fascination can be about: to engage in an adventure with something in order to expand the self, to be pulled away from the self into something outside of it by sustained attention and by learning how to care for something. Crawford (2015) describes attention as 'the faculty that joins us to the world' (p. 24), which is perceived with suspicion in an age in which autonomy – understood as independence from everything outside of us – is considered to be the highest good.

On this third terrain I was thus explicitly engaging with the themes at hand as someone who has little knowledge and is driven to pursue more knowledge from the will to understand. In other words, I was doing what many people are doing every day in response to what we see on the news: trying to figure out what is going on. Travelling this terrain allowed me to observe my ignorance – which, I found, is partly a result of stultification – in order to understand better how knowledge and ignorance are deployed as a means of domination, of steering our attention to some parts of reality and not to others. The notions of signification and attention have come to play a central role here: why are certain events, movements, people given significance while others are not? That is, why do people give attention to some things, and not to others? Why, for example, did Theresa May speak with disdain about Greta Thunberg's plea to humanity to change our destructive way of living on the basis that she was only a child (McGuinness, 2019)? Why did it take me so long to realise what has been happening for generations in Palestine? Why did I not understand the

significance of picket lines until quite recently? How does education contribute to the selection we make in the things we attend to and signify, and how we give meaning to them? And what is the role played by knowledge and ignorance in processes of oppression and emancipation? These questions are part of the study of *agnotology* (see Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). Unfortunately, space and time do not allow me to delve further into this topic here – such excavations will have to be conducted in further adventures. For now, the spiral will turn inward, not to the question of ignorance, but to the question of that which ignores: to the self, understood as will.

Fourth terrain: Discovering the self as will

This is an entry point to the fourth terrain, where I begin with a reminder that my fascination, as my research question indicates, lay from the outset with Rancière's concept of *emancipation*. As discussed in Chapter 6, Rancière opposes the forms of critical theory that equate emancipation with an accumulation of more knowledge, which is provided by the educator in the stultifying manner described above. For Rancière as I understand him, emancipation is rather an event which is intimately related to his concept of the *will*. At one point, he describes the will as 'that self-reflection by the reasonable being who knows himself in the act' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 57). A prime example is given by Rancière in a scene which he often recounts throughout his works, and which describes what he has called a 'micro-event' (Rancière, Jeanpierre & Zabunyan, 2012/2016, p. 82). The event, already alluded to several times above, and which I will now finally discuss, revolves around Gabriel Gauny, who was one of the writers from the 19th-century French working class who Rancière encountered during his archival travels, and whose writings fascinated him to the extent that he republished them in a book (Gauny & Rancière, 1983).

In this event, the 19th-century writer Gauny gazes out of the window and imagines himself to be the owner of the mansion which he is helping to build, but which he will never himself be able to possess. Gauny later writes about what took place, in third person, about himself:

> Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out on a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighboring residences. (Gauny, cited in Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 81)

Less often recounted by Rancière is how the story continues. As Gauny gazes out the window, he sees:

> … two of the buildings that the spirit of enterprise and the spirit of reform have succeeded in erecting in these years: the factory and the cellular prison. (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 87)

Shortly after, Gauny goes on an adventure to one of the two buildings, a monstrosity: a prison built as a perfect panopticon. Inducing a prison guard with copious amounts of wine to show him around, he is appalled by the horror he encounters. The prison is built in such a way that the prisoners are completely cut off from any communication with each other and with the outside world. It is also built in such a way that escape is made utterly impossible. Rancière therefore has Gauny ask:

> How is it that those who build these flawless structures are not conscious of the fact that they are building a tomb for their brothers? (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 89)

Gauny further observes that the prisoners can never escape the gaze of the prison guards – the panoptic element of the prison. They are therefore at every moment of the day subject to the gaze of those who have taken away their liberty – something which reminds him of the way in which he was continuously subjected to the gaze of his bosses who exploited his body during long hours of daily labour.

Emancipation is here then an event in which a body which thought itself powerless begins to demonstrate the universal power of reason manifested in its own actions; that is, in the expressions of itself, as a will, by making use of its intelligence. It entails specifically the power to *perceive*: to make sense of what one senses. Emancipation is a reappropriation of one's own gaze, one's own power to perceive, coupled with the realisation that perceiving is a form of action (Rancière, 2008/2009). Based on my reading of Rancière's definition of the will on the previous page, emancipation is viewed here, first, as a cognitive event: the being *knows* themselves in the act. Rancière seems to be using the word "knowledge" here in quite a different sense from when he laments how the stultifying teacher boasts about the knowledge they possess (English has one word, knowledge, whereas French, like many other European languages, have two). Crucial, in any case, is precisely that there are multiple forms of knowledge which overlap here: the expert has knowledge simultaneously of the totality at which they are an expert, as well as of the distinction between the class of experts and the class of ignoramuses.

Emancipation is, secondly, also an affective event, in which one feels on a deeply intuitive level that one is expressing one's own will, feels one's own feelings, makes use of one's own senses to perceive the world, and, ultimately, acts in an expression of oneself as a will. The emancipated body – stated as an ideal, regardless of whether this may or may not

be fully actualised – thus also acts in a way free from the influence of internalised oppressive forces aimed at diminishing own's power to be and to grow by going on adventures. My own will was to understand Rancière. I wanted to be able to recognise and feel, in my own experience, the meaning of *will*, which was – and I consider this to be a specifically educational process – at the same time a search for my self, for who and how I am. Recalling my reflections on "understanding" earlier, in this fourth terrain I learned about my own motivations while reflecting on them during the adventure. Considering what my motivations were gave me an indication of my own will, of what I had apparently, and implicitly, been wanting to do. My further question then became: from where does my will arise? Why is it that I want to understand? Do I want to be an expert because I am stultified and want to stultify others? Or, conversely, could it be that I have been stultified and that this has led to me refraining from becoming an expert? To answer this question directly: I believe the latter is the case, though I will not expound on this, since it would involve me writing about the influence on me of people who have given me no permission to write about them. Important to me here is Rancière's insistence that 'there are no men of great thoughts, only men of great expressions' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 69). My realisation has been that the suppression of the will to understand, related to the will to develop forms of expression, can itself be a form of stultification. If expression is then understood as power, then developing forms of expression (related to Crawford's notion of skilled practices evoked above) can be a way to increase our power *to be*. I have thus also become critical of the post-qualitative perspective which I was still much more drawn to in the beginning of the thesis. I do not discard it wholesale, but I think its anti-scientific attitude goes too far in rejections of the possibility to represent the world with language; to understand things better and to become more powerful as a person in order express meaning better; and even to address more adequately matters of injustice.

This connects to my reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* (1996) as discussed in Chapter 2. The reason I started a side-adventure into that book was initially because my supervisors pointed me to it. It was also because I needed to get away from Rancière's works long enough in order to protect myself from the detrimental effects on my sanity of being in a state of confusion for as long as I had been at that point. Spinoza, too, equates the self with the will, stating that 'the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing' (Spinoza, 1996, IIIP7). The idea of this fundamental striving to persevere (or *conatus*), which he also calls will, is further explicated by Spinoza as the inherent drive to increase or aid our mind's power of thinking, as well as our body's power of acting. The similarities between Jacotot's equation of the will and the self and Spinoza's

idea of the conatus fascinated me – after which the observation itself that I had been fascinated in turn fascinated me. This led me to an inquiry into the meaning of fascination, learning about its etymological roots in the Latin *fascino*, meaning 'enchant, bewitch, charm, fascinate'. It occurred to me that becoming fascinated by something was like being charmed by it, yet in a way in which the will has not been dulled, such as in the case of stultification. This relates again to Crawford's discussion of skilled practices. Crawford states that:

> … genuine agency arises not in the context of mere choices freely made (as in shopping) but rather, somewhat paradoxically, in the context of *submission* to things that have their own intractable ways, whether the thing be a musical instrument, a garden, or the building of a bridge. (Crawford, 2015, p. 27)

Now, as already stated, Crawford highlights the value of attention to things that fascinate us. This includes the observation that is those things outside of us that teach us the ways in which we interact with them. Crawford contrasts this with the Western belief in autonomy. So too did I become interested in the notion of the will in relation to the notion of autonomy. This has been an important concept in education for a long time (see, for example, Dearden, 1972). We are a body striving to persevere and increase our power to act and think, while simultaneously being moved by outside forces which charm us and draw us toward them: 'Will is the power to be moved' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 54). Rancière also takes up the concept, but he redefines it:

> … "Autonomy" has been a key concept in modern emancipatory politics. But it must be understood correctly. It does not mean the autonomous power of a subject as opposed to external forces: it means a form of thinking, practice and organization free from the presupposition of inequality, free from the hierarchical constraint and the hierarchical belief. (Rancière, 2017, para. 3)

This fragment makes sense in light of the observation that the whole of Rancière's works is always about searching for ways of expressing the possibility of equality as a presupposition underlying the way we think, perceive, and act. I referenced this earlier by noticing that his idiosyncratic use of the word "opinion" refers to this kind of presupposition.

Aesthetic experience

Rancière seems to propose that in order to combat the stultifying tendencies of explanatory forms of pedagogy – including, in his view, many of the existing forms of critical pedagogy – we need to think about education in relation to having an aesthetic experience. This word is often used in order to denote art theory. It can also be used more broadly to 'that which is directly related to sensory perception: derived from the Greek

aesthetikos which means to feel or pertain to the senses' (Todd, 2020, p. 1113). Rancière has introduced a still different way of understanding the concept of aesthetics:

> … aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 8)

This concept of aesthetics is central to Rancière's philosophy, as well as in the way it has been taken up by other Rancièrian adventurers (e.g. Lewis, 2012; Panagia, 2018; Todd, 2018). I will therefore discuss it in what follows.

The first things to note about Rancière's discussion of aesthetics, is that it entails a direct critique of the sociology of Bourdieu, who is an often recurring antagonist throughout Rancière's works. Rancière is inspired in his use of the word aesthetics by his reading of Kant who proposed, teaches Rancière, that humans are capable of entering a state of experience he called 'aesthetic judgment' or 'aesthetic apprehension' (Rancière, 2006, p. 1) or the 'aesthetic gaze' (Quintana, 2018, p. 6). In this state, someone perceives an object neither as an object of knowledge nor as an object of desire. What is therefore also irrelevant in this state are 'the reasons which render an object desirable or offensive' (Rancière, 2006, p. 1). Taking up an example from Kant himself, Rancière mentions the aesthetic apprehension of a palace. A palace can be perceived as an object of desire (for the purveyors of decadence who will own and live in it) or as an object of offense (for those who have worked long hours to build it for little to no recompense, yet will never participate in the pleasures it will bring). Both of these forms of judgement must be *ignored* – Rancière emphasises the word in his text – in order to appreciate the palace aesthetically. There is thus a 'will to ignorance' involved in this state (Rancière, 2006, p. 2).

