The Archipolitics of Jacques Rancière
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Abstract
The paper examines Jacques Rancière's critique of Hannah Arendt, whom he considers as a proponent of liberal political philosophy. The fact that he finds in Arendt an advocate of the liberal, even conservative fixation of the borderline between the private and the public sphere and at the same time oversees her insistence on what he would call 'dissenting' politics – particularly her notions of *beginning* and *revolution* – demands the uncovering of possible tacit reasons of his rebuttal of Arendt.

In the center is the axis to which their two seemingly irreconcilable political-theoretical edifices are bound, around which they 'twist' and, although separated, are even able to supplement each other: the axis of the *private and public*, i.e. of the *social and political*, and the notion of *arché* as its balance point. The assumption is that Rancière's radical posture against Arendt prevents him to also learn something from her purportedly juxtaposed position. Moreover, it seems that Arendt's political thought even offers solutions for paradoxes into which he maneuvers himself.

Therefore, and contrary to Rancière's own insistence on the irreconcilable differences between them, Hannah Arendt represents for Rancière's political thinking a theoretical forefield that precedes his own work and even anticipates its critique.

Krisis

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The formation of the philosophical and political thought of Jacques Rancière was decisively marked by the experience of his initiation into political theory as Louis Althusser's student and by his participation in the writing of *Reading Capital* (1965). Rancière's subsequent political theory, the "student's" criticism of his "teacher," marked the radical departure of an entire generation from Marxism of the Althusserian type (cf. Rancière 1974; 1975). At the same time as he advanced his criticism of Althusser's scholarly pedagogy and the politics of knowledge in general (e.g. Bourdieu's sociology), Rancière extensively discussed what he called "rejuvenated political philosophy" (Rancière 2002, viii). The term refers to a rather heterogeneous group of French *nouveaux philosophes* who in the 1970s and 1980s were strongly oriented towards Plato and Aristotle: André Glucksmann, Alain Finkielkraut, Pascal Bruckner, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Jean-Marie Benoist, Christian Jambet, Guy Lardreau, and Jean-Paul Dollé (cf. Negt 1983, 57). For Rancière, new political philosophy is not a "subgenre" or an "area" of philosophy, not a "reflection of immanent rationality of political activity" (Rancière 2010c, 96); it is, in fact, "the name of an encounter – and a polemical encounter at that – in which the paradox or scandal of politics is exposed: its lack of any proper foundation" (Rancière 2002, 61). Here, Rancière demonstrates his disagreement with the foundational idea that politics proceeds as an enactment or materialization of some external or eternal "grounds" (truth, nature, etc.). Regarding the invisible "grounds" or foundations of political philosophy, in what follows I examine his critique of Hannah Arendt, whom he considers a proponent of political philosophy in general and a forerunner of French new political philosophers in particular (similarly, Badiou calls them "Hannah Arendt's disciples," Badiou 2003, 8). Contrary to general assumptions and contrary to Rancière's own insistence on the irreconcilable differences between them, Hannah Arendt's name represents for his political thinking a theoretical forerunner that precedes his own work and even anticipates its critique. Following on the heels of this claim, I suggest reading Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière as representative of two different anarchisms. They meet on opposite sides of a common rotational axis, which has the *arché* as its anarchist core notion: on one side is the pathos of the an-archic as the new and unforeseen element of event or even revolution; on the other is the anarchist rejection of any genealogy, tradition, and authority as the leading principles of the political. Here, if Rancière's ambivalent relation to Arendt is characterized by strategic positioning and attacks that are carried out in disguise, in footnotes and allusions, then reading these subtexts makes it necessary to unpack his references for the sake of positioning him in the direction of a different theoretical context and a different understanding of an-archic politics.

A Symptomatic Reading

Both Arendt and Rancière are theoreticians for whom it is almost impossible, as Arendt similarly asserts of Duns Scotus, to find "a comfortable niche between predecessors and successors in the history of ideas" (Arendt 1978, 133). Rancière's hybrid position, blending Marxism, post-Marxism and anarchism, German liberal-philosophical heritage and the French Maoist experience, has already led to interpretations that observe him in a contrapuntal relation to his predecessors (cf. Badiou 2005, 108). Due to his unusual encounter with German philosophy (primarily with Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller), he occupies a unique place within the context of (French) post-post-structuralist theories (Hartle 2009, 241). Concurring with this is his critical but nonetheless ambivalent stance towards

Hannah Arendt: although he sees in Arendt a typical follower of the tradition of liberal political philosophy, certain common traits he shares with her cannot be ignored. Is it possible, then, that Rancière, who heated up the particularist nature of postmodern micropolitical emancipatory thinking and passed from the area of social, interest-oriented identity politics to the level of the "actual" political, purposefully antagonizes Arendt, who formulated this criticism long before him and possibly more radically (cf. Mengue 2009, 186)? Taking this suspicion as the point of departure, the reading of Rancière's texts ventured here illuminates the implicit or unconsidered interrelations between him and Hannah Arendt. That said, in the same way that Slavoj Žižek discovers in Rancière an "anti-Lyotardian Lyotard" (Žižek 1999, 172), I interpret him as an anti-Arendtian Arendtian.

