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DO WE NEED OTHERS TO EMANCIPATE OURSELVES?
REMARKS ON JACQUES RANCIÈRE

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1. Teaching equality

My starting point is what I take to be the core of Rancière's entire work, namely equality or, rather, what Rancière calls 'the presupposition of equality of anyone and everyone' (Rancière 1999: 17). As far as such presupposition is concerned, the pivotal book undoubtedly is Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 1991); i.e. those *Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* Rancière draws from the writings of the self-declared ignorant schoolmaster Joseph Jacotot (1770-1849) who discovered, practiced and theorised the equality of all speaking beings during the time he was teaching in Louvain (Belgium). Jacotot qualifies such equality as the equal intelligence of all beings that have been able to learn their first language on their own when they were infants; i.e. without yet understanding the hints of those who already spoke that language. In other words: they learned their first language autonomously and had to be their own

teachers since all other alleged teachers spoke a language the respective child did not yet understand (Rancière 1991: 5). From this Jacotot concludes that learning (a language) does not depend on teachers. Rather, the only prerequisite for learning is the desire to learn; be it for reasons of survival, play, curiosity, knowledge or whatever.

As is well known to readers of Rancière, Jacotot developed his theory about the equal learning ability of all speaking beings upon an unintended experience during the time he taught in Louvain. There he found out, accidentally, that he could teach his students capacities that he himself did not possess simply by encouraging them and by forcing them to talk about what they had learned and to report as to how they had proceeded in learning. To be more precise, Jacotot, who did not speak Flemish, encouraged his Flemish-speaking students (with the help of an interpreter) to learn French via a Flemish/French edition of a book entitled *Télémaque* (Fénelon, 1997), that was quite popular in Jacotot's days. The overwhelming success of his students who learned French incredibly swiftly via Fénelon's *Télémaque* inspired Jacotot to develop his anti-pedagogical theory of 'universal teaching' (Rancière 1991: 16). According to this theory, teaching is not based on (more, higher, more profound etc.) knowledge but on encouragement. Pupils, Jacotot contends, do not need teachers who already know what their disciples are supposed to learn, as long as the latter really want to learn and as long as they believe in their capacity to learn. As a consequence of this, a person who, for example, does not speak Greek is, according to Jacotot, very well able to teach her children how to read and write Greek texts. For all this person needs to do is to encourage and support the child in finding out on her own.

The only reason why we sometimes might indeed need teachers is, in the eyes of Jacotot, our lack of the courage to make use of the capability to learn on our own; i.e. some of us might need teachers who remind us of the fact that we are, in a way, already experts in learning by ourselves because we successfully did so when we learned our first language. In other words, it is not the knowledge or the content-related expertise of teachers that we might need in processes of learning but solely their encouragement based on the belief in universal intelligence. According to

Jacotot, intelligence is universal in two respects: it is the equal intelligence of all speaking beings, and it structures all kinds of capabilities – shoe-making, for instance, no less than singing or reading. As a result, universal teaching consists in practicing the belief in these two axioms and in acting accordingly.

Those, on the other hand, who insist on the superior knowledge of teachers and conceive of education as the progressive replacement of the pupil's ignorance by the teacher's knowledge, produce nothing but stultifying effects. They ensure, Jacotot contends, that the inferiority of those who need to learn is endlessly prolonged by definition, because a teacher needs to always know at least a little bit more than her student. Moreover, by insisting on an irreversible gap between teachers and pupils – to the effect that the promised equality between them is continually postponed – conceptions of teaching that are based on superior knowledge betray emancipation (cf. Rancière 1991: 118 ff.). The irreversible gap guarantees that pupils will always depend on their teachers and that equality is 'deferred from commission to commission, from report to report, from reform to reform, until the end of time' (Rancière 1991: 134).