Entering the stage now: the central dispute Rancière has with Bourdieu. The latter's sociology entails extensive surveys in which he seeks to establish the way in which people's taste is determined by their social origin. He finds that the state of appreciating objects aesthetically is only possible for those who possess the capacity to do so – for those, in other words, who have been educated in a certain way, and therefore possess the cultural capital necessary for relating to objects through an aesthetic gaze. He argues (in characteristically confusing language) that:

> Whereas, in order to grasp the specificity of the aesthetic judgement, Kant strove to distinguish that which pleases from that which gratifies and, more generally, to distinguish disinterestedness, the sole guarantor of the specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from the interest of reason which defines

> the Good, working-class people expect every image to explicitly perform a function, if only that of a sign, and their judgements make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness. Whether rejecting or praising, their appreciation always has an ethical basis. (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 32)

In other words, working class people can only appreciate objects on an *ethical* basis, but never on an *aesthetic* basis. Again, he states that, when confronted with the picture of an old woman's hands, the:

> … culturally most deprived express a more or less conventional emotion or an ethical complicity but never a specifically aesthetic judgement. (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, p. 71)

So people from the lower classes see the hands of the woman in the photograph and respond to it in a way in which they describe exactly what they think about the woman's hands – they are deformed, she might have arthritis, she must have been working hard, and so on. Those from the higher classes however are able to perceive the picture as a thing of beauty, or as a means through which to reflect in an abstract way on life and society. As Bennett summarises Bourdieu's findings:

> In the case of the bourgeoisie, he finds a unified principle for its cultural tastes in the Kantian principle of disinterestedness; that is, of a liking unguided by any calculations of utility. As the antithesis to this, the habitus comprised by the working class' 'culture of the necessary' subordinates aesthetic considerations of form to functional considerations. (Bennett, 1984, p. 25)

So the distinction between the classes, says Bourdieu, is upheld through the different capacities they have in relating to the world. These capacities are part of what he calls *habitus*. This concept refers to the dispositions people have in relation to the class of which they are a part. He relates it to the word "ethos", about which Rancière states the following:

> Before recalling law, morality or value, ethos indicates the abode. … Further, it indicates the way of being which corresponds to this abode, the way of feeling and thinking which belongs to whoever occupies any given place. (Rancière, 2006, p. 5)

The habitus is thus a certain way of being in which one feels at home, the often unconscious ways in which we are inclined to act and express ourselves – and, in relation to the discussion above, the ways in which we are inclined to perceive (make sense of) ourselves and the world around us. Moreover, the habitus works unconsciously, implicitly allowing us, as Ross states,

> … to practice an accumulation of collective experiences without knowing we are doing so. For Bourdieu, it goes without saying because it comes without saying. (Ross, 2009, p. 20)

Lane observes that Bourdieu thus understands class or social identity in the following way:

> An agent's class identity is defined by their possession of a range of statistically measurable attributes, in the form of the kind and amount of economic, intellectual and cultural capital they possess. However, in a second move, those positive attributes are taken to form an ideal core, a unity and identity of experience and feeling incorporated into a shared ethos and habitus. (Lane, 2013, p. 37)

For Bourdieu, continues Lane, 'a class explicitly expresses the values and experiences incorporated into the unspoken assumptions of its socially determined ethos and habitus' (Lane, 2013, p. 38). So our habitus, which is what we form through our education, is what unconsciously *determines* the way we relate to the world. This is a depressing image. In Rancière's critique of Bourdieu – and he expands this critique to pretty much the whole field of sociology, and even further to the very organisation of academic fields of research into disciplines separated by strict boundaries – he explicitly denounces the way in which identity is taken to be a totality, expressed in the fragments that are the individuals who are part of – or are supposed to be part of – that identity. Instead, he searches for ways in which people who were supposed to express their identity expressed something else entirely.

This must thus be why he attaches such great significance to Gauny's scene. Rancière believes that Gauny entered the aesthetic state when he gazed out the window, and he finds this highly significant, because according to his interpretation of Bourdieu, Gauny's working class background would have excluded him from possessing the capacity to enter that state. Quintana (2018, 2020) has extensively analysed Gauny's scene and emphasises the way in which Gauny comes to relate in a different way to himself as a body through a movement of *torsion*. In his momentary state of contemplation, Gauny achieved:

> … a reconnection with the body, its rhythms, its gestures, and its mobility, as if thought were this very mobility pleasantly re-experienced by a body in its different possibilities of movement, interruption, disjunction, exploration, and observation. (Quintana, 2018, p. 5)

The way in which Gauny reconnects with his body, according to Quintana, reminds me strongly of the way in which I have tried to understand the self as will. It is a shift in perception, of perceiving oneself 'no longer as an observed body, but as an observing one' (Quintana, 2018, p. 5). Quintana further proposes on the basis of her analysis that:

> … intellectual emancipation is, above all, a certain mobility of the body that divides and reconfigures it, opening it up to other forms of feeling, perceiving, and imagining. (Quintana, 2018, p. 21).

This ties back in then to the notion of the *partage du sensible*, already alluded to several times above. Gauny's reappropriation of self was a reappropriation of his capacity to perceive the world differently. Through the aesthetic reappropriation of his senses, Gauny was able to *reconfigure* the way he made sense of the world around him. 'The aesthetic dimension' of an experience like Gauny's, writes Quintana elsewhere,

> … refers to how we produce, make, or find sense, to the manner in which we identify something as "real" or "given," on the basis of certain ways of configuring it. It also refers to how identifications of this type always involve assembling and disassembling, a certain relation of sense and sense …: between sense (the established meanings) and the sensed (the endured, the affects, the perceived); between certain boundaries and positions of corporeality that define and distribute a common space. Thus, to become aware of this fundamental aesthetic dimension is to acknowledge that we understand, feel, are affected, and have experiences on the basis of certain "distributions of the sensible" (*partages du sensible*), that is, on the basis of the conditions of possibility of these experiences, which have emerged historically and give rise to a socially accepted community of sense and perception. (Quintana, 2020, p. 24)

We perceive the world in certain ways passed down to us through the generations and held in place through mechanisms of propriety and acceptability, of what is normal and abnormal, prescribed as possible or impossible. The notion of the *partage du sensible* is central to Rancière's later works. As already mentioned above, I have discovered that his discussion of it is a continuation and further explication of his use of the word "opinion" in TIS. It was already present there, and it was also already present in his earlier work *Proletarian Nights*. But my mission was to understand Rancière's wider works in order to be able to embed the meaning of TIS into the context of the whole. Therefore, my attempt to understand what the *partage du sensible* is about is a way to connect my discussion of the self as will – and, importantly, a reappropriation of the self and thus the will – to Rancière's conceptual constellation. This is therefore what I will do in what follows.

Partage du sensible

Let me begin by reiterating that Rancière, following Jacotot, proposes that there are two circles: the circle of powerlessness and the circle of power. The latter is not simply a circle but a spiral, a swerve away from the gravity of the social body, toward ways of perceiving, ways of feeling, ways of doing, and ways of expressing that are different from the ones prescribed to us. The circle of powerlessness, on the other hand, is a perpetual

pattern of cause and effect in which children are taught – in schools and outwith them – that they do not belong to the class of beings destined to express themselves in a significant way; that they cannot understand what is really going on in the world; and that they do not have the ability to exert influence in a meaningful way on their community or society. Through the circle of powerlessness, the inegalitarian lines that structure society are perpetuated over time through the education of children, who will internalise the *fictional* boundaries that demand of everyone that they stay within their place, both literally and metaphorically speaking. The term "fictional" is used by Rancière in a specific way – which he takes from Aristotle – and I will elaborate on this in more detail below.

These boundaries are constituted by a set of *a priori* beliefs preceding the ways in which people perceive both themselves and others. They are implicitly presupposed to be part of nature, and therefore universal and unchangeable. Hence the importance of the notion of causality here, alluded to by Rancière in the materialist metaphor he employs in his discussion of *truth*: an absent star around which everyone is in orbit but on which no one can ever settle. Unlike his "Bourdieu", Rancière believes, as did Jacotot, that gravity never fully takes hold of us, and the chain of cause and effect can therefore always be thwarted.

In order to dissent from the gravity of these fictional boundaries and hierarchies, Rancière draws from ancient Greek atomists a metaphor in which he compares individual human beings to atoms, falling in parallel trajectories in an infinite void[33]. This void *precedes* all human communities and societies, which are thus grounded on nothing – they are *anarchic*. This is also why the habitus cannot be of the determinist nature Bourdieu espouses. Unlike the universal and immutable laws of nature, which force matter in predetermined directions, social laws only exist as long as they are agreed upon, and they are thus contingent. But what Rancière seems to be discussing is not primarily the written laws that comprise the justice system, but rather something more fundamental: the *implicit* laws and boundaries that work on freely floating human bodies like black holes, pulling them toward one another until they become a homogeneous mass of mindless machines acting as if they are a unified whole. Emancipation is about a *swerve*, as in Gauny's "as if" microevent, in relation to which Rancière observes the following:

> A different society presupposes the production of a different humanity, not a destructive confrontation with the master or the bourgeois class, because the healing of the ill entails the singular asceticism of rebellion and its apostolic propagation, the illusion of emancipation is not a nonrecognition reproducing domination but the twisted path whose circle comes as close as possible to this

[33] See Lewis (2012) and Spencer (2015) who both explain that Rancière was inspired by Althusser in making use of this metaphor.

> reproduction, but with an already crucial swerve or digression. (Rancière, 1981/2012, p. 82)

In passing I note here that this "nonrecognition" is in allusion to Bourdieu, which is not explained by Rancière, so that it is only possible to understand this if one has the required knowledge, and those who do not are excluded from such understanding. That said – these laws play on the *aesthetic* level, in what Rancière refers to as 'a certain modality, a certain *distribution of the sensible*' (Rancière, 2009c, p. 2, emphases added). This term is the translation most often given to *partage du sensible*[34]. It is defined and used by Rancière in various ways throughout his works. The following definition seems most relevant here:

> We will call partage du sensible a generally implicit law that defines the forms of part-taking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed, the nemein [distribution] upon which are founded the nomoi [laws] of the community. This partage should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, that which separates and excludes; on the other, that which allows participation. (Rancière, 2001, cited in Chambers, 2014, p. 6)

There are thus implicit modes of perception (see also Rancière, 2000, p. 16) which found the way people act together. These modes of perception structure the ways in which people make sense of the world in a shared way, prescribing who is included and who is excluded: who gets to participate and who does not. They also prescribe who can be perceived as significant (such as the wealthy) and who should be perceived as insignificant (such as the anonymous masses working to produce our clothes in sweatshops). They are thus also referred to by Rancière with the term *consensus*, which etymologically can mean something like "an agreed upon way of perceiving together". For Rancière:

> … consensus means that whatever your personal commitments, interests, and values may be, you perceive the same things, you give them the same name. (Rancière, 2001, n.p.)

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[34] Following a suggestion made in conversation by Carl Anders Säfström, I have chosen to use the original French term *partage du sensible*. It has been translated in several ways, including "distribution of the sensible", "partition of the perceptible", "division of the sensible", and "configuration of the sensible". But as is often the case, Rancière is playing with ambiguity in this phrase: both *sensible* and *partage* can mean different things. *Sensible* has been translated as 'judgements, perceptions – ways of being' (Pelletier, 2009, p. 271), 'perceptible, sensitive, or sensible' (Bray, 2017, p. 264) and 'sensory' (Davis, 2010, p. 179). Chambers notes that *partage*, too, is a 'doubtless multivalent', stating that it means '"separation" (hence, partition) and "disruption" but it also means "distribution" and even "sharing"' (Chambers, 2014, p. 6). I note, finally, the resemblance between the word *partage* and Rancière's notion of the 'part that has no part' as his designation for those whose voice is not heard within society. The "part" here is to say that this group is not given an (equal) part in both a political and an economic sense. But it also refers to parts being played on a stage, a theatrical metaphor which is often employed by Rancière (see Lewis, 2012). Because of all this, staying with the original French seems the only way not to risk losing all these meanings.

This statement is again reminiscent of the concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu. However, while Bourdieu considers the habitus to determine the ways in which groups of people act together, Rancière believes that there is no such determination:

> We could say that the social order is subject to an irrevocable material necessity, that it moves, like the planets, by eternal laws that no individual can change. But we could just as easily say that it is only a fiction. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 81)

Fiction – in the sense in which Rancière discusses it – and truth, for Rancière, are thus closely intertwined. As observed by Spencer (2015), Rancière makes an important distinction between facts and truth. Though facts are facts, truth – even scientific truth – is always embedded within a narrative in which facts play a role but which is not comprised only of those facts. There is always a "fictional" element to truth. But a fiction, writes Rancière:

> … is not the invention of an imaginary world. It is the construction of a framework at heart [*sic*] of which subjects, things, and situations can be perceived as being linked together within a common world and where events can be thought in a way as to be organized into an intelligible sequence. (Rancière, 2015b, p. 8) [35]

The word framework here reminds me of the notion of structure already evoked above, which is often used in academic literature, and which I too employed as if I know what it means, even though that is not fully the case. However, in the context of Rancière's philosophy, I may have gathered some partial understanding of what he denotes with that term. For him, as I understand it, and as the above citation indicates, it is that which frames the way we perceive the world. If that world is like an infinite void without inherent meaning, then it is only through these structural frames of perception that human beings give meaning to their experience of the world. He also uses other phrases which seem to denote the same as or something similar to a mode of perception – including field of experience, sphere of experience, sensible fabric of experience, regime of thought, cartography of the common world, consensual landscape of the perceptible and the thinkable, and interpretive grid or

[35] See Rancière (1993/1994) in which he introduces his notion of the *poetics of knowledge*. See also Rancière (1995/1999,pp. 128-129) for his discussion of how the observation that narratives are necessary to establish truth has been used in Holocaust denial. The crux of this argument is that 'every time that, even if all the elements of the process were established, their connections could never be entirely proved and still less could it be proved that they were a result of a plan entirely worked out, programmed and immanent in each of its steps' (p. 128). So there is an accumulation of facts, none of which is denied (the camps were real, the gas chambers were real, orders were given), but it is only possible through the establishment of a narrative that all these facts can be logically connected to become a comprehensive whole. And as long as someone denies that narrative, absurd as that denial is, they can deny the truth in which all these facts are perceived together as one event.

network (as in the excerpt cited earlier in this chapter). A mass of human bodies moving in the same direction is thus structured according to a uniform mode of perception within which they perceive the same truth about things, and because of which they feel the same way – in terms of Spinoza, they love and hate the same things, or become joyful or sad because of the same things – and act in the same, coordinated way. The way they live is an expression of the way they perceive things. These modes of perception are constituted by "fictions", which, in my understanding of the specific way in which Rancière uses this word, are narratives connecting facts to one another in order to form a comprehensive whole, a shared ideal frame which makes the world make sense. Moreover, beside making the world makes sense, it moves human bodies in a coordinated way.