As the intersection and contact points between Rancière and Arendt are revealed only after a detailed – one could say "symptomatic" – reading, analyses of this kind are still rare and vague. Here, Katrin Meyer notes that "Arendt's critique of the (homogenized) notion of people, of the anti-political decision making by the majority and the plebiscite [...] is clearly comparable to Rancière's [...] diagnosis of post-democracy" (Meyer 2011, 30). In his book on the "insurgent democracy," conceived along the lines of Karl Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), Miguel Abensour notes that "only Jacques Rancière seems to preserve Marx's intuition as to the being, as to the anti-statist disposition, of democracy" (Abensour 2011, xxxiv), while just a few pages later he interprets this anti-statist disposition as "action in the Arendtian sense of the term" (Abensour 2011, xli).[1] And Andrew Schaap assumes that Rancière could be a closet Arendtian (Schaap 2011, 37).

In his essay "The Subject of the Politics of Recognition: Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière," James Ingram stresses that with his understanding of politics, similarly to Arendt, Rancière counteracts the minimization of politics and its relegation to economic spheres of interests and competition (Ingram 2007, 236). Like Arendt, he demands that democracy be actively lived and profiled precisely in opposition to the "collapsing of the political, the sociological and the economic into one plane" (Rancière 2006, 20). It seems that, notwithstanding Rancière's

insistence on the irreconcilable differences between himself and Arendt, for Rancière's political thinking Arendt represents a theoretical forerunner that precedes his own work and even anticipates its critique.

Indeed, in the same way Althusser's spirit still unmistakably haunts his texts, Rancière never managed to escape his adversary Arendt. Throughout his works one finds several rather non-systematic remarks on Arendt which could almost all be summarized in a short paragraph. Arendt's name first appears in *On the Shores of Politics* (1990/1995). There he disputes the legitimacy of her adoption of Aristotle's division between *poiesis* and *praxis*. Without indulging in an in-depth reading of Aristotle's legacy in Arendt in any of these instances, Rancière mentions her name as a generally valid example of the continuation of political philosophy, so that when speaking of ancient political philosophers, he introduces her name by means of a "for example" or "and so on." As for Arendt's central notion of *vita activa*, he uses this term as a negative foil to which his *vita democratica* is juxtaposed: "This is what I should like to demonstrate by examining some aspects of what I shall call *vita democratica* – rather as Hannah Arendt speaks of the *vita activa*. I shall deal with just two such aspects in what follows: the *use of words* and the *use of forms*" (Rancière 1995, 45). Interestingly, this quotation, taken from the very end of the chapter "The Reign of the Many," refers to Hannah Arendt by way of a disambiguation but does not give an exact explanation as to why Rancière's notion of *vita democratica* should be detached from Arendt's notion of *vita activa*.

Five years later, in his political and theoretical masterwork – *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1995/2002) – Arendt's name is only rarely mentioned. However, a critique of political philosophy, as formulated in *Disagreement*, is later exemplified precisely using Arendt's attempt to detach social problems from politics, which is purportedly based on the "natural" distinction between the rich and the poor. If in *Disagreement* one reads that "[t]he struggle between the rich and the poor is not social reality, which politics then has to deal with" but that this struggle "is the actual institution of politics itself" (Rancière 2002, 11), then in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (2004/2009) Rancière directly treats Hannah Arendt as an advocate of this "natural" distinction. There, he uses her name as representative of political

purism and the philosophy of consensus: "Arendt's political purism, which ventured to separate political freedom from social necessity, becomes a legitimation of the necessities of the consensual order" (Rancière 2009, 131).[2]