It is no coincidence that Rancière published the results of his archival research on Joseph Jacotot's anti-pedagogical theory of universal teaching in 1987.¹ Around that time, both the school system and theories of education were fervently discussed points of issue in France. In these discussions republican elitism was pitted against reforms that were supposed to gradually reduce the inequalities of the French school system; inequalities, that is, which had been analysed by, above all, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984, 1991).² Without mentioning the main intellectual figures of this debate, namely Jean-Claude Milner and Pierre Bourdieu, Rancière seems to address both of them critically by bringing Jacotot's method of teaching into play. For Jacotot's method circumvents the shortcomings of both sides without being a compromise (cf. Ross in Rancière, 1991³). Or, to put it differently, Jacotot's anti-pedagogy rejects the republicans' belief in the rationality of knowledge taught by allegedly neutral and knowledgeable teachers who are not interested in the social backgrounds of their pupils no less than the (Bourdieuian) reformers' starting point: namely that we

have to begin with analysing and acknowledging inequality between (different classes of) pupils in order to then be able to gradually reduce it. Moreover, Bourdieu's supposedly emancipatory analyses of inequalities require the superior knowledge of sociological experts, which categorically contradicts Jacotot's axiom of the equality of all intelligences.

Rancière, on the other hand, contends with Jacotot that nothing but the equality of all intelligences can be the starting point of convincing theories and practices of emancipatory teaching. Otherwise, for example, if we conceive of equality (between teachers and pupils no less than between pupils with different social backgrounds) as the *goal* of emancipatory education – which is the claim of both the republican and the Bourdieusian reforms – education will be in need of perfection forever. Moreover, we will be stuck in efforts of analysing and eventually reinforcing inequality. What Rancière, therefore, rejects together with the superior knowledge of teachers:

'[...] is the logic of the pedagogical process in which the schoolmaster starts from the situation of ignorance which is that of the student and progressively replaces ignorance by knowledge, his knowledge, and progressively takes the student away from a situation of inequality to lead him or her 'towards' a situation of equality.' (Rancière, 2010b: 167)

2. The politics of equality

As already mentioned above, Rancière's voice can hardly be discerned from Jacotot's in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. This is not only the result of lengthy quotes from Jacotot's writings but also due to the fact that Rancière's book consists to a large extent of a very sympathetic reconstruction of Jacotot's life, theory, and praxis. At times, one cannot but indeed get the impression of reading Rancièrian variations on motives by Jacotot. However, Rancière's accentuation is somewhat different. On the one hand, Rancière uses Jacotot's theory of universal teaching as one amongst many other opportunities to re-articulate his account of politics as an emancipatory act of claiming equality by those who are not even

recognized as speaking beings.⁴ On the other hand, Jacotot's theory provides more evidence, indeed almost a proof, of the equality of all speaking beings that has been the centrepiece of Rancière's account of political emancipation since his earliest writings. Therefore, it is not Jacotot's anti-pedagogy that fascinates Rancière but, rather, the fundamental role that Jacotot ascribes to equality in processes of learning and teaching which in its turn means that Jacotot conceives of learning and teaching as emancipatory practices.⁵

According to Rancière, Jacotot's theory comes down to two axioms (Rancière 2010b: 168) that conjunctly account for the 'presupposition of equality'. The first axiom amounts to claiming that equality is not a telos or a utopian goal but a starting point. The second consists of the proposition that there is only one kind of intelligence, namely the universal, and in fact anarchistic, intelligence of being able to learn anything autonomously; an intelligence, that is, which is shared by the scientist, the technician, the peasant, the craftsman, the musician, the painter etc. It is the intelligence of anybody. This implies, let it be understood, that the capability to speak a language does not range above the capacity to construct a computer or play the piano. Being the result of universal teaching and learning, they are all on an equal footing. Or, to put it differently, once we have found a way into our first language we are, in principle at least, able to construct ways into many other unpredictable fields of theoretical and practical knowledge we desire to become acquainted with. Talking of such universal intelligence in terms of the capacity to speak, as Rancière no less than Jacotot has a tendency to do, therefore does not necessarily imply that the capability of speaking is superior to the capability of e.g. singing. According to Rancière, it is just an easy way to summarize the general capacity of learning anything autonomously possessed by those who have learned to speak a language. This is why Rancière quotes and emphasizes Jacotot's statement: "'*speaking* is the best proof of the capacity to do whatever it is'" (Rancière 1991: 65). However, it seems that summarizing the general capacity to learn as the capacity to speak is not without problems to which I will return later.