According to Rancière, a central fiction – perhaps *the* central fiction – in the world of education is the narrative around the word *intelligence*, which I have analysed in Chapter 5. This narrative is expressed succinctly in two texts I analysed there in order to gain an understanding of how intelligence is commonly understood. The first text was a long article written by Spearman titled "General intelligence, objectively determined and measured". The reason I chose this article was because of the foundational role it played in the establishment of the way in which intelligence came to be understood, first in the field of psychology, and then practically everywhere else as well. In the article, Spearman defines intelligence in several ways, including the following:

> Intelligence is that represented and measurable by the general impression produced upon other people. This forms the basis of the common broad assortment of the children by their teachers into "bright," "average," "dull" respectively. (Spearman, 1904, p. 251)

Spearman referred to this understanding of intelligence as *common sense*, creating an intimate connection between the general understanding of intelligence and a notion of consensus. A century later, a remarkably similar common sense view is expressed by Hand in the following words:

> Intelligence is a quality of mind possessed to different degrees by different people. We say of some people that they are highly intelligent, of others that they are moderately intelligent, and of still others that they are not intelligent at all. (Hand, 2007, p. 40)

A number of elements are entailed in this excerpt which constitute it as a fiction. First, there is the construction of a plural subject which universally and infinitely expresses – 'we say', implying that *everyone* says it, and that we *always* say it – a hierarchical division in perception between three different kinds of people. This hierarchy is further elucidated by making use of metaphor. The most intelligent are *high*; they are literally superior. Following

this, there are those with moderate intelligence: even though Hand claims to eschew an understanding of intelligence in terms of IQ, evoking a mode or average nonetheless implies/evokes the image of a bell curve often employed in order to represent IQ's normal distribution. Finally, hyperbole is used to denote those with the least amount of intelligence, since even if intelligence is hierarchically distributed, no person would actually have no intelligence at all. Recalling Rancière's excerpt on the previous page, this fiction expressed by Hand is not the invention of an imaginary world. It is rather a way in which the real world is given a frame through which that world can be understood as a coherent whole. It is an indication of the possibility that the way in which teachers often perceive children – and the way in which children are then implicitly taught to perceive one another – is founded on a mode of perception, embedded within a quantitative frame which stratifies those children from the very moment they join the world of discourse. It is also to show in a more general sense that we can often only understand some-thing through the metaphor of another thing (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Implicit in TIS in the notion of "opinion", and explicated by Rancière in his later works, is thus this notion of the *partage du sensible*: a mode of perception which assigns everyone their part to play and, at the same time, establishes a division between those with higher and those with lower capacities of thought. This mode or frame structures how people perceive, feel, think, act, express together, all tied into a kind of knot which is implicitly present in their actions. Moreover, such frames are – and this observation shows how much Rancière is influenced by Foucault, because this theme seems to allude strongly to his concept of *discourse* – also expressed in the material configuration of, for example, a city or a school. If this notion of the *partage du sensible* holds merit – and the popularity of Rancière's works throughout the academic world seems to suggest that many believe it does – then it is probably the case that the parts and partitions assigned to people form a complex network with many shifting layers. Nonetheless, Rancière often brings the hierarchical *partage* down to two kinds of groups (or three, which can then still be condensed into essentially two groups): the superiors and the inferiors, the elites and the gullible masses. Here again the overlap between Rancière's political ideas and his educational ideas becomes clear: as I have explored, his main critique of pedagogy is that it establishes the idea in children that they are part of a group of superiors or a group of inferiors.

The distinction drawn by Rancière can be compared to various other such distinctions. Some examples are the notion of the "subaltern" in post-colonial theory (see Watts, 2010) and the notions of oppressor and oppressed in critical theory or the notion of voice and voicelessness in feminist theory. It also reminds me strongly of Butler's (2018) discussion

of the notion of grievability. With this term she denotes the idea that the lives of large groups of people are perceived as less valuable than those of other groups. Therefore, she states:

> Their claim against being injured or killed is not always registered. And one reason for this is that their lives are not worthy of grief – or *grievable*. The reasons for this are many, and they include racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia, misogyny and the systemic disregard for the poor and the dispossessed. (Butler, 2018, lecture)

Important to note, as I have come to understand it, is that in the way Rancière discusses them, these groups are categories of *perception*. That is, they are not "ontological" categories which tell us something about the way things are objectively. Rather, they are a frame through which we perceive – that is, make sense of what we sense – others and ourselves as superior or inferior, grievable or not grievable. Or to formulate it in my own way, based on my reading of Rancière: the expressions and actions of the superior group are perceived as worthy of signification, and it is only their words that are given weight (where weight is the meaning given to the words in the actions of other bodies). Which is to say that their expressions and actions are assigned the status of meaningful, as worthy of being taken up in the narrative of the whole of human history. Rancière often goes back in time to analyse the way in which this frame has historically been theorised. His two primary examples are those he takes from Plato and Aristotle, and I will recall my exploration of both of these in what follows.

Plato's myth of the metals

Rancière's first primary case of the way in which people have been categorised through frames of perception is a famous story written by Plato in his "Republic" (-375/2004). Plato is one of the main antagonists on the stage of Rancière's works, and in much of his critique aimed at other thinkers (such as Marx and Bourdieu) he finds that the way in which they present their ideas expresses a lurking Platonism, even if not always explicitly stated as such by the thinkers themselves. In Plato's story, as told by the character Socrates, everyone is told that their childhood and the education they received were merely a dream. In truth, they had been lying dormant way below the earth. During this period, the Demiurge (as Plato formulates it) had poured one of three metals into their souls: bronze, silver, or gold. Now, having reached adulthood, they should fulfil their duty in line with the type of metal to which they have been assigned (produce, fight, or rule respectively). A society which is ordered in this way is the manifestation of *justice*. This image is called by Plato the *γενναῖον ψεῦδος* (*gennaion pseudos*), which is usually translated to *noble lie*, but which could also be translated to noble *fiction* (Rowett, 2016, p. 67).

It is clear that Rancière is highly critical of this fiction, because it lays the foundation of the kind of inegalitarian society discussed above, in which everyone is assigned a place according to their perceived capacity, where the leaders lead and the rest must follow. Plato was indeed explicitly anti-democratic, and Rancière (1992/2007) states that 'the whole political project of Platonism can be conceived as an anti-maritime polemic' (p. 1). Here I note in passing that it took me quite a while to figure out what he means by this statement – as with many other things he writes, since his works are primarily made up of this kind of allusive language, and they are riddled with metaphors. What I now understand he means by it is that Plato felt a strong aversion against the working classes, here symbolised by sailors. 'The sea', continues Rancière, speaking from his Plato's perspective, 'smells of sailors, it smells of democracy. The task of philosophy is to found a different politics, a politics of conversion which turns its back on the sea' (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 2). The reason Rancière's Plato is averse toward the working classes is because he perceives them to be idiotic, ruled by a lust for possession, incapable of intelligent thought and thus incapable of ruling either society or even themselves. They need to be ruled by others, and cannot be left to meddle in the realm of politics. Therefore, for Plato, 'in order to save politics it must be pulled aground along the shepherds' (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 1).

Plato's project is thus, according to Rancière (1992/1997; 1995/1999), the foundation of a project that will span millennia called *political philosophy*, which has as its primary aim the suppression of democracy. This is at the same time a suppression of politics itself, understood as that which disrupts the ruling *partage du sensible*. Politics for Rancière is always about a redistribution of the sensible, that is, about a *dissensus* – a rejection of the dominant consensus or mode of perception which tells people whether their soul is filled with gold (highly intelligent), silver (moderately intelligent) or bronze (no intelligence at all). The suppression of politics takes place when these categories are taken to be *a priori* truths about human beings, a consensus which itself cannot be disputed, preceding all forms of political debates in a more ordinary sense of that term. So he is then also implicitly arguing that Plato's fiction is still constitutive for the way in which the dominant *partage du sensible* is structured today – as exemplified in the conceptualisations of intelligence discussed above.

According to Rowett (2016), Rancière's negative interpretation is similar to the way in which Plato's narrative is usually interpreted: namely, taking Plato's aim to be 'to deceive people into accepting and preserving a class system that is not natural but is falsely presented as if it were' (p. 85). She offers a critique of this interpretation by arguing that Plato's fiction was itself meant as a radical critique against the rule of the aristocratic elite in Athens at the time. In its place he aimed to establish a meritocracy, in which it is not birth (neither in terms

of the parents' social status, nor in terms of genetics) but merit or talent which determines what class someone will end up in. And talent is not something people are born with, but rather something they acquire in their education. What Plato aims for, she writes, is:

> … a better system, to ensure that nothing affects your chances of a powerful position except political wisdom and aptitude. … [And] equality of opportunity for all combined with distribution of responsibilities according to ability. (Rowett, 2016, p. 86)

So according to Rowett, Plato rejects not only aristocracy, but also democracy, because democracy also 'ignores political ability' (Rowett, 2016, p. 86). She further observes that Plato's fiction, when analysed properly, is *not* a lie, but a metaphor for something that is actually true. This truth is precisely that talent is *not* assigned by birth but that it is something that is *based on educational attainment*. Every child goes to school and receives the same education, and doing best in school is what it means to receive a golden soul from God.

A reason why some children, even if all start off with equal chances, 'acquire and develop talents, and manifest them' (Rowett, 2016, p. 89) better than other children is not provided by Rowett. She does seem to espouse a naïve understanding of the role of environment and social position in this mystical notion of talent, when she states that:

> We need not determine exactly what is due to nature and what to nurture, providing that we understand that the nurture is designed to ensure that no one is set up to fail owing to unequal chances. (Rowett, 2016, p. 89)

It would be pertinent here to delve into the plethora of studies demonstrating the problematic nature of such a mystical view of the role of the educational environment in the way children develop. This, however, is not the reason why I recalled Rowett's defence of Plato's educational views. It is rather to return to the crux of Rancière's main claim about education.

It is the claim that "talent" is not a notion which describes something that is actually present in a human body, but rather a fiction which structures the actions of human bodies according to a shared *partage du sensible*: a mode of perception which makes us perceive ourselves and others along hierarchical boundaries and which makes our actions as well as our expressions stay within the confinements of those boundaries. In Jacotot, Rancière has found a counter-fiction – the *equality of intelligence* – which denies the boundaries implied by the notion of talent.

Revisiting the equality of intelligence

One sense in which Rancière uses the word "intelligence" is as the acquisition of knowledge. Here, intelligence seems to denote the same as talent in Rowett's discussion of Plato. It is the amount of knowledge and skills one has acquired. Since it is reasonable to assume that some people acquire more and more in-depth knowledge than others as they grow up, Rowett's critique of democracy – that it *ignores political ability* – seems to make sense. If democracy is constituted on a power which can belong to anyone and everyone, as Rancière often puts it, then how do we reconcile this with the observation that some have more knowledge about the world than others, and therefore seem to be in a better position to make judgements about the future course of society? Yet this is exactly the point Rancière disputes. It is for him *not* the case that anyone is in a better position to make these decisions. *Everyone* can make political decisions. This in turn has to do with the second sense of intelligence. Here it is refers, succinctly put, to the capacity for expression everyone shares. We have all gone through an adventure in which we acquired language. This is highly significant, because it means that everyone is a master of language, which makes us all equal in a very fundamental, even *universal* sense: 'The first requirement of universality is that speaking beings universally belong to the linguistic community' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 56).