The contact zones between Arendt and Rancière have been summarized by Andrew Schaap in his essay "Hannah Arendt and the Philosophical Repression of Politics" (2012). Firstly, both Arendt and Rancière argue for a politics that overcomes determination through the purely *social* (economics, competition, life sustainment). Secondly, Arendt's understanding of *arché* displays some elements of an-archic politics related to those of Rancière, although he strives to correct her. And thirdly, her understanding of *politics* as a creation of a common world is compliant with (rather than opposed to) Rancière's own world-disclosing understanding of *politics*, which is defined as the public appearance of the hitherto invisible, unrecognized voices, bodies, and subjects (cf. also Schaap 2010, 167). Schaap's conclusion is that "[i]n each case, an Arendtian might suspect, Rancière has actually (albeit, perhaps unintentionally) taken a concept from Arendt and twisted it to suit his purpose" (Schaap 2012, 161). Nevertheless, Schaap concurs with Rancière's rejection of Arendt, claiming that "the disagreement that Rancière seeks to establish between himself and Arendt is real and profound" (Schaap 2011, 38). The differences consist, firstly, in Arendt's ontological understanding of politics, which is opposed to Rancière's dealing with the political as a process (ibid., 38); secondly, in Arendt's understanding of the human as a *speaking* animal, whereas Rancière sees the human as a *literary* animal (ibid., 36); and, thirdly, in Rancière's critique of the political-philosophical anthropocentrism, to which Arendt still professes (ibid., 36). In the present study, although Schaap approves of Rancière's critical position towards Arendt, I claim that the fine distinctions are indeed based on a "disagreement that Rancière *seeks* to establish between himself and Arendt" (ibid., 38, italics I.P.) rather than on profound differences. Here, I incline more to the inference by James D. Ingram, namely that "Rancière can be read as emending rather than rejecting Arendtian politics" (Ingram 2007, 237).

The Dichotomies

Ernst Vollrath once remarked that in modern history the "old wisdom" had turned into the "ability of an individual to successfully conduct his/her life" (Vollrath 1987, 239-240) and that philosophy itself had experienced a centuries-long privatization process, which he calls the "privatization of prudentia" (ibid., 244). Rancière counters a history of modern times written in this way with the warning that (political) philosophy has never been able to bridge the gap between thinking (theoria, contemplatio) and the common, political world. If in its origins within antiquity it provided nothing but normative interpretations – Plato and Aristotle drew a normative differentiation between those who think and act and those who "merely" produce and work –, the political philosophy of the twentieth century continued to distinguish between "man and animal" in a way that this distinction "runs right through the human species itself: only the best (*aristoi*) [...] are really human; the others, content with whatever pleasures nature will yield them, live and die like animals" (Arendt 1998, 21).

Despite Rancière's attribution of Arendt's thought to precisely this infamous tradition, Arendt does not invoke the ancient origins of political philosophy in order to upgrade the contemplative and detached science of political rule but in order to underscore "man's faculty of action" (ibid.). Here, consider her encompassing claim that although "no other human ability has suffered to such an extent from the progress of the modern age" (ibid.) and that not even the modern "rise of the secular" could outdo the "striving for immortality which originally had been the spring and center of the *vita activa*" (ibid.). Moreover, although she developed *political theory* as a critique of merely contemplative *political philosophy*, it is telling that with her path-breaking, elaborate, and voluminous correction of the political deficiency of modern times Arendt did not simply reject *vita contemplativa*, much vaunted since the Middle Ages, but that her political theory, in fact, enhanced political thought by adding to it the dimension of *vita activa* (ibid., 17).

Rancière's central target in his critique of Arendt is her hierarchical distinction between shadow and light, the private and the public, the social and the political,

contemplation and action. He stages the dispute with Arendt and political philosophy as "a struggle over the distribution of public and private, of what is political and what is not" (Rancière 2010a, 54). If Arendt's notion of *beginning* – which in the realm of politics embodies the idea of a radically an-archic birth (Birmingham 2007, 277) and thus cannot be reduced to any *principium*[3] – necessarily has a public character, Rancière is interested in questioning the very semantic and political regime (the "order of words and the order of bodies," Rancière 2002, 37) that constitutes the distinction between the "public" and the "private" as hierarchical in the first place. Such a deconstructive gesture informs *On the Shores of Politics*. Here, he supplements Arendt's claim that the primary human right consists in "the right to have rights" (Rancière 1995, 50) with the following comment: "We might add that rights are held by those who can impose a rational obligation on the other to recognize them" (ibid.).

However, Rancière proceeds in a simpler manner than is required by Arendt's complex conceptualizations. He confuses two related but decisively different levels of her analysis. Rancière – a supposed "careful reader of Arendt" (Schaap 2012, 156) – confounds her *epistemological dichotomy of the private and the public* with her *political-theoretical separation of the social and the political*. For a disambiguation of these two dichotomies, consider Hannes Bajohr's pertinent differentiation between the *epistemological* (the prominent position of coming to light and of world disclosure) and the *political dimension* (execution of the break, dissent, disagreement, and beginning) of Arendt's work (Bajohr 2011, 29-31). Bajohr asserts that "publicity" in Arendt essentially encompasses two aspects of meaning which can be observed independently; concomitantly, they "unveil the entire semantic content of Arendt's publicity concept only in their interplay and combined effect" (ibid., 27). It is important to remark that unlike epistemological publicity, and still in close correlation to Martin Heidegger's notion of *disclosedness*, a disclosedness that is not spatially bound, Arendt's ideal of political publicity is able to "avert the elusiveness of the spontaneously emerging [publicity] and *continuously ensure the 'space of freedom'*" (ibid., 66, italics I.P.).