In Rancière's view, the presupposition of equality therefore is supposed to be not so much about speaking a shared language or sharing the capabil-

ity of speaking whichever language but, rather, about learning a new practice – no matter which. In order to emphasize the possibility of such radical newness within familiar practices Rancière says at one point: 'We know that improvisation is one of the canonical exercises of universal teaching. [...] In the act of speaking, man doesn't transmit his knowledge, he makes poetry' (Rancière 1991: 64 f.). Furthermore, and this is where Rancière gives Jacotot's universal teaching a surprising twist, the presupposition of equality is about claiming and/or taking something that is radically new in the sense that one has no admission to claiming or taking it.

However, it is very likely, even almost unavoidable, that we forget about such equal and supposedly poetic intelligence of learning as discovered by Jacotot and re-discovered by Rancière. For wherever we look and from the moment we start demonstrating our capacity to learn we are told that (innate) talent, excellence, ingeniousness etc. do play a role; that in real life hierarchies of knowledge and expertise rule, and rightly so. We start believing that teachers who know more than their pupils are necessary, that some are less talented and more in need of being taught than others; that some are so incapable of learning that even teaching would lead to nothing and that this is why one should not invest time, knowledge and money into such lost causes. Even in our times of cognitive capitalism where (life-long) learning has become imperative and appears to be less exclusive, mechanisms of control and classification like tests, marks and rankings have not disappeared. Paradoxically, they have rather become rampant.

In light of this, it is all the more remarkable that Rancière follows the path of Jacotot's two axioms, and even takes them further. On Rancière's account, Jacotot not only encourages us to revise our theories of pedagogy and practices of teaching. Rancière goes so far as transforming Jacotot's axioms into some kind of a paradoxically non-foundational fundament of what he calls emancipatory politics, or just politics. As is well known by those who are familiar with his thought, the events called politics by Rancière are not struggles for, or negotiations about, getting more of this or that property, be it power, sovereignty, money, influence, rights or whichever other goods or positions that are available within an established community. For all these struggles do not challenge the existing

order of properties, powers, positions etc. That is why they are, in Rancière's terminology, nothing but acts of a police that reinforces, primarily via aesthetic strategies, the respective orders. Such orders define and secure what counts as property, knowledge, or right, and who is entitled to claim the goods and positions just mentioned. Last but not least, such reinforcement implies that there is nothing that cannot be resolved within the existing order, which in its turn means that there are no alternative orders, in fact no outside. Margaret Thatcher's claim that there is no alternative should therefore be given the credit of being the most concise description of Rancièrian police.

Politics on the other hand, consists in doing or claiming something that the members of an established community are not able to perceive or claim, at least, or to be unable to see because it does not make sense in the current distribution of positions, goods, places and times. Rancière dubs such confrontation a situation of disagreement – *mésentente* – a situation, this is, in which one party claims to not understand or see what the other is talking about. In many cases of disagreement the representatives of the established distribution of positions and properties whom Rancière also calls the representatives of a 'consensus' do not even realize that others are talking to them or that others are there at all.

'Disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness. [...]. Disagreement occurs wherever contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation.' (Rancière 1999: x)

In order to make herself heard, perceived and understood in such a constellation of radical disagreement the dissenter needs to successfully demonstrate that the two parties in question have something in common. Or, rather, she needs to demonstrate that they are even equal and that it is because of this equality that the ignorant side, that which claims to not see the problem, is very well able to understand and that the other side is justified to take what she is claiming in an understandable and rea-

sonable way. Such demonstration 'of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds' (Rancière 2010c: 39) presupposes, let it be understood, an act of radical, indeed poetic, translation. For it consists in building a bridge between two formerly incommensurable worlds or 'distributions of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004). Obviously, Rancière implies that such a bridge is not dissimilar to the bridge that children need to construct when they learn their first language. As soon as some minimal understanding is reached between the two worlds, it becomes evident that the current distribution of positions, properties, and entitlements together with their conditions of perceptibility is not without alternative, that the respective *status quo* cannot provide a solution for all problems but rather excludes that on which it at the same time rests and purports to respect: the equality of all beings able to learn on their own.

3. Some intricate implications of Rancière's politics of radical equality

Rancière's account of equality has far-reaching consequences for political thought and action. On three of them I would like to put special emphasis in order to, on the one hand, defend them against misinterpretations and, on the other, to discuss possible limitations of Rancière's radical equality. However, my overall aim is to provide a reading that makes such radical equality as compelling as possible.