As I see it, the word "expression" denotes all the many ways in which a human body can express itself. Even silence and doing nothing can be a powerful example: Rancière evokes several times the protest initiated by Erdem Gündüz in 2013 on Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey. The protest was part of a longer period of protests regarding the future of Gezi Park, which was going to be destroyed in order to make place for a shopping mall. It consisted of the protestors (beginning only with Gündüz, who was then joined by more and more people) standing still for hours, staring at the large Turkish flags hanging on the Ataturk Cultural Centre (Rancière, 2016a; Rancière, 2016b). The relevance for education seems clear to me: caring for children must entail the willingness to listen to what they express not only in their words, but also in their silence.

However, expression is about more than that for Rancière. The *partage du sensible* is a mode of perception which is constituted by a fiction. This fiction is expressed in the actions of human bodies as well as in the way they organise their material environment. In other words, whenever someone elevated in the social order expresses their disdain for someone below them, and whenever someone low in the social order expresses their fear for someone above them, they are both, in a sense, expressing the same thing: the mode of perception which prescribes the boundaries within which both are implicitly expected to remain in terms

of what they do and say and what do not do and do not say. The equality of intelligence is then a pointer to the always present possibility to dissent from this mode by expressing another mode altogether. This possibility is a capacity which belongs to everyone at all times. And whenever this happens, in whatever way it happens – whether, for example, through speech, by a reordering of material space, or simple silence – *the expression of this different mode is the expression of a world within another world*. The equality of intelligence is an opaque portal into a different world. And maybe glimpses of that world can be found in those who have taken it up in their own adventures and who have let themselves be moved by it, through the dark portal into lands unknown. Moreover, the interdiction by the experts to travel beyond the opaque veil of things unknown to us is at the same time to conjure a boundary – fictional, yet very real in its effects – that prevents us from seeking new worlds beyond the one we have come to know so far.

Rancière in philosophy of education

One example in which the thread of the equality of intelligence has been taken up by other Rancièrian adventurers is in the works of Simons and Masschelein. In combination with a discussion of the importance of time – see the Introduction for a discussion of the importance of the notion of time in Rancière's works – these authors repeatedly emphasise that the school was originally a Greek invention in the democracy of Athens and hence condemned by Plato. An important meaning of the Greek *scholé* is that of "free time", which means a time freed from the productive time of society[36]. The school, in this sense, is a place in which children are *not* categorised and ranked – it is exactly the opposite. They write:

> With the coming into existence of the school form, we actually see the democratisation of free time which at once is, as Rancière (1995, 55) argues, the 'site of the symbolic visibility of equality'. *The school form should be regarded as the visible and material refusal of natural destiny*. This also explains that the invention of the school form was at the same time the start of several attempts to tame or neutralise the school: time and again there have been attempts to *reintroduce some kind of natural order (e.g. age, talent, capacity, natural development)* and hence to claim a kind of natural destiny and to neutralise the free time. (Masschelein & Simons, 2015, p. 86, my emphases)

The sentences I have emphasised in this excerpt show what I believe to be the fundamental point of dispute between Rancière and the Rancièrians on the one hand, and proponents of ranking children on the basis of talent on the other hand. It is that talent, far

[36] This is also mentioned by Rancière (1992/2007, p. 53).

from being some mysterious characteristic children are inherently born with, is instead a structuring framework determining the destiny of children *a priori*. In the school as imagined by Simons and Masschelein, it becomes a space and time within which the gravity of the social world is suspended and bodies are allowed to float freely, to recall the metaphor evoked earlier in this chapter. In this state of suspension, the beliefs, practices, and ways of perceiving ourselves and other human beings, implicit in the workings of society, are not transmitted uncritically but can instead be studied and changed.

Others have taken up Rancière's writings on aesthetics in order to argue for the importance of aesthetics in education (e.g. Lewis, 2012; Todd, 2018). Todd has written extensively on the possibility of transformative forms of education. During her own adventures, she has taken up Rancière's notion of emancipation, which she understands:

> … in terms of being able to make claims in which one's voice moves from being simply 'noise' to something that is heard and listened to. (Todd, 2018, p. 974)

This is a reference to Rancière's repeated discussion of Aristotle, and I will discuss this in what follows.

Aristotle's distinction between human and subhuman

In his *Politics* (2000) Aristotle famously defines the human being as a political animal. What distinguishes human beings from other animals, according to Aristotle, is that they possess the capacity for speech. Rancière, summarising his Aristotle, states:

> The supremely political destiny of man is attested by a *sign*: the possession of the logos, that is, of speech, which *expresses*, while the voice simply *indicates*. (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 2)

Rancière emphasises several words here. The first is *sign*. In the distinction created by Aristotle, when someone utters an expression, this expression can be interpreted as a sign of two different things: either of speech – expression – or of voice – indication. Animals have no speech, only a voice with which they indicate. What they indicate, according to Aristotle, is whether they are experiencing pleasure or pain. Humans have the power of the *logos*, with which they can express whether the pleasure or pain that they receive from others is just or unjust. Rancière continues his discussion of this distinction created by Aristotle by observing that he further distinguished between two types of human being. These are, in short, the master and the slave, where the slave is defined as follows:

> … the slave is the one who participates in reason so far as to recognize it (*aisthêsis*) but not so as to possess it (*hexis*). (Rancière, 1999, p. 17)

The slave is a kind of transition case between animals and masters/humans, because while animals have no comprehension of human speech at all, the slave is able to understand human expression, without being able to express themselves in a meaningful way. In other words, they possess the capacity to understand and follow orders, but they do not possess the capacity to challenge the justice or injustice of those orders. Rancière's interpretation of this fundamental image is also influenced by Hegelian theory and theories of *recognition*, and Deranty (2003) goes so far as to claim that 'Rancière's fundamental political concern is the denial of recognition experienced by the dominated' (p. 137).

It is important to observe here the gendered nature of the word "master". Indeed, Aristotle makes it clear in the very beginning of his *Politics* that although he believes women are of a higher order than slaves, they still belong to the same kind of category in the sense that it is only a man who can be a master over a woman, and never the other way around. Biesta observes the following in relation to this:

> Although some of Rancière's writings may give the impression that he is primarily — or perhaps even exclusively — concerned about questions of inequality in relation to social class, Rancière's configuration of emancipation is definitely not restricted to this. Emancipation is about the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being. (Biesta, 2010, p. 48)

This seems to be partly a fair assessment, though I do observe that the issue of class is clearly what Rancière focuses on in most of his works. Moreover, critique has been raised against him in relation to his underwhelming treatment of gender and women's emancipation (Fraisse, 2013; Regard, 2019) and his lack of recognition for the way women are framed in the works of some of the male philosophers and writers so often evoked by him, from Aristotle to Flaubert (Chanter, 2019, Chapter 1).

With the distinction between "master" and "slave" a maddening self-reinforcing loop is created. The distinction between human and what we might call subhuman is one in which those who possess the *logos* thereby also possess the capacity to perceive whose words are logical and whose words are not; they can distinguish between who does and who does not make sense. Therefore, it is only the masters who can interpret/decide whether someone else is a master or a slave. They decide whether the things someone says or does is a sign of them being human – "human" being again a category of perception, and not an ontological attribute. Importantly, a "slave" can never challenge a "master's" interpretation/decision, since they lack the power of expression necessary to perform such a challenge in a meaningful way. Even if they were to give an objectively sound argument, the sounds they produce would still not be perceived as a sign of humanity, and would therefore not be

considered to be meaningful expression. The point seems to be that were the "slave" to attempt to challenge the master's interpretation, then the master would – and, more strongly, *could* – not hear their words as human expression. The slave's words would be discounted by the master as meaningless nonsense. And because the words are perceived as nonsense *a priori* in this way, no argument given by the slave can ever change the way they are perceived, since no argument given will ever actually be perceived as an argument.

Fifth terrain: The aesthetics of writing and reading

The fifth and final terrain regards the primary two activities of my adventure, seemingly so obvious that it is easy to overlook that they were the main activities actually comprising and initiating the adventure: reading and writing. It seems to me that both the art of writing and the art of reading are often approached in a way which does not appreciate them *as art*, both in education and in the academy. Rancière has taught me the significance of this negligence. The academic world, it has been observed, is dominated by a market logic in which everything and everyone is in danger of becoming instrumentalised and deployed in the endless desire for more profit (Marginson, 1997). To consider the researcher as a writer, that is, as an artistic adventurer, is to get a glimpse of what it might mean to say that democracy is the manifestation of a world within another world, a world of artists within a world of domination. And this would mean that both reading and writing would be approached in a much more careful way, with attention, like one would treat the flowers in a meticulously grown garden. It would also mean that they are thought of – and taught – as activities in which one can become more and more artful. Following my interpretation then of Rancière's writing, I claim that the style of my own writing is not yet at the level of true mastery, but that, following the adage that everyone is equally intelligent, I will be able to reach that point if I keep studying it as a skilled practice in the future.

For this, I want to build further on some of the aspects of the style of writing which I have begun to develop during the writing of this thesis. These were among the most fascinating things I have learned from Rancière. He taught me about the method of taking a scene (often depicted in excerpts, or short narratives) to then write commentary on the scene, following the adage that the meaning of the scene is immanent to it, but that it can be woven into a whole network of associations outside of it. He also taught me about spiralling and weaving ways of writing. All of these relate to Rancière's notion of equality: there can be equality in writing, which relates to contingency and to a non-layered style in which registers shift and the personal and the impersonal intertwine.

CHAPTER 8: FINALE

In this finale to the thesis, I will formulate my current take on the question to what extent Rancière's works can be an emancipatory force in education. This will include several points of critique on his writings as well as on some of the ways in which those writings have been taken up in the literature, and an elucidation of the thoughts I have developed about education during the thesis adventures.

My adventure into reading Rancière's works was a sort of test of the equality of intelligence between Rancière and myself – or rather, between his works and myself, if 'the book *is* the equality of intelligence' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38, emphasis original). This approach would, simultaneously with the adventure itself, allow me to observe the adventure as a form of education. The questions Jacotot asked his students as a guide for their adventure were the following: 'what do you see? what do you think about it? what do you make of it?' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 24). These are the questions that I will try to answer here.

The adventure began with my reading of Rancière's book TIS. This book had been put on the table for me by a teacher, an act which set me off in directions unforeseen by him (or me) at the time. The significance of the micro-event consisting of the encounter between myself and the book lies in the fact that the book fascinated me. Reflecting on the experience of being fascinated made me realise that it is a transformative type of experience. Following Spinoza (1677/1996), we can conceive of the self as a will striving to persevere in their being, characterised by a relentless pursuit of affecting and being affected by those things that increase their mind's power to think, as well as their body's power to act. These are the things which, Spinoza proposes, are designated by us as "good". Fascination is an affective state in which the will's pursuit changes course toward the establishment of an affective relationship with that which fascinates. What follows from these premises is that, since fascination transforms the will, it transforms one's being – that is, it transforms the meaning one assigns to words like "me", "self", and "I". Moreover, it often changes the meaning one assigns to words like "we" and "us", since fascination for something may put one in community with others who have been similarly fascinated. In the relationship with that which fascinates our individual self can thus become part of the whole of a community of adventurers with which we can identify.

Our existence is thus not separate from the things that fascinate us. We consist of relationships between ourselves as a body and the things that affect it or are affected by it. When we become fascinated, it is like a charm or spell cast upon us. But we willingly let it happen. We let ourselves be *captivated*, defined by the OED as 'To overpower with excellence … to enthrall with charm or attractiveness; to enslave, fascinate, enamour,

enchant, charm'. Something gets a hold of our attention and draws our will to carefully attend to it. In Dutch we say, when we become fascinated by something, that it will not let us go. When we embrace the spell cast upon us by a fascinating aspect of reality, this may lead us into an adventure, comprised of sustained and careful attention, in the course of which that which fascinates us becomes more and more a part of who we are. So, too, for example, did I notice that my adventure into Rancière's works transformed me in some of the ways in which I was inclined to think and act. My adventures into those works put me in community with others who had been fascinated by Rancière, other adventurers who had travelled his world before me, and whose observations I wanted to examine during my own adventures.