Furthermore, Rancière omits to specify the exact meaning of the "social" in Arendt.

Instead of reading it as a critique of commercialized *assujettissement* and identification of human beings according to the anti-political models of state or economy, he attacks her attempt to save political action from the encroachments of the "social." Departing from the claim that the "opposition between the 'political' and the 'social' is a matter defined entirely within the frame of 'political philosophy'" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 9), which would amount to "the philosophical repression of politics" (ibid.), he draws a rather simple conclusion: in his reading, Arendt advocates with her repudiation of the "social" a removal of private matters from the political sphere; consequently, she neglects the fact that "political figures [...] are always entangled in social figures" (Rancière 2010c, 90). For this, consider a more profound disambiguation proposed by Simona Forti. Taking Noberto Bobbio's differentiation between two dichotomies within what he calls the "great dichotomy" of the private and the public, Simona Forti remarks that for Arendt the "social" represents the realm where the confusion of the private and public takes place, where "pubblicizzazione del privato e la privatizzazione del pubblico" (Forti 2006, 291; cf. Bobbio 1989; also Pitkin 1981, 334) are underway. The dichotomy of the private and public helps Arendt, in fact, to interpret the "social" as an anti-political blending. The actual juxtaposition, which Arendt wants to reinforce normatively – and this is thoroughly ignored by Rancière – is the one between social passivity and interest-oriented conformism (which are anti-political) on the one hand, and free, unimpeded, and therefore unpredictable action (which is only political) on the other.

As regards his insistence on the dynamics of politicization and Arendt's assumed ontological understanding of politics as plurality (Schaap 2011, 38), Rancière reads Arendt as if she conformed with the ancient tendency to "identify political activity with the police order" (Rancière 2002, 70) and thus delegated political practice from the people to professional politicians, "experts" in politics. In Rancière's reading, when isolating "a short extract from the speech made by Pericles in Thucydides" she "set[s] up an exemplary political stage where peers (*homoioi*) distinguish themselves by making the fine speeches and performing the fine deeds that confer a brilliant immortality upon the precariousness of human actions" (Rancière 1995, 68). This identification of Arendt's political thought with the police order of

ancient political philosophy is neither precise nor correct. In her critique of "the social," Arendt does not vindicate the consensual politics of the state against the emancipatory demands on the part of society but, similarly to Rancière, critically observes what he recognizes as the aforementioned "collapsing of the political, the sociological and the economic into one plane" (Rancière 2006, 20). The result of this is the interference of the logic of profit, interests, and competition in politics and thus the *privatization of politics*. Arendt's concern for politics, therefore, is oriented towards politicization of this privatized state, i.e., towards *action* as intervention in the enduring logics of mere "behavior" as typical of modern society, which imposes "innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalize" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement" (Arendt 1998, 40). This necessity of politicization also features the outstanding historical moments of revolutions as soon as these begin to channel the political process towards normalization of hierarchical, apolitical relations between the leaders and the led, thus enforcing a "cleavage between the party experts who "knew" and the mass of the people who were supposed to apply this knowledge" (Arendt 1963, 264). Although this concern in fact complements Rancière's primary question, "where do you draw the line separating one life from the other?" (Rancière 2004b, 303), Rancière seeks to detach himself from Arendt in order to highlight his own, substantially different, understanding of the core of politics, i.e., of its *arché*. Before coming to the notion of *arché* that serves as a *differentia specifica* of their theoretical edifices, I will first consider how the disagreement between a foundational view of politics on the one hand (Arendt's appreciation of politics as the realization of specific human potential for action) and a post-foundational view on the other (Rancière's renunciation of a pre-political human nature and reorientation of politics towards demonstration of a dissensus over the very grounds of politics) structures their understanding of human rights.