(1) Contrary to what readers of Rancière might assume at a first glance, and despite its Habermasian overtones,⁷ the presupposition of equality is not a transcendental fact on which one could rely (after having deduced it) once and for all. Rather, equality is something that needs to be acted out, to be verified time and again and that, in order to be verified, presupposes faith in equality. 'Liberty is not guaranteed by any pre-established harmony. It is taken, it is won, it is lost, solely by each person's effort' (Rancière, 1991: 62).⁸ In other words: the equality in question is not just there – e.g. as a stable potentiality or transcendental ground – but rather in need of specific, actual 'verifications' that very often refer to no less specific official acknowledgements, inscriptions and documentations of equality; be it the declaration of human rights, constitutions, the equal

treatment policy of a company, or the mission statement on diversity of an institution etc. Such inscriptions frequently turn out to be important and useful tools in specific struggles. However, in themselves, they are as weak as all argumentative deductions of equality no matter whether such deductions proceed in a logical, transcendental, neurophysiological, or whatever other (scientific) way.⁹ To put it differently: all such inscriptions, and even the axiomatic presupposition of equality, are nothing in themselves but everything in acts of constituting equality by claiming it.

Rancière does not only refuse to deduce equality. Likewise, he does not define it. When he speaks of axioms of equality or contends (with Jacotot) that equality is something that all speaking beings share, such claims should not be misunderstood as definitions. Similarly, remarks about the ability to speak (and, as a consequence, to learn) as evidence of the equal intelligence of all speaking beings should not be read as arguments in favour of an ultimate foundation. By making such assertions Rancière rather declares his faith in equality.

‘It is true that we don’t know that men are equal. We are saying that they *might* be. This is our opinion, and we are trying, along with those who think as we do, to verify it. But we know that this *might* is the very thing that makes a society of humans possible.’ (Rancière, 1991: 73)

In my view, the most striking strategy of practicing his belief in equality is Rancière’s kind of writing which consists in narrating ever new (mainly archival) stories about successful acts of claiming and taking equality, i.e. by narrationally giving empirical evidence. Such practice of doing philosophy is strongly opposed to all kinds of foundational thinking. However, I would not deny that it is rather misleading to call a ‘presupposition’ that which needs to be poetically re-invented in every single situation where disagreement in the sense of *mésentente* is articulated.

(2) Rancièrian equality needs to be actively claimed and taken as opposed to being conceded or condescendingly awarded to somebody.¹⁰ The reason for this is that those who have their place in an existing distribution of the sensible are unable to understand the claims of the excluded, unable to see that the axiom of equality is ignored and that there are alterna-

tives to the current distribution of places and positions. The claiming party, however, does dispose of the intelligence to see the cracks in the distribution of the sensible in question. One of the expressions of the claiming party’s intelligence is its bilingualism both language-wise and perception-wise. By bilingualism I mean that the subjects of the claiming part understand both the rules of the current distribution of the sensible plus something else. They virtually live in two worlds and, therefore, are in a condition that comes close to what W.E.B. Du Bois had already in 1903 called the exceptional intelligence of ‘double consciousness’ in his book on *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1996).¹¹

Especially in light of whom mainstream political and moral philosophy primarily addresses, it seems to me to be a major step to stop addressing the wrongdoers and/or apologists of the *status quo* by way of warning, criticizing, correcting or showing them in how far they are logically or morally wrong or, at least, blind. For such strategy always implies the assumption that it is only from the wrongdoers and/or apologists that changes can and must be expected. Rancière’s writings reject this type of reasoning and critique since it amounts to nothing but yet another round in the game of prioritizing the existing distribution of the sensible over all possible alternatives. Instead of addressing the representatives of the *status quo*, Rancière’s account of equality therefore puts the emphasis on encouraging those who are so radically excluded from equal treatment that their claims appear as incomprehensible, as mere noise, gibberish, or nonsense. By expecting substantial changes from the demanding party instead of the wrongdoers who represent the *status quo* Rancière emphasizes the demanding party’s capacity to learn, to speak (up), and to change the distribution in place; he indeed accentuates the exceptional bi- or multi-lingual intelligence of the demanding party. Although such radical demonstrating and claiming of equality is difficult and rare, Rancière keeps emphasizing that in principle it is always and everywhere possible. ‘Anybody can be emancipated and emancipate other persons [...]’ (Rancière, 2010b: 169). However, we will have to raise the question as to whether this is not a rather empty possibility. Moreover, it needs to be asked why Rancière only speaks of the politically empowering aspects of bilingualism without ever mentioning its inhibiting dimensions that, ac-

ording to Du Bois for example, cannot be cut off from the emancipatory ones.