My initial proposal was to find out whether Rancière's works could be an emancipatory educational force. My hypothesis was that they can be, even though I was not clear on what exactly I was asking about. The use of the word "emancipation" in the formulation of my research question was a more or less unconscious choice, made in response to the use of that word by Rancière and the literature generally. Speaking metaphorically, the spell of fascination had apparently already taken hold of me, channelling what Rancière proposes to be the universal 'capacity to say what one thinks in the words of others' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 10). Let me here reflect on this word again for a moment. The word emancipation, like many of the themes that have been discussed, is an intersection between politics and education. Biesta (2010) explains that emancipation was originally a concept used in Roman law, where it 'referred to the freeing of a son or wife from the legal authority of the *pater familias* — the father of the family' (p. 42, emphasis original). Today, one of the senses given to the word, as reported by the OED, is the following: 'Setting free, delivering from intellectual, moral, or spiritual fetters'. Common between the two senses – and all other senses given in the same dictionary – is that it is about *setting free*. Generally then, as Biesta further explains, emancipation is conceived of as a process of liberation where one person or a group of people sets another person or group of people free from the constraints that curb their liberty.

Biesta (2010), following his reading of Rancière, locates the latter's view on the essentially stultifying essence of the pedagogical relationship within the logic of this kind of emancipation. In Biesta's summary of the critical tradition, the critical pedagogue is essentially concerned with liberating others from the oppressive constraints working through them in the form of ideology. According to Rancière (followed by Biesta), this kind of relationship is necessarily stultifying, because it presupposes an inequality between the emancipator and their students. The emancipator has the power to liberate their students because they have knowledge of how the world really functions, whereas the students are

caught in the web of ideology preventing them from perceiving the oppressive structures which keep them tied down to a position of social inferiority. This is the same logic Rancière locates in Bourdieu's works – and indeed within the very structures framing the hegemonic mode of perception linked to the passion for domination fuelling the inegalitarian orders permeating the globe. He traces the origin of this logic back to Plato's philosophy, in which Plato painted an image comprised of a distinction between those who are perceived to possess a power of thought and those who do not, establishing the fictional justification of the hierarchical social order we have seen throughout history ever since.

The convergence between politics and education in the word emancipation thus consists of the impulse of liberation from society's oppressive order: the liberation of political subjects by a sociologist or philosopher, and the liberation of children by teachers. This impulse, which originates in Enlightenment thought, comprises the essence of what Rancière generally refers to as a pedagogical relationship. This is a relationship in which, states Biesta,

> … those who do not yet know receive knowledge from those who do know (and are thus dependent upon those who know for their trajectory toward equality and emancipation). Education so conceived is grounded in a fundamental inequality between the one who educates and the one who receives — and needs — education. (Biesta, 2010, p. 54)

Hence, the inequality of the social order is, for Rancière, analogous to the inequality between a teacher who knows and a student who does not know. He has maintained this view on what constitutes inequality in a pedagogical relationship since the very beginning of his trajectory away from his former teacher Althusser. Indeed, Rancière's assimilation of Jacotot's opinion of the equality of intelligence between teachers and students is made in direct dispute with Althusser's view that:

> … the pedagogic situation is based on the absolute condition of *an inequality between a knowledge and a lack of knowledge*. [...] The famous pupil–teacher, lecturer–student, relationship is the technical expression of this fundamental pedagogic relationship. [...] No pedagogic questions, which all presuppose unequal knowledge between teachers and students, can be settled on the basis of pedagogic equality between teachers and students. (Althusser, cited in Hudson-Miles, p. 672, emphasis added by Hudson-Miles)

For Rancière, and others who have taken up his philosophy of education, this assumption of inequality, which underlies the emancipatory logic so far described, thus leads to the opposite of emancipation: stultification. For him, as for the critical pedagogues, education is also about emancipation. However, for him it is not something done by others to someone, but something someone does to themselves. As discussed above, Rancièrian

emancipation is about breaking the circle of powerlessness and shifting to the spiral of power. Emblematic of that break is the scene in which Gauny perceived the world as if he were part of the class of those who dominated him, which, in Rancière's analysis, means that he broke the imaginary fetters of class identity. He did this not as a response to anyone who revealed the truth of his oppression to him – he was well aware of it – but rather by perceiving the world for a fleeting moment in time as if he were not oppressed at all, and he was his masters' equal. This moment entailed a sensible revolution: a 'torsion' of his body (Quintana, 2018, p. 1) and a shift toward a different way of perceiving the world. This was a way of perceiving which, maintains Rancière, did not belong to someone like Gauny, according to those who wanted him simply to build their mansion for them so they could freely and undisturbedly begin to utilise it for their hedonistic lifestyle. He was supposed to be incapable of entering the aesthetic gaze which drew him out of his prescribed ethos. For Rancière, Gauny thus parted ways with the fictional circle of powerlessness, confirming to Plato's ancient fiction of the metals. This fiction builds a frame for the mode of perception or *partage du sensible* in which those who labour should not believe themselves capable of meaningful thought and expression, so that those who think and pursue pleasure do not have to waste time labouring. Rancière states:

> The Platonic myth prescribes a relationship of reciprocal confirmation between a condition and a thought. The counter-myth of the joiner [Gauny] breaks the circle. (Rancière, 2006, p. 9)

This "should not" of the circle of powerlessness takes the form of a "cannot". The structures of the social order prescribe an incapacity or inaptitude of thought – and, hence, of having adequate knowledge of the world. It is the kind of impossibility indicated by a traffic sign depicting a red circle with a white horizontal bar in the middle. The message of such a sign is that drivers may not enter the street it guards. But this impossibility is imagined: there is no physical border preventing anyone from driving that way – though there is, of course, the very real possibility of being caught and fined if one does so, a fact which imbues the sign with its power to make cars stop and turn. Gauny breaks the circle of powerlessness and enters the spiral of emancipation, not in the sense that he is no longer forced to destroy his body through long days of arduous labour, but in a sense which Rancière describes as:

> … an operation of an effective disjunction between the arms and the gaze, a disjunction between an *occupation* and the *aptitudes* which correspond to it. (Rancière, 2006, p. 5)

In other – that is, my – words, Gauny realised in that moment that, even as his exploited body was forced to suffer, he was not forced to believe himself destined for exploitation. Hence, he thwarted the fictional incapacity to shed one's ethos or *habitus* incurred upon him through the distribution of social roles. This refusal to be incapable, in my reading of Quintana's (2018) interpretation of Rancière's discussion of Gauny's scene, is a necessary, though not always sufficient, prerequisite for someone to be galvanised into political action aimed at confronting the sources of the sufferings of oneself and others. Quintana follows Rancière in observing that it is precisely this kind of moment which cannot and does not happen in the mode of perception deployed by philosophers and sociologists like Althusser and Bourdieu – often denoted by Rancière simply as "scientists" – who consider everyone except themselves to be caught in a web of ideology which only they can help them escape. 'Such perspectives', writes Quintana,

> … impede us from considering the unforeseeable and incalculable ways in which bodies can reinvent themselves from the positions, roles, and practices that they are subjected to. (Quintana, 2018, p. 4)

This excerpt also allows me to brings Spinoza back onto the scene. A phrase that fascinated many Spinozian adventurers, and which Quintana might be alluding to here, is Spinoza's (1677/1996) statement that 'no one has yet determined what the body can do' (IIIP2). Bourdieu's determinist framework, which keeps everyone in their place by perpetually pointing out what their place is – that is, who they are supposed to be, implying also who they are not allowed to be – is contradicted in Gauny's spiralling torsion, leading him to 'the curved roads of reappropriation of the self' (Rancière, cited in Quintana, 2018, p. 5). Since self is will, emancipation in this sense consist of the reappropriation of oneself as a will – in Spinoza's sense of that word, as the striving to persevere in one's being and increase one's power to act and think.

Concluding discussion

Based on the above, it seems that I have gained some sense of understanding of some of the ideas Rancière expresses throughout his works, albeit still a rather incomplete one. During my adventure toward that understanding I have always tried to follow Rancière's arguments – as well as those made in secondary literature – as far as possible. When things did not make sense to me, when they seemed counter-intuitive or simply wrong, I always tried to act in line with Rancière's own proposition that what is commonsensical to me may exactly be part of the hegemonic mode of perception – the consensus – manifesting itself through the ways in which I am inclined to think and act. Now I will stop doing this and

express my thoughts on what I have learned, including my disagreements with Rancière (that is disagreement in the regular sense of that term, not in Rancière's idiosyncratic usage of it)

The first thing I want to discuss regards the transfer of Rancière's political notion of emancipation to an application of that notion in the field of education. I observe a fundamental problem with this transfer. Emancipation, as discussed, is about liberation from states of oppression or, in Rancière's terms, from stultification. It is about a spiriting away from the hand that grasps. There is an overlap here with understanding. The Dutch word for understanding is *begrijpen*, and the Dutch word for grasping is *grijpen*. Understanding is thus getting a grip on something. Indeed, another word for understanding is to *comprehend*, derived from the Latin word for grasping, with the "com" implying that it is a grasping that can happen in community, together. Again, in English one can say that, if one understands something, one has a grip on it, or one grasps it. Understanding is thus like a hand that reaches out and grasps an idea. It can further be understood as a grasping together, a collective of hands that grasps things in the same way simultaneously. In this way, it relates to the notion of consensus, a mutual way of perceiving the world or having a grip on the world (as also observed by Lyotard, 1992).

Oppression can in this context be understood as the way in which power is exerted over the bodies of people by understanding those bodies in a certain way, by saying that someone's body belongs to a certain category of being, and therefore has to act and think in a certain way, and not in other ways. To understand, in Rancière's (1995/1999, Chapter 2) analysis, is in this sense of the same as following an order, like a diligent 'Yes, sir!' after being asked the question: 'Do you understand?'. Emancipation for Rancière is therefore about subjectivation, which is an event or a process in which an individual or a group 'inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community' (Rancière, 1999, p. 37). This also means it is about de-identification, or, in my words, about a spiriting away from the hand that grasps us – to escape from the way in which others understand us (or, in this sense, have knowledge about us) based on who they are telling us we should be.

Now, throughout the literature, it seems that taking up the notion of emancipation and applying it to education seems like a matter of common sense. Yet emancipation in all of the senses here discussed presupposes a situation in which bodies have already been inscribed in what Rancière often refers to as the "social order", and also as a "community", in which they are perceived as inferior or superior. Education, however, is a context in which this inscription is not a thing from the past. Rather, education is the process of such an inscription. It is not a context in which people have already taken up an identity in the wider social order

or community, from which they need to emancipate themselves by assigning a different meaning to the names they have been given and by beginning to perceive themselves as equals to all others. The educational community is – or, to be more precise, *can* be – a different type of community than the community of society.

This proposition might echo the utopian depiction of the school as an 'impossible reality' (Verburgh et al., 2016, p. 263) discussed in the previous chapter, though I am not quite in agreement with their literal interpretation of the equality of intelligence and the impossibility that is implied by it. The idea of the school as utopia is founded on Jacotot's principles of the opinion of the equality of intelligence and the presupposition that everyone can learn everything. Those principles are taken up by Rancière as an expression of his anarchic dissensus with Plato's meritocratic fiction, which aims to replace the aristocracy of the wealthy with an aristocracy of the most talented. The fiction of talent is replaced by the fiction of the equality of intelligence. The fiction that some bodies can learn some things better than others is replaced by the fiction that everyone can learn everything. The fiction of the well-functioning social order – where order, for Rancière, is synonymous with hierarchy – is opposed with Rancière's belief that democracy always consists of a break with that order, resulting in a transformation of the ways in which people relate to each other, away from the old, toward something new and unforeseen.