In Rancière and Arendt's common opinion, the modern idea of human rights functions as ideology because it exhausts itself in the reduction of men to mere objects of politics instead of establishing their (self-)empowerment as political agents. Rancière interprets this as privatization which simultaneously succeeds on two levels. The ideology of human rights firstly operates as "an explicit form that denies political rights to certain parts of the population on sexual, social or ethnic grounds" (bio-political or archipolitical level, Rancière 2010a, 57). Secondly, it entails "an implicit form that restricts the sphere of citizenship to a definite set of institutions, problems, agents and procedures" (the parapolitical level; ibid.). He relates the human-rights ideology to the founding story of the *polis*, to that ideal-historical moment in which individual groups of people are assigned tasks in accordance with their supposed "nature." According to Rancière, political subjectification is precisely a reaction to this "natural order"; it is a "product of the [...] multiple fracture lines by which individuals and networks of individuals subjectify the gap between their condition as animals endowed with a voice and the violent encounter with the equality of the logos" (Rancière 2002, 37). Here, Schaap highlights an important distinctive trait in Rancière: in contrast to Arendt, who identifies the human as a *speaking* animal, Rancière insists that the human is a *literary* animal (Rancière 2002, 37), meaning that political subjectification necessarily implies "an excess of words" (Schaap 2011, 36). Schaap's point of distinction appears convincing but "an Arendtian" (Schaap 2012, 161) might, again, suspect that this confrontation proceeds at the cost of Arendt's own distinction between the *mere potential* of politics and politics as *action*. Although in her seminal political-theoretical works *The Human Condition* (1958), *On Revolution* (1963), and *On Violence* (1969) Arendt does not venture a distinct designation, in her late *The Life of the Mind* (1978) she insists on the deficiency of the mere capability of speech in contrast to actual communication. In her perspective, the mere availability of the language asset – anchored in the *sensus communis* as a "specifically human sense" (Arendt 1978, 268) – does not straightforwardly imply or lead to its political use. In order to make this asset accountable, one has to enact it through actual communication, which one necessarily does as a member of a community, as part of a "we" (ibid., 202): "and it is only as a member of such a unit, that is, of a community, that men are ready for action" (ibid.).

Another major difference put forward by Schaap regards Arendt's anthropocentric understanding of politics and Rancière's own critique of anthropocentrism. The Rancièrean project of democratic politics does not consist in the unification of people under a certain universal name or common denominator (craftsmen,

proletarians, women, etc.); instead, the political is contained in the renouncing of this police classification (May 2010, 12). In this regard, I agree with Schaap's conclusion that Rancière's view of politics is processual and dissensual, whereas Arendt's is rather ontological. Indeed, the greatest point of disagreement between Arendt's and Rancière's theoretical positions arises from the following: if politics for Arendt is primarily a world-disclosing, revealing activity that actualizes the true political potential of men, for Rancière – who also emphasizes its world-disclosing dimension – it is first and foremost a "litigious name" (Schaap 2011, 23). As such, politics *is not*; it only "*occurs* wherever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone's intervention, to crop up" (Rancière 2002, 60, italics I.P.). Thus, Rancière highlights the eminently disputable nature of being political. Whereas Arendt uses the category "human" in normative relation to all human beings (thus inevitably neglecting the fact that not everyone can enact his/her own humanity in the same way), Rancière problematizes the disreputable distinction between man and animal within the very realm of the political (human) community. "But the whole question, then, is to know who possesses speech and who merely possesses voice" (Rancière 2009, 24). However, although he complicates the classic distinction between man and animal, and notwithstanding his critique of anthropocentrism as present in the tradition of political philosophy, even in Rancière the litigious political act of renouncing the imposed identities takes place in the name of the human. The anthropocentric kernel in Rancière's thought is conspicuous, all the more so if one considers that Rancière introduced the category of the human in the still post-structuralist 1990s, that is, at a time when the hesitant questions as to "what comes after the subject" were constitutive of the theoretical establishment (cf., for instance, Nancy, Cadava, and Connor 1991).

To recapitulate, with the post-structuralist experience in mind, Rancière still adheres to a certain anthropocentrism, but he places the *human* differently than Arendt did: it is not a universal category that in modern times becomes alienated, degraded, or privatized, but a matter of political dispute, the very place of political articulation itself. Therefore, Rancière's emending of traditional (Arendtian) anthropocentrism is not a critique but a variation, indeed a translation of the traditional problem into terminology established by the linguistic turn, which is interested in "the *use of words* and *the use of forms*" (Rancière 1995, 45).

The Foundations of Politics: Arché

When Rousseau asserts that the actual founder of civil society was "[t]he first man, who, after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him" (Rousseau 2007, 59), one can add, along the lines of Rancière's thinking, that civil society draws its eternal power from the naturalization of this archipolitical lie. Moreover, the very modern version of democracy, whose "political figures [...] are always entangled in social figures" (Rancière 2010c, 90), is guilty of the same crime. Rancière maintains that the naturalization of this lie has been the task of political philosophy: "At the head of the anodyne expression 'political philosophy' one finds the violent encounter between philosophy and the exception to the law of *arche* proper to politics, along with philosophy's effort to resituate politics under the auspices of this law" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 9).