(3) Despite the fact that Rancière often conceives of Jacotot's universal intelligence as 'collective intelligence' and even speaks of a 'communism of intelligence' (Rancière 2010a: 80)¹², he keeps emphasizing that collective intelligence is not the intelligence of a collective. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, for instance, he contends: 'But this much is true for each individual's intelligence taken separately: it is indivisible, without community, without division. It cannot, therefore, belong to any group, for then it would no longer belong to the individual. We must therefore conclude that intelligence is only in individuals, that it is not in their *union*.' (Rancière, 1991: 76) In a similar vein, he answers the question 'How far can the communist affirmation of the intelligence of anybody coincide with the communist organization of a society?' by explaining: 'Jacotot entirely denied such a possibility. Emancipation, he said, is a form of action that can be transmitted from individuals to individuals. [...] But a society can never be emancipated' (Rancière 2010b: 169). Put differently, collective intelligence is not the intelligence of a group – let alone of a stable community or a state – but the individual intelligence of anyone (unqualified).

Although it is quite clear from what Rancière distances himself with his definition of collective intelligence as the intelligence of anyone – namely from a totalitarian collective that speaks with one voice – it remains rather opaque, first, how his insistence on emancipation as an individual affair can be reconciled with the collective dimensions of emancipatory processes; and, second, what this conception of collective intelligence positively amounts to. Rancière's characterisation of collective intelligence as the intelligence of everyone is primarily directed against Negri and Hardt's theory about the intelligence of the multitude as developed in their book *Empire* (Negri and Hardt, 2000). A closer look at Rancière's critique shows that what he rejects is, first of all, the homogeneity of a multitude beyond (internal) struggles. Additionally, he repudiates the belief, inherent in Negri/Hardt's celebration of the intelligence of the multitude, that the current form of capitalism, namely cognitive capital-

ism, necessarily implies its own destruction. In Rancière's eyes, such faith in a typically Marxist teleology is all but convincing (Rancière, 2009b).

No matter whether Rancière is right in his critique of Negri/Hardt, it does not sufficiently clarify the specific collectivity or communism of intelligence Rancière is interested in despite his general emphasis on the individual. Moreover, in light of the significance of this concept for all of Rancière's writings, it is all the more astonishing that he does not take Virno's further elaboration and critique of Negri/Hardt's account of the intelligence of the multitude into consideration but prefers, as it were, to flog a dead horse (Virno, 2004; Power, 2011). Virno's account of the 'general intellect' not only comes close to what Rancière seems to have in mind when he appropriates Jacotot's concept of a universal intelligence; it might also have enabled Rancière to positively determine what the collectivity of intelligence consists in. Moreover, in *Communists Like Us*, co-authored by Negri and Félix Guattari, Negri is after an anti-totalitarian conception of communism that comes very close to what Rancière seems to be striving for.¹³ However, without further clarification Rancière's concept of a collective or communist intelligence remains rather opaque. It is difficult to see more in Rancière's kind of communism than, on the one hand, the universal intelligence of all speaking beings; or, on the other, the possibility of a succession of individual acts of emancipation the connection between which appears as arbitrary. But why then should one call such succession collective or even communist intelligence?

4. The inter-active and fractional communality of communist intelligence

Despite the fact that Rancière, to my knowledge, does not use the term 'autonomy' when he theorises political emancipation, one can easily get the impression that his emphasis on the individual is very much in line with classical, liberal accounts of autonomy in political and moral philosophy.¹⁴ According to such accounts, autonomy refers to the universal capacity of any thinking and speaking individual to take self-determined and un-coerced decisions. Emancipation, accordingly, is the process of

becoming such a self-determined individual that, in its turn, is possible because of the universal capacity to think and judge. From such a perspective, those who do not emancipate themselves can be blamed to be irrational, and even immoral, for they possess all the capacities needed for emancipation. A classical key reference in this context is Kant's practical philosophy. However, if we take a closer look at Kant's (probably most famous) text on emancipation, a text also alluded to by Rancière when he discusses his relation to communism,¹⁵ namely 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"', we might be surprised. For the opening paragraphs of this short text already indicate that Kant's account of self-determination, emancipation, and true autonomy might be less individualistic, or to put it provocatively, more communist than Rancière's – or so it seems at least.