In terms of *politics*, this is a powerful image. Yet an *education* which has as its primary aim to break with the old in order to transform it into something new and unforeseen, forgets that transformation can only happen to something that has first been formed. In some sense, there *is* an aspect of transformation entailed in the process of education, as expressed by Biesta (2013a), when he states that 'the educational concern rather lies in the transformation of what is desired into what is desirable' (Biesta, 2013a, p. 3). He follows this up by stating that the educational concern:

> … lies in the transformation of what is *de facto* desired into what can *justifiably* be desired—a transformation that can never be driven from the perspective of the self and its desires, but always requires engagement with what or who is other (which makes the educational question also a question about democracy). (Biesta, 2013a, p. 3, emphasis original)

Translating this to my reading of Spinoza, it is to say that education should contribute to the transformation of the desires of children from desiring what is bad for them to desiring what is good for them – where "good", as said, means that it contributes to their striving to persevere and increase their power to think and act. Yet this itself is not enough, because it might easily be interpreted to mean that any kind of behaviour goes as long as it is to the benefit of the child – even if it is to the detriment of others, so that even the desire to dominate

could be conceived of as good. If we want the way we think about education to be somehow linked to a notion of equality, then the pursuit of what is "good" for a child cannot be seen as separate from the pursuit of what must be done when one wants to act under the mark of equality.

My contention, following this, is that the opinion of equality, within an educational context, is the following belief: it must be possible to conceive of sensible educational configurations (including spaces, times, relationships, practices) that inscribe children into a community of equals from the very outset of the educational process – that is, from the very beginning of their life. And it must be possible, moreover, to sustain these configurations in some dynamic form over time, over generations.

Disagreeing with Rancière: a turn to Arendt

It seems, though, that this belief is in disagreement with some of Rancière's own premises. This is a disagreement I have reached after giving prolonged attention to a feeling of discomfort with certain aspects of his writings. The premise I want to address here is expressed in the sentence that 'We must therefore conclude that intelligence is only in individuals, that it is not in their *union*' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 76, emphasis original). The notion that intelligence only exists in the individual seems to be a way for Rancière to emphasise the importance of resisting complicity to social movements that perpetuate or exacerbate injustice. It is to signify the power of the individual to withstand the structures that aim to keep them, or others, in their social place of subordination, or to withstand social movements such as fascism that rise up time and again throughout history. He uses the metaphor of the 'law of gravity' (Rancière 1987/1991, p. 76) for this, proposing in seemingly Roussauian fashion that an individual can be on their own path, and that this path can be thwarted by the forces of what he often calls the social order.

However, though I am still very much willingly fascinated by Rancière's notion of the equality of intelligence, I believe that there is an oversight in his theory when he denies the intelligence present in systems in which individuals work together, now and over time, especially in the intergenerational expression of care that is education. This is to say that when we form as a "self" (which is to say, as a "will") we do so by appropriating beliefs, desires, and modes of expression and action whose existence spans collectivities of bodies and thus binds us with those bodies in a plural subject encompassing a multiplicity of individual subjects. "My" path is therefore always at least partially "our" path. Furthermore, the fact that education makes individual paths change course – which is to say, it makes children and young people do things they did not at first want to do, or, crucially, *they did*

not know they could want – is a double edged sword which cannot be avoided as it is an essential aspect of what education is about. It can be a violent and nihilistic demand for submission to forces of domination and inequality, but it can also be a caring and meaning-affirming urging to persevere in powerful relations of equality. In order to elucidate this further, I now turn to Arendt, because among the few things I have read so far in my life, she gives the best answer to my sense of discomfort, and so I believe that discussing some of her central concepts will allow me to better formulate my own critique on Rancière's philosophy of education.

One of the concepts often associated with Arendt's thought is *natality*. This concept refers essentially to the existential condition of birth, just as mortality refers to the existential condition of death (Bowen-Moore, 1989). The notion of natality is inherently intertwined for Arendt with the notion of "beginning", since every birth is the beginning of a new, unique human being. Everyone is therefore fundamentally endowed with the capacity to begin – and this capacity is rooted in the condition of natality. But this "birth" does not merely refer to biological birth. Rather, as Totschnig (2015) convincingly argues, Arendt uses the word birth in order to denote the 'arrival of newcomers in the web of human relationships' which refers to 'the manifold network of interpersonal relations – relations of affection, friendship, cooperation, authority, obligation, etc. – that constitute the human world' (p. 341). The unicity of every newcomer means that every birth, understood in this way, renews the web of relationships.

The capacity to begin carries over into maturity and is therefore closely related to Arendt's notion of *action*. For Arendt, action, together with justice, comprise the realm of politics (Arendt, 1958). And the political is for her very emphatically the world of adults, a world of which children are not yet a part. In relation to this, she traces the word "school" back to its roots in Greek antiquity, where *skhole* referred, in Arendt's words, to 'freedom and surcease from political activity' (Arendt, 1958, p. 14). The school is then an in-between space, between the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of politics. This recalls Conroy's (2004) notion of liminality evoked in Chapter 5. In more recent work Conroy (2019) has formulated a critique inspired by his reading of Arendt on the contemporary 'failure to consider childhood as a particular, liminal, space rather than a refraction of the public spaces of the agora' (p. 1). In Arendt's analysis, through the encroachment upon both the private realm (the household or family) and the public realm (politics) of what she calls 'the social realm' (Arendt, 1954, p. 22), the difference between an adult sphere and a sphere for children has to great extent dissolved.

In educational terms, this also means for Arendt that adults have stopped taking responsibility for the world, which they are supposed to represent to children in the liminal space of education. Furthermore, it means for her that *authority* has disappeared from the pedagogical relationship between educators and children, with disastrous consequences. When a teacher no longer teaches with authority – which she defines simply as being able to tell a child 'what to do and what not to do' (Arendt, 1961, p. 181), but which is crucially something done without coercion – it means that children are left to their own devices, which is to say, left to the tyranny of the majority of their own world, detached from the world of adults. The result, according to Arendt (1961), 'tends to be either conformism or juvenile delinquency, and is frequently a mixture of both' (p. 182).

There is much more to say about authority as discussed by Arendt, but there are two implications of her view that are relevant for my argument. The first is that pedagogical spaces are in a very fundamental sense not spaces of equality – neither between educators and children, because the educator has an authority which the child does not possess, nor necessarily between children, since, as Arendt observes, communities of children can be egalitarian but also tyrannical, and it would be naïve to assume the former in all instances.

However, it is certainly not the case that this contradicts Rancière's writings on education. In fact, I have emphasised the role played by urgency in TIS, as well as made the observation that the ignorant schoolmaster is essentially a demand. Remember also Rancière's following statement, which I believe to be of central importance in everything he writes on education:

> Unconditional exigency: the emancipatory father is not a simple good-natured pedagogue; he is an intractable master. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 38)

Finally, see also Lewis' (2012) interpretation of the ignorant schoolmaster as a Neo-Kantian categorical imperative, as evoked in Chapter 5. So, for Rancière as well as Arendt, there is clearly an element of authority at play in education which he does not view as anti-egalitarian; authority does not contradict his principle of equality. As noted in Chapter 4, Magnusson (2015) has shown how, for Rancière, the question of emancipatory education is not a question of authority or freedom, but rather of equality and inequality. That is to say that regardless of whether, for example, the pedagogy in a classroom is more or less child-centred (see Schweisfurth, 2013), or whether it has stronger or weaker framing (see Bernstein, 1975), the point for Rancière is that it can still be either egalitarian or non-egalitarian. This becomes more clear in Biesta and Bingham's (2010) discussion of the figure of the child in Rancière's philosophy. Through this figure, they show how, from Rancière's

perspective, the child is a political actor on account of the very fact that, when they learn to speak,

> … the child must force his or her will onto another in order to be understood in a way that reconfigures the distribution of the sensible. (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 59)

The example they give is of a child called Barbara who randomly (at least from the perspective of her confused parents) starts using the word "nana" in order to communicate that she wants milk from a bottle – or, when emphasis is placed on the second syllable, that she does not like what is inside the bottle. Rather than dismissing this as an adorable affair without any deeper meaning, Biesta and Bingham show that this poetic act is precisely what Rancière means when he writes of democracy as the 'forced-entry' into 'the space of shared meaning' (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 49) that is the *partage du sensible*. The child demands to be heard, that is to be perceived as a speaking being, and she refuses the notion that she will not be fed because her word is incomprehensible to those she needs to care for her. What becomes clear here, at least for me, is that there is an inherent equality between the parents and the child as poetic, speaking beings, regardless of all the other inequalities that exist between them. Of course, the parents could refuse the child her bottle, and she would be powerless to do anything about it. But equality is not about power for Rancière, but about intelligence – and in the poetic expression of her will, we can perceive in Barbara's use of the word "nana" the same intelligence at work as in the parents who desperately try to figure out what their crying child wants to communicate to them.

So the disagreement between Arendt's view and Rancière's view lies not in the role they ascribe to the crucial role of authority in the pedagogical relationship, even if Rancière, unlike Arendt, discovers a more fundamental equality underlying any unequal relationship. Rather, it lies in the question whether intelligence, as Rancière emphatically states, lies only in the individual. Here is then the second implication of Arendt's work which I want to discuss. Although Arendt does not discuss matters in terms of intelligence, I believe that her discussion of authority (in Arendt, 1961, Chapter 3) can be interpreted as a way of understanding intelligence that contradicts Rancière's purely individualistic understanding of it. For this I take into account that intelligence has multiple meanings, even within Rancière's own framework. In one sense, there is intelligence as the 'poetic capacity for translation' (Lewis, 2012 p. 89), which belongs only to the individual, and is exemplified in the interaction between Barbara and her parents. But in another sense, there is what Arendt (1961) describes as 'making distinctions' (p. 95). Her text on the question "What is Authority?" is not itself about making distinctions, but she does introduce its importance

early on in the text, lamenting the lack of distinction she believes other political thinkers (who she divides into liberals and conservatives) make between authority, tyranny, and totalitarianism. My aim here is not to go deeper into these distinctions themselves, but rather to give signification to what Arendt herself is doing. Her way of doing philosophy, in a very fundamental sense, is the exploration of distinctions between various terms that could be considered equal in meaning or between which the relationship is not clear (authority, tyranny, and totalitarianism are one example; another is labour, work, and action). Going back to the root of the word "intelligence" shows that it is a combination of "inter" (between) and "legere" (choose, pick out, read). Intelligence can thus be understood as the power of making the right choice between different options. And, very generally speaking, education entails teaching about traditionally developed distinctions between actions as well as between things and between ideas, and the words used to denote them. Barbara is a political being from the outset in Rancière's sense because she inserts herself into the world of speaking beings, demanding to be perceived as an equal. But in order to be understood she will have to learn a language that exists regardless of her and that will exist within and through her the more she shares in its complex web of meaning. Recalling Todd's (1996) observation evoked in Chapter 6, this process of letting the spirit of history start flowing through us (so to speak) is not one in which the individual disappears entirely. Rather, it is a process of *conflict*. That said, it is not the case that the intelligence of the individual can either stay on a hypothetical "own" path unrelated to the wider flows of the collective. An egalitarian education, therefore, should be one in which the authority of tradition is embodied in the teacher's words and actions, while also allowing for the child's power of intelligence to manifest through a potentially conflictual relationship with that tradition. The child's intelligence becomes infused with the intelligence of the collective. Arendt writes:

> Without tradition—which selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is—there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future, only sempiternal change of the world and the biological cycle of living creatures in it. … Remembrance, which is only one, though one of the most important, modes of thought, is helpless outside a pre-established framework of reference, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasions capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected. (Arendt, 2006, p. 5)

So we need to be somehow embedded within frames of meaning in order for things to make sense to us, and to feel that our experience is connected to the experience of others. For Rancière, these frames or police orders are *always* hierarchical in nature, and, thus,

> … to act on the assumption of equality always interrupts the existing social order which, for Rancière, is by definition an order of *in*equality. (Biesta & Bingham, 2012, pp. 621-622, emphasis original)

This also means that the best kind of community is the one that 'all the breaking and entering perpetrated by egalitarian logic has most often jolted out of its "natural" logic' (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 31). The best way of organising human communities is thus by allowing them to be broken into and changed as often as possible. But for me this is to overlook the possibility that frames of meaning that give order to our lives might actually be constitutive of egalitarian practices, in which case they might be worth being preserved and strengthened. This is also to disagree, to an extent, with Rancière et al.'s (2005/2017) claim that 'every normal pedagogical experience is structured by reasons of inequality' (p. 179). At the same time, I do understand Rancière's fundamental lesson that communities are always in danger of being usurped by some individual's or group of individuals' lust for power. Therefore, education should also always entail an attention for the possibility, and often the necessity, for dissenting words and actions.