In its original meaning, *arché* is polysemic: it means both "origin" and "principle" through which authority is legitimated, both "commencement" and "commandment" (Rancière 2006, 38):[4] "*Arkhè* is the commandment of he who commences, of what comes first" (ibid.). Although Rancière does not necessarily imply this (he begins the paragraph only by saying, "As Hannah Arendt reminded us," ibid.), Arendt seems to approve of this amalgamation of "commencement" and "commandment" when she somewhat uncritically introduces Plato's dictum that "only the beginning (*arche*) is entitled to rule (*archein*)" (Arendt 1998, 224).[5] Similarly, she suggests that the "experience of foundation" (Arendt 1963, 41) is tightly connected with the history of revolutions, that "revolution on the one hand, and constitution and foundation on the other, are like correlative conjunctions" (ibid., 126). This correlation is, in fact, "conservative" rather than "revolutionary" (ibid., 41), she adds. In her account, the conservative character of the revolutionary founding act is nevertheless justified only to the extent that it points to the striving that the

"'revolutionary' spirit could survive the actual end of the revolution" (ibid., 126). It points to the demand "to assure the survival of the spirit out of which the act of foundation sprang" (ibid., 126).[6] But the preservation of the founding spirit is political only if it is upheld by many: "A model of sovereignty that would rely on only one absolute, that is, solitary agent would from [Arendt's] perspective mean not the constitution but the death of the political" (Meyer 2011, 28). Upon closer inspection, it would therefore be false to assume that with the seemingly affirmative reference to Plato Arendt legitimized the assumption that the founding act alone provides the right to rule.

In *Ten Theses on Politics* (2001), Rancière focuses on Arendt's "vertiginous short-cut" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 2) of equating beginning, ruling, being free, and living in a city state, that is, of her understanding of freedom as life within a politically defined framework. Later, in "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" (2004), he supplements this critique as follows: the claim that "[t]o be free and to live in a *polis* is the same thing" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 2) confers human rights only to those in possession of citizen's rights. Arendt's understanding of *bare life* as the state of radical abolishment of the *political* leads to an invocation to restitute the borders, which consequently effects the exclusion of those who remain outside of the borders (Rancière 2004b, 301). Such a reading suggests that Arendt actively endorses the exclusive archipolitics as inherent to the traditional understanding of democracy, which is exemplified by her presumably shortsighted critique of human rights: "Either the rights of those who have no rights or the rights of those who have rights. Either a void or a tautology, and, in both cases, a deceptive trick, such is the lock that she builds" (ibid., 302). However, the "vertiginous short-cut" is Rancière's trick rather than Arendt's lapse. When he concludes that Arendt's critique of the emptiness of human rights ends in a tautology ("they are the rights of those who have rights, which amounts to a tautology," ibid.), the supplement provided by Rancière only translates, again, the Arendtian account of human rights into the two-leveled disambiguation of the category of *man* between the "order of words" and "the order of bodies":

[S]uch is the lock that she builds. It works out only at the cost of sweeping aside the third assumption that would escape the quandary. There is indeed a third assumption, which I would put as follows: the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not (ibid.).

Contrary to an alleged interest in tautologies, Arendt's criticism of the Rights of Man is not exhausted by a rhetorical interest in, as in Rancière, "the *use of words* and *the use of forms*" (Rancière 1995, 45), but culminates in advocating institutional politics that would ensure the practice of freedom. Indeed, then, "[t]o be free and to live in a *polis*" amounts to "the same thing" (Rancière 2001, Thesis 2): however, Arendt enforces archipolitics for the sake of inclusion and not exclusion, and with the aim of an extension of the *polis*, and not the conservation of existing borders.

That said, the model of *polis* advocated by Arendt is not one of the socially stratified "Fortress Europe" or related post-democratic reinventions of the modern idea of the sovereign state. Instead, departing from the ancient idea of *isonomia* (meaning "no rule," Ingram 2007, 234), Arendt designs a normative ideal that relinquishes the differentiation between rulers and subjects. "This notion of no-rule was expressed by the concept of *isonomy*, whose outstanding characteristic among the forms of government [...] was that the notion of rule (the "archy" from αϱχειν in monarchy and oligarchy, or the "cracy" from κϱατειν in democracy) was entirely absent from it" (Arendt 1963, 30). Notwithstanding the implied extension of *isonomy* towards the many, at this point Rancière's remark on the parapolitical character inherent to this model of political action, which necessarily enables politics only within secured spaces – councils of the *polis* or the political sphere of a legally effective state – proves most relevant indeed. The ideal of isonomy unambiguously presents a weak point in Arendt's theoretical construction, as long as some pertinent questions are left unanswered, for instance: *How* can that which is declared politically unworthy (through laws or their absence) become political and change the existing order of the political? *How*, i.e., by means of which acts, interventions, or procedures can freedom of the few result in "freedom for everybody" ("Freiheit für alle," Arendt 1965, 10)? As agonal readings of Dana Villa, Bonnie Honig, and

Hanna Pitkin have shown, this is possible only under the substantial dynamization of Arendt's dichotomies of *zoé* and *bios*, of the social and political, private and public (Villa 1997; Honig 1991 and 1995; Pitkin 1981). As regards the first question, Rancière's insistence on politics as a process undoubtedly has more to offer for contemporary questions of political subjectification of that "part of those who have no part" (Rancière 2002, 65). But when it comes to Rancière's own attempts to define more precise modalities of upholding the newly established polity, his argumentation delimits itself to advocating an unforeseeable event. It is precisely here that Rancière's and Arendt's initial positions coincide in their mutual predilection for the events of political subjectification, "disruption" (Rancière 2002, 70), or revolution, which in both accounts assumes the category of "miracle" (Arendt 2005, 112). *Arché* takes place "whenever something new occurs, [when] it bursts into the context of predictable processes as something unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately causally inexplicable – just like a miracle" (Arendt 2005, 111-112); "Politics occurs wherever a community with the capacity to argue and to make metaphors is likely, at any time and through anyone's intervention, to crop up" (Rancière 2002, 60). Simultaneously, Arendt supplements this necessity of a secular miracle with the insistence on institutional – archipolitical – instruments that ensure the continuation of the revolutionary spirit. She endorses this position because in the face of the annihilation of human freedom by totalitarian, inhuman politics, freedom ought to outlive the moment of disruption. Contrary to Rancière's interpretation of her inclination towards institutions, founding acts, passing laws, and constitutive consensus in terms of a marker of a liberal perspective and an "archipolitical position" (Rancière 2004b, 299), in Arendt's account the institution vouchsafes the possibility of new *beginnings* as a fundamental political principle: therein and only therein lies its "conservative" (Arendt 1963, 41) character. The conservative trait of institutionalization is tied to the revolutionary spirit that engendered the change in the first place. Moreover, the institutional correspondence to the spirit of the beginning not only preserves but also questions the revolutionary achievements (ibid., 232). In this context, Bonnie Honig interprets Arendt's understanding of revolutionary *authority* as a "practice of authority [that] turns out to be, paradoxically enough, a practice of deauthorization" (Honig 1991, 111). If this principle of authority enables the upholding of revolutionary spirit, it can do

so only by questioning the actual fundamentals of authority, institution, and revolution.

Conclusion: Revolutionary vs. Evolutionary Anarchism

On the basis of these considerations of authority and institution, I propose an Arendtian-Rancièrean notion of *limited institution*: on the one hand, it enables the sustainment of disruptive democratic events and enactments of freedom ("the act of its own verification, which is forever in need of reiteration," Rancière 1995, 84); on the other, it fulfills the demand that "the community of equals [...] never achieve[s] substantial form as a social institution" (ibid.). The *limited institution* need not be understood as a reconciliatory "third-way," a theoretical middle path between the two thinkers, but as a type of institutional praxis that prevents the risks of both the archipolitical derailment of institutionalization and anti-institutional "radical passivity" (Wall 1999) inherent in a number of post-foundational political-theoretical projects.

Rancière's paradoxical insistence on the political praxis that refrains from establishing social institutions must primarily be viewed as a correction of the purported Marxist and psychoanalytical understanding of revolution as a "simple upheaval of the forms of state" (Rancière 2009, 99). He speaks about a "revolution that is no mere displacement of powers, but a neutralization of the very forms by which power is exercised, overturning other powers and having themselves overturned" (ibid.). If the event of *arché* is necessarily based on exclusion, which Laclau recognizes as indispensable for all acts of emancipation,[7] Rancière proposes a weakened – even *evolutionary* – understanding of emancipation as it was often advocated by anarchist and social democratic corrections of Marxist revolutionary theory and praxis.[8] His correction of classic revolutionary theory goes hand in hand with the post-Marxist demise of the old revolutionary models and the rethinking of politics in terms of "the political" (Bedorf and Röttgers 2010). Therefore, it is with a view to the demise of historical *revolutions* that Rancière's democratic project of "redisposing the objects and images" (Rancière 2009, 21) functions as a necessary and hitherto

mostly missed chance for changing the world without enforcing exclusion and violence. In this respect, his project is undoubtedly anarchist in the sense that "anarchism not only provides the antidote to the statist degeneration of Marxism, but it can, more generally, prevent the authoritarian trap into which any attempt to realize the freedom of equals can fall" (Bottici 2014, 193).

Concomitantly, and in contrast to Arendt's own method of not simply rejecting *vita contemplativa* but of extending it by the dimension of *vita activa*, Rancière's correction of violent and exclusive emancipatory projects refuses to think about, let alone answer, one of the most pertinent political-theoretical questions: How can the rupture in the archipolitical logic be accomplished, if not by means of another *archê*? How can one counteract the police division of the recognized (public) and denied (private) languages, if not by way of institutional backing of one's own position?