Now, Arendt's point might imply that she only laments the loss of tradition that marks our era, but this is not the case. She further states that:

> … with the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past. (Arendt, 2006, p. 94)

For Arendt, we live in a gap between past and future, with a connection to the past which grounds but does not determine our future actions. The educator is someone who operates within this gap, and has a responsibility to present a world to children, who are newcomers into the world, while also allowing for them to change that world in new and unforeseen ways. She formulates this in the following way:

> The responsibility for the development of the child turns in a certain sense against the world: the child requires special protection and care so that nothing destructive may happen to him from the world. But the world, too, needs protection to keep it from being overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation. (Arendt, 2006, p. 182)

For Arendt, as said, there is thus something specific about education which does not pertain to the adult world of politics. For her, the word emancipation cannot apply to children in the same way that it does for social groups who have liberated themselves from oppression, such as in the case of women's emancipation or the emancipation of the enslaved or exploited. She maintains that 'treating children as an oppressed minority in need of

liberation' is an 'absurdity' (Arendt, 2006, p. 187) which has nonetheless been applied in practice, with the result of a loss of authority in the realm of education already discussed above. 'Authority', she writes,

> … has been discarded by adults, and this can mean only one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children. (Arendt, 2006, p. 187)

Here we can weave the thread comprised by this short excursion into Arendt's thought back to the general canvas of my counter-translation of Rancière's thought. Rancière espouses the belief that one does not need a teacher in order to learn, and that teachers are in fact often detrimental to one's learning process. This is done through the 'stages of explicative progression' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 12) which I have explored in more detail above. What is rather needed for us to learn – to keep adventuring, that is, to be fascinated and be drawn forward through our fascination – is what he calls *urgency*. Urgency occurs when a situation demands of us to learn what is necessary for us to persevere and increase our power.

The primary example is learning a language, which almost everyone does because the frustration of not being able to communicate with those around us urges us to adventure into the world of signs and appropriate their use in order for us to be able to express our self, or will. Another example is the case which I discussed in Chapter 2 of the girl in the Children's Home who was illiterate but had become very proficient at hiding this fact. She had to learn how to do so in order to protect herself from being bullied and ridiculed. The organisation's members designated her as stupid because she could not follow regular school activities, but it is clear that she was actually very intelligent, as proven by the way in which she managed to hide her illiteracy from others. She was also exceptionally empathetic for a ten year old and she understood social situations better than many adults. All of this could not be perceived by the adults around her, because their *a priori* designation of her as stupid precluded them from being able to perceive what she was capable of.

Another example from the Children's Home was a twelve year old girl who had taught herself how to manipulate others through a combination of knowing how to compliment them and a remarkable capacity to cry on demand. No doubt her social background had imposed the urgency upon her to learn this set of skills. But these were children who had already been cast aside by society before entering the Children's Home, and so their sensible world had imposed a demand on them to learn how to perceive themselves as inferior, which was then further exacerbated by the power imposed upon them by the panoptic nature of the home that was supposed to be a safe haven for them. The point, in any case, is that urgency

makes one learn what it is necessary for them to learn, and that, in my analysis, the ignorant schoolmaster is a sensible configuration of space and time which urges us to persevere and increase our power to act and think under the mark of equality[37]. So this also troubles my critique of the panoptic nature of the home: George's demand for attention worked at least partly as the urgency I discuss here. This is an *aporia*. The increase in power is thus an increase of our capacity to express our will, which is our self – but that self is understood not as in the excerpt from Biesta two pages above – that is, as separated from an engagement with what or who is other, but precisely as relational, as exemplified in the communal nature of fascination.

What follows from the previous discussion is that education, when conceived of us as the establishment of sensible configurations sustained over time through tradition, does not entail a process of emancipation. Not in the conventional sense, because there is nothing from which a child has to be set free. But also not in Rancière's (2009b) sense, where 'emancipation means the disruption of the distribution of the sensible' (n.p.). Education is rather a space and a time in which the sensible is in the process of being distributed. So instead of conceiving of education primarily as a process of emancipation – which is a liberation, an escape, a disruption, a getting away from, an onslaught of the new – I want to first think of it as the sensible configuration of an environment within which children become part of a community of equals, in which they can become fascinated by things and increase their power to think and act and express. This is a theoretical proposition, constructing a utopia which we can attempt to project into the world, even though, because we have all already been corrupted by the passion of contempt at least to some extent, it will never be something we can fully accomplish. This means that, as Masschelein (2011) proposes, being an educator is always an 'exercise of thought' and a 'work on the self' (p. 356).

Instead of liberation, then, education as the sensible configuration proposed allows children to adventure within a world of freedom from the outset. What "freedom" means, in this context, can be related to Rancière's notion of autonomy, already invoked above:

> A form of thinking, practice and organization free from the presupposition of inequality, free from the hierarchical constraint and the hierarchical belief. (Rancière, 2017, para. 3)

That hierarchical belief is what, in TIS, Rancière calls the passion of *contempt*, or 'inequality's passion' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 80). The passion of contempt, writes Rancière (1987/1991), 'is the principle behind the laziness that causes intelligence to

[37] In Chapter 3 I explained why I am using the word "mark" in this way.

plummet into material gravity' (p. 87). This laziness is another word for distraction, and to plummet means such as things as parroting phrases we do not understand or we do not believe in, or to let other people get a hold of us and control what we do and believe, or to become part of mass movements fed by hatred that give a sense of belonging we have not been able to find elsewhere.

In my view, then, this kind of freedom does not contradict being part of a community which makes certain demands on how we should act or think. It is the paradoxical kind of freedom that results from restraints put in place in order to keep us attentive. It is not a freedom to act or think in whatever way we want. But that in turn does contradict one of the principles formulated by Rancière in TIS, at least in the very general way in which he states it, that 'whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 18). As Biesta (2017) puts it, this notion implies a figure of the teacher as 'a facilitator of learning, a facilitator of students constructing their own stories' (p. 68). He calls this a freedom of signification, and he denounces this way of understanding what the "ignorant schoolmaster" does. This freedom, he writes,

> … appears as a kind of neo-liberal freedom, where everyone is free to articulate their own 'story', rather than a political let alone a democratic freedom where there would always be a question about how the different 'poems' would impact on the ways in which we live our lives *together-in-equality*, rather than each of us being enclosed in our own story. (p. 69)

There is thus, in the education proposed by Rancière as I understand it, a *common* story – or myth, fiction – which is the fiction of the equality of intelligence. And it matters to my understanding of the Rancièrian teacher whether someone's actions are in agreement with this story or not, and, thus, what they learn, and how they learn.

Following this, let me revisit once more the notion of the "equality of intelligence". Throughout this thesis I have pointed out different ways in which Rancière, and others taking up the word from him, understand the word "intelligence". Though it is never explicated, this word is used in very different senses by them. For instance, at different points in the literature "intelligence" might be a *person*, the *mind* of a person, the *knowledge* contained in the mind of a person, which is at times further equated with *science*, and thus *method*. It can further be a *capacity* or *power* inherent to everyone and anyone to speak or express, to understand, to translate, to guess, to wander, to be ignorant. This usage of the word "power" is congruent with the notion of the circle or spiral of power as a world which, conjured through the presupposition of the equality of intelligence, breaks into the world of inequality. To retain control of our own power is to be able to use our own intelligence, which is to resist the plummet toward material gravity, toward the planet of contempt. This power is

what is manifested when we learn a language and also what is stultified when the expert teacher tells us that we should learn the right method for acquiring knowledge before adventuring any further by ourselves. So Rancière, charmed by Jacotot's rebellious spirit, urges us to:

> … methodically repeat the method of chance that gave you the measure of your power. The same intelligence is at work in all the acts of the human mind. (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 16)

This is what I have done in my adventure as well – to meander to and fro, spiralling and weaving my way through the literature without anyone telling me what it meant or how it should be interpreted. And yet I believe that this view is not without problems. First, Hallward asks several questions which I believe are quite obvious yet which are not answered by Rancière:

> Does all learning really proceed on the model of language learning? Is even language learning, or tool-using, devoid of explanation as Jacotot conceives it? To what extent is it possible to avoid recourse to the economy of explanation in fields of knowledge that are less accessible, less 'ready-to-hand' than those of natural languages — fields like quantum physics or neurology, for instance? (Hallward, 2008, p. 41)

I have neither the time nor the space to delve into these questions, but the point is that Rancière, as far as I know, does not grapple with these questions. Furthermore, he insists that the dualism between superior and inferior, master and slave, also pertains to the difference between the expert who has followed certain methods to get to knowledge and the layperson who does not know these methods – a 'division', as Rancière (1987/1991) puts it, 'between the groping animal and the learned little man, between common sense and science' (p. 8). He uses the word science synonymously with knowledge, too, as when he states that Jacotot had 'had communicated nothing to them [his students] about his science' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 9). Again, he states that the inequality between the pedagogue (the expert) and student is 'based on the opposition between science and ignorance' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 13). The circle of powerlessness is thus founded on this opposition between science and ignorance, and breaking out of it is to equalise or abolish the distinction. This is also to speak and act veraciously – I explored this in more detail in Chapter 2 – and Rancière continues this by stating the following:

> It will not be said that one has acquired science, that one knows truth or has become a genius. But it will be known that, in the intellectual order, one can do what any man can do. (p. 26)

And so here the equality of intelligence is once more about a capacity – which is, again, an overlap between his thought about politics, such as when Gauny did what he was not supposed to be capable of, and education. But again I believe that the overlap does not work as well as Rancière assumes: Gauny was capable because he taught himself to be capable. Perhaps the capacity Rancière refers to should therefore be qualified as the capacity to learn. Also, I am reminded by Trajković' statement that:

> … this practice becomes essentially dangerous today when we are living in a post-truth world. Because it doesn't give us mechanisms or tools in order to confront that. Because it assumes that we have pluralism, it assumes that we live in a plural society, which we don't. (Trajković, 2020, lecture)

And this is also the case for the overlap between Rancière's dispute with his figure of "the scientist" – represented by Althusser, Bourdieu, Plato, and many others – and the teacher as someone who has knowledge. Both run awry, in my view, because of the confusion of the meaning of the word intelligence.

If intelligence is considered to be an innate talent, as it often is – as, for example, in Hand (2007), who states that 'to be intelligent is to have a general aptitude for theory-intensive activities' (p. 42) – then the equality of intelligence stands in direct dispute with the notion of innate talents. It is a dispute with the very spirit of Platonism which, as Rancière observes, plagues most of the human and social sciences today.

If intelligence is considered to be a capacity, then it does not make sense to me to say that it is equal, simply because people do not have equal capacities. But I connect capacity to my discussion above of fascination, of the idea that we can enter and explore vast realms of ways of expressing, and that we can increase our capacity to care for those ways and to increase our power of expression by doing so. This is also in agreement with Crawford's (2015) discussion of skilled practices as ecologies of attention, discussed above, and his claim, related to the loss of these practices, that 'the resolutely individualistic understanding of freedom and rationality we have inherited from the liberal tradition disarms the critical faculties' (p. 21). And thus, I also believe that intelligence should not be considered as an equal ability to understand, as in Simons and Masschelein (2011b) and Vlieghe (2013; 2018). This is to assume that there are no prerequisites for understanding. But there are, and I have experienced it myself, in the fact that there were many aspects to Rancière's philosophy which I could not understand. Not because I missed the innate intelligence or talent, but because I missed knowledge of the whole within which I could have given meaning to the fragments I encountered. And it is important, I believe, to observe that that lack of understanding made me feel very powerless for a long time, which might have been avoided

if someone had explained the things I did not understand to me. Looking back, then, I would also have chosen not to spend as much time trying to break through the veil of the opaque texts before me, and instead to gather knowledge and understanding about things more accessible to me first.

I further reiterate that what "explanation" means in Rancière's conceptual constellation is not clear, even though it seems to be very clear to those who explain Rancière while claiming they do not explain him. In the eighth chapter of Biesta and Bingham's (2010) work on Rancière's philosophy of education, the authors respond to a critique raised in 1994 against TIS. They clearly believe that the critique is wrong, and that it is wrong because it 'uses its conclusions to *explain* certain things about Rancière and his work' (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 147, emphasis original). Yet they refuse to explain why they believe this is wrong, since 'to argue against this set of explanations is to join in the act of explaining' (Biesta & Bingham, 2010, p. 147). Pelletier's (2011) response to this is concise yet powerful: it is 'the very claim to refuse an explanation which functions as an explanation of why the review is wrong' (p. 617). So it seems that one can explain without explaining, while it is also the case that one can explain while not explaining. And it is the former kind of explanation which can greatly enhance someone's power because it provides them with the tools needed to adventure further through the lands of that which fascinated them.