By leaving this question unasked and unanswered, it is not surprising, then, that in his later writings Rancière exchanges the strictly political questions for aesthetic ones. This conforms with Jay M. Bernstein's remark that in times in which capital performs the crucial work of formation art functions as a mere "placeholder" for "absent politics" (Bernstein 1992, 269) as well as with Michael Hirsch's criticism of the libertarian left, Rancière included, as "unpolitical" (Hirsch 2009, 223; cf. Meyer 2011, 31). Rancière advocates artistic and literary practice as a specific cultural path to the *evolutionary* redistribution of the sensible: it is not politics writ large but *mute speech* that operates without an "ordering principle" (Davis 2010, 107) and thus brings a "redisposing [of the] the objects and images that comprise the common world" (Rancière 2009, 21). For Rancière, the unpredictable and contingent appearance of *mute speech* is a messenger of equality. In contrast to an understanding of emancipation, according to which the emancipatory subject requires "a *real* 'other'" (and thus also a *real* "self") (Laclau 1996, 3), with the idea of *mute speech* Rancière does not provide a theory of the subject but shows the demonstration of dissensus by political subjects in the making. By positing a paradoxical fundamental or identity of *man* and at the same time refusing to consolidate it for the sake of securing its survival, his subject remains an abstract entity. However

convincing the image of the emergence of *mute speech*, of new subjects and of a new sensible, coming about spontaneously, without interest, may be, it is politically implausible that "[b]eings without will, like Bartleby or Billy Budd" (Rancière 2004a, 159) or Schiller's taciturn Juno Ludovisi, whom Rancière invokes in numerous texts, can endure. In Rancière's "Quixotic" foundation of the political (Valentine 2005, 58), it remains unclear *how* and *for whom* these sluggish characters could become harbingers of democracy. That is why Andrew Gibson recognizes in the Rancièreian type of revolution the typical melancholy of the left (Gibson 2005). Additionally, the emancipatory and world-making power of *mute speech* can be explained only in retrospect, namely only when the mute speeches of the past have been preserved, that is, *institutionalized* in some form. This means that the "conservation" or institutionalization of mute speech – via institutes, museums, books, and even in oral tradition – secures its permanence and enduring presence. Otherwise, its democratic promise remains reduced to a series of sporadic emancipatory phenomena: "Rancière argues for an understanding of democracy as *sporadic*, as something that only 'happens' from time to time and in very particular situations" (Biesta 2008, 108). While he can explain how a democratic movement comes about from below – through the development of the new speech and the redistribution of the sensible, etc. – he does not think of the necessity for permanence of the newly created sensible, because he observes it exclusively in a democratic *process* and speaks against any kind of archaizing its emancipatory political. However, the question is not whether the politics of equality can be institutionalized, but *how* it can be institutionalized. The step from the question of "whether" to the question of "how" is not a step, as Todd May says, from atheism to religion, but a step from atheism to agnosticism (May 2010, 145).

If Arendt's revolutionary "practice of archaization turns out to be, paradoxically enough, a practice of anarchization"[9] and if it is, nonetheless, never able to get rid of the problem of exclusion, Rancière's own anarchic idea of subjectification is, especially after the aesthetic turn in his theory, in danger of sliding into inaction, indifference, and radical passivity. This, of course, does not necessarily have to be detrimental to the relevance of his thinking in terms of the critique of contemporary (post-)democracy. Moreover, and here I wish to reinstate Pitkin's revaluation

of Arendt's separation of the social from the political, "What we need here is not separation but linkage" (Pitkin 1981, 346). If the notion of *arché* serves as the axis to which two seemingly irreconcilable theories are bound, around which they revolve and even complement each other, then one should revisit the figure of Hannah Arendt not as one of Jacques Rancière's uncomfortable, unbearable predecessors but as a forerunner whose political thought provides answers to questions Rancière does not even venture to ask.

Notes

1] For further comparative readings, cf. Markell 2006; Plot 2014; and especially Quintana 2012.

2] The same assertion is found in Rancière 2010b, 201.

3] On the religious origins of *principium* in contrast to the particularly human *initium*, cf. Birmingham 2007, 177.

4] On Arendt's interpretation of *arché*, cf. Arendt 1963, 28-31; 212-214.

5] In the German version, she uses the expression "[z]ur Herrschaft berechtigt, was Anfang ist," meaning "the one who begins is entitled to rule" (Arendt 2002, 285).

6] Cf. the expectation put forward by Laura Quintana: "Que la democracia, como 'poder del pueblo' pueda tener sentido depende entonces de que puedan constituirse espacios conflictuales, y nuevas formas de subjetivación que fracturen la evidencia de lo dado" (Quintana 2012, 200).

7] "Emancipation means *at one and the same time* radical foundation and radical exclusion; that is, it postulates, at the same time, both a ground of the social and its impossibility" (Laclau 1996, 6).

8] For a more precise elaboration of this argument, cf. Perica 2017.

9] A paraphrase of Honig's previously quoted remark on the "practice of authority [that] turns out to be, paradoxically enough, a practice of deauthorization" (Honig 1991, 111).

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Biography

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