The final aspect of education as a sensible configuration can be expressed in reference to Rancière's repeated discussions of Aristotle. As explored above, Rancière repeatedly emphasises Aristotle's definition of the human being, in a way which I will repeat once more here:

> The supremely political destiny of man is attested by a *sign*: the possession of the logos, that is, of speech, which *expresses*, while the voice simply *indicates*. (Rancière, 1995/1999, p. 2)

In relation to this, Todd proposes that emancipation should be understood:

> … in terms of being able to make claims in which one's voice moves from being simply 'noise' to something that is heard and listened to. (Todd, 2018, p. 974)

Education – which, as I have argued, is not about emancipation – should be the place in which one's expressions are considered to be something worthy to be perceived and signified as meaningful by others from the outset. This is a fundamental aspect of an education as a sensible configuration of space and time which urges children to persevere and increase their power to act and think under the mark of equality. It is about increasing one's power to express and for those expressions to be heard by others, so that a community

can be formed within which all children consider themselves to be an equal to all others. This community would ideally become a utopia for them – that is, an ideal frame which they can project upon the world, or, to recount Rancière's formulation,

> … an intellectual construction which brings a place in thought into conjunction with a perceived or perceptible intuitive space. (Rancière, 1992/2007, p. 15)

The utopia here consists of an understanding of ourselves as sharing in the universal and equal power of intelligence, which we apply in fascinating adventures – that is, by being led by fascination in community with other adventurers. This utopia or ideal framework forms in relation to the sensible space and time comprising the educational settings within which we are brought up. Since we grow up knowing ourselves to be part of a community of equals, it becomes possible for this community to be present in our world even when it is absent. That is, in order to 'rave reasonably' (Rancière, 1987/1991, p. 91) the world of reason needs to be part of us so that we can project it into the world of madness around us. This means that the reasonable community of equals is there even when it is not there, and we do not lose self-confidence even when surrounded by those who would very much wish for us to lose it.

Perhaps what Gauny did was almost miraculous, because he was able to do this despite the fact that he was not actually part of such a community. He was surrounded by violence and yet could interject the world of reason into the world of unreason around him. But he did this through a realisation that he was not actually alone, that he was connected to all those others who suffered, like the prisoners in the panopticon he had begun to perceive on the horizon. This is perhaps a way in which love can break into the world of hatred. But this also means that educational spaces cannot be the kind of spaces they are now so often where it is either about competition, or, conversely, where what children do – whether they adventure, and increase their power of expression – hardly matters to their teachers. The latter then entails a notion of freedom to do anything they want, even if that freedom is taken up to succumb to gravity, that is, to the development of a deep sense of inferiority or superiority. It is rather about creating sensible configurations that function as ignorant schoolmasters, that is, as a non-coercive demand to adventure. This would be a space and time which demands of children that they persevere and increase their power to act and think, to develop skilled forms of expression, surrounded by others who hear them and who are heard by them in turn, so that they ultimately know themselves to be capable to persevere, even in the face of violence. To be autonomous, that is, free from contempt and the desire to dominate; yet powerful, and with full understanding that they only need immanent justification for their striving to persevere and create powerful expressions.

Limitations

The adventuring approach taken in this thesis, based on the hypothesis that it would allow me to observe the equality of intelligence between myself and Rancière's works, was of an experimental nature. Every experiment, by definition, entails the possibility that its results are not as expected or hoped. A final reflection is in order in which I delineate the limitations of my project in terms of its aims, succeeded by an indication of what I believe should follow next in my research adventure.

The most central limitation is, I believe, related to the fact that Rancière is a philosopher whose works are very difficult to read. My academic background is not as a philosopher, though I did follow several philosophy courses both in my undergraduate Bachelor's and postgraduate Master's programmes. Rancière might respond to this that setting boundaries on what it means to be a philosopher is to partition the sensible and construct the belief in a fictional incapacity belonging those who are excluded from the category of "philosopher". My point however is not to partition the sensible and make claims as to who gets to call themselves a philosopher. It is more basic: there were locations in my adventure in which I did not manage to progress, because my ignorance regarding the themes and concepts at hand excluded me from participating in the shared horizon implicitly present in those points. Relating to my analysis of the confusion of the meaning of intelligence in Rancière's works and the secondary literature, I believe it is possible to conclude that, regardless of whether I possess an innate intelligence in the sense of "talent" – or, indeed, if such a talent is merely a fiction and everyone is equally intelligent in this sense from the outset – I still missed intelligence in terms of the "knowledge" that was prerequisite for understanding what was happening.

A counter-argument to this could be the following: reading Rancière's works was never about knowledge and understanding, but about going on an adventure. He might tell me that it was exactly the ignorance I felt which urged me to go off on my path, an adventure in which I connected all that I encountered to the myriad of things I already knew. This argument certainly, in my view, qualifies the limitations so far observed. However, I also believe that it does not fully invalidate them. There are parts of Rancière's works that have remained opaque, and where the adventure ran into murky ground – and I believe that it might have been fruitful to obtain knowledge about those before setting off. So I do not agree fully with his depiction of the teacher – as someone who transmits knowledge, or as someone who creates a lesson plan going from simple to complex – as necessarily stultifying. More

nuance is needed on these matters in order to know in which way these actions may be stultifying, and in which ways they may contribute to someone's adventure.

In relation to this, I also believe that there are problematic ways in which Rancière's notion of the equality of intelligence has been taken up in the literature, as recounted several times in this study. Generally, this is about the notion that the opinion or assumption of equality can be an opinion or assumption of ability. I believe that ability cannot be wholesale assumed as something already present, since abilities, as I see it, can be developed over time. Education, in one of its many senses, thus entails a process of acquiring the abilities needed to adventure through the world, or worlds. In my own Master's programme in Social and Cultural Education, which took 3 years including a year of pre-Master, my professors generally followed a Rancièrian approach to education. Here, an openness toward the unknown and an ethos or willingness to be present, to put oneself into play, are perceived to be of greater importance than expertise or vast amounts of knowledge (which is not to say we did not learn knowledge, that was certainly also part of it). Their critical approach to education was, to an extent, a way to counter the dominant discourse on and practice in education, which is centred on the teacher as expert, and where:

> … the teacher's expertise is generally translated as 'competency', that is, as (assumed) knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be employed to perform concrete tasks. (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 119)

Such an expert is 'someone whose expertise is based on (scientific) knowledge and/or someone who acts methodically and competently' (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 66). This notion of the expert teacher echoes my discussion of it in the previous chapter. There, I already summarised Simon's (2008) delineation of the teacher as someone who seeks mastery, in contrast to the teacher as expert. In later work, Masschelein and Simons (2013) refer to the former as an 'amateur teacher' (p. 70). 'For such a teacher,' they write, 'knowledge and methodology are important but so too are love and caring' (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 67).

Now, I most certainly agree with this view and I also think – as I have hopefully expressed in my thesis – that love and care are the driving factors behind education. However, my adventure has allowed me to question the assumption that knowledge and methodology are so distinct from love and care as here proposed. A metaphor I have already introduced above is that of a meticulously grown garden. If one wants to care for the garden, if one loves the flora and the fauna living in the garden, then one needs to know how to properly interact with those living things if one wants the expression of their care to be fruitful. Care that is not backed with knowledge can be dangerous or deadly, and the flowers

may be trampled rather than given a chance to flourish. Similarly, the keeper of the garden functioning as an amateur teacher would not allow anyone to experiment with the flowers in whatever way they want. They know that this would be too dangerous. So they have to set limits on the their students' freedom, and they have to be in a constant state of vigilance to make sure the students act in a proper way. Rancière's call for impropriety can certainly have a place here, if, for example, the royal garden has been closed off for the public and is reappropriated by them as a public place. But it can have place in the question of how to attend to the garden only with great hesitation: what is important there, in terms of education, is that the newcomer in the garden can learn from the old generation all the ways they have developed in terms of how to care for it, and the transmission of those ways of caring is empowering, not stultifying.

In terms of my own adventure, I think that the spiralling method of contingency has brought me many things, but it has left unattended the development of specific methods and knowledges with which to care for the material at hand. So, too, did my adventure allow me to become more aware of some of the many forms of injustice and inequality permeating our globe; as well as of how I had subconsciously subscribed to a consensus, a managed way of perceiving things, in which I actively remained ignorant and refrained from acting on the will to *redistribute* the inegalitarian ways in which the sensible is distributed. Yet at the same time, despite these realisations, I did not feel that I became more capable or knowledgeable in terms of how to affectively deal with what I was now perceiving. Instead of feeling more powerful, I felt less powerful, because there was a constant awareness of the many years of inactivity and depression which could have been spent on learning more about the world around me. In this sense, I feel some affinity with McNay's (2014) critique of Rancière's philosophy that it has a certain social weightlessness to it. And with the final words of an article by Hallward, in which he discusses the matter of political action in relation to Rancière's philosophy and its critique on the Marxist tradition. He states:

> In this sense the Marxist prescription is an instance of a more general endeavour at issue in every militant philosophical project — the effort to lend a consequential clarity to a subjective relation whose implications are otherwise obscure, and thereby to help illuminate a moment that Rancière's own work, in the end, does too much to defer: the moment of a decision, the moment of consequence. (Hallward, 2008, p. 43)

More concretely, my PhD was in a way the continuation of a struggle I have had throughout my school career. Both my primary and secondary schools were based on Montessori's theories. As such, their schooling systems were grounded on the conviction that giving children the freedom to plan their own path of learning is always the best way to

tease out their independence and reach maturity. For me, this system was a disaster. With no one to provide structure for me I never managed to finish anything on time. I was eventually expelled from school because I failed to complete the work I was supposed to do three years in a row. A stubborn clinging to the principle of freedom thus seems like an absurdity to me when that very freedom becomes a stultifying prison for those who miss the ability to stay attentive when confronted with an overload of tasks that need to be organised on a daily basis. This failure was always accompanied with a moral judgement: I failed to stay attentive and organised, and that made me a lazy and bad person. So my experience of "school" consisted primarily of the perpetual message that I was a moral failure and that I needed to be better at organising my work, which turned into an endless loop of the reinforcement of the same soul-crushing idea that I would never be able to succeed. At the same time, there was also the message that I was intelligent and that I should be able to accomplish many things if only I were able to change my mindset and get to work. These notions were thus imprinted in my mind and throughout my university path – Bachelor, Master, PhD – I consistently failed to stay on track and respond adequately to the call to organise and bring structure to my work, and therefore also consistently kept feeling like a moral failure. This has no doubt influenced both my fascination with Rancière's work and the way I have interpreted as well as critically assessed it. For me, the most important factor of his depiction of education is the call to create an environment in which the belief and expectation that human bodies can accomplish great things if they stay attentive is not an ideal only expressed in words, but in the very corporeal engagement of an educational community of which everyone is equally a part. This is also why I have tried to emphasise the role tradition can play in the creation and configuration of such communities. The iconoclastic spirit of the previous century oversaw the eradication of educational traditions in the name of the emancipation of children from the clasps of the authority of the previous generations. This is what I believe Arendt saw happening and what she perceived as the disappearance of the responsibility of existing generations for the maturation of the new.

Continuation of the adventure

The question remains how I want to continue in the future. It is clear to me now that a doctoral thesis is not an end point, but a beginning. Adventuring through Rancière's works has allowed me to adventure through a small part of a much wider whole which is still opaque to great extent. My wish is to break further through this opaque veil in order to learn more about education and its relation to the wider social and cultural context within which we are urged to think about education today.

My experience in this thesis has been double-sided. It was a great privilege to be able to spend so much time on following my own adventures, and it has made it possible for me to begin the development of my own conceptual framework, as well as a way of dealing with words through writing in order to express the deep worry I feel about the world we find ourselves in today. Yet these thoughts have remained too ethereal, too ungrounded to actual educational practice. Therefore, my adventure, which will certainly not stop taking place in the world of theory, should also be a way from the clouds toward solid ground, in order to find ways to give weight to the words written on these pages. Otherwise they remain just that: words.

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