After having emphasized how difficult it is to free oneself from 'guardians' – for it is so convenient 'to have a book to have understanding in place of me, a spiritual adviser to have a conscience for me, a doctor to judge my diet for me, and so on' – Kant continues:

Thus it is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost second nature to him. [...] There is more chance of an entire public enlightening itself. This is indeed almost inevitable, if only the public concerned is left in freedom. For there will always be a few who think for themselves, even among those appointed as guardians of the common mass. (Kant 2008: 54-55)

In other words, Kant conceives of the company of, and interaction with, others as essential for facilitating seemingly individual acts of emancipation that, let it be understood, turn out to be mutual achievements. However, the necessarily communal dynamics of emancipation that transcends individual attempts to emancipate oneself do not lead, according to Kant, to an (identitarian) collective.¹⁶ Rancière, on the other hand, contends:

'There cannot be a class of the emancipated, an assembly or a society of the emancipated. But an individual can always, at any moment, be emancipated and emancipate someone else, announce to others the *practice*

and add to the number of people who know themselves as such and who no longer play the comedy of the inferior superiors. A society, a people, a state, will always be irrational. But one can multiply within these bodies the number of people who, as individuals, will make use of reason [...].'
(Rancière, 1991: 98)

Rancière, in other words, conceives of emancipation and autonomy as the result of essentially individual acts of claiming one's universal – or, if you will, collective in the sense of universally shared – capacity to speak despite the fact that he quite often designates the intelligence that is at the basis of individual emancipation, and at the same time subjectivation, 'collective intelligence'. However, as I have tried to indicate, the meaning and substance of this collectivity needs to be further developed. For all that is really clear is, first, Rancière's aversion as far as collectives that rest on fixed, if not essentialist, qualities are concerned and, second, that he therefore turns to individuals who share the same universal intelligence but seem to not necessarily need each other to develop or intensify this intelligence. When Rancière writes: 'Collective understanding of emancipation is not the comprehension of a total process of subjection. It is the collectivization of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus' (Rancière 2009a: 49) it is therefore difficult to see more in such collectivization than a summation or concatenation of autonomous acts of strong individuals in various scenes of dissensus. To put it differently: although it is obvious that Rancière conceives of emancipation as a process of concatenation and extension – one cannot be emancipated, i.e. faithful to the presupposition of equality, without encouraging others to believe in their power to emancipate themselves – he strictly refrains from calling such networks emancipated. This in its turn suggests the assumption that emancipation is an essentially individual achievement. Before I try to develop an alternative reading of Rancière's term 'communist intelligence' I want to highlight a related problem of individualism.

The moral and political implications of Rancière's claim that the subalterns who have no part, can under all circumstances speak for themselves if they only want to and try hard enough, are all but unquestionable. For

this seems to imply that those (without a part) who do not emancipate and subjectivise themselves are morally and politically inferior. What comes to mind, here, is Gayatri Spivak's critique of Deleuze's and Foucault's claim that the subaltern can under all circumstances speak for and liberate themselves. Spivak objects that such praise of the strength of subaltern subjects amounts to a denial of the intellectuals' entanglement with, and political responsibility for, the subaltern. In my eyes, such criticism applies no less to Rancière than to Foucault and Deleuze's statements in a discussion about the role of intellectuals (Spivak, 1988; Foucault and Deleuze, 1977).¹⁷

It goes without saying that Rancière is neither literally issuing imperatives to emancipate oneself or claiming that all speaking beings are responsible for their emancipation. However, given his Jacototian tendency to anchor universal intelligence in the individual capacity to speak, it is almost impossible to not interpret his claim that everybody who can speak is, in principle, able to emancipate herself, as not implying such an imperative. There seem to be two Rancières – not dissimilar to the two Kants Foucault distinguishes when he discusses Kant's essay on *Enlightenment* (cf. Foucault 1984).¹⁸ The position of the first and strictly universalist Rancière makes it difficult to not conceive of the 'self-incurred immaturity' of speaking beings and the related subaltern positions as a sign of moral or epistemological lack. However, the second Rancière knows as much as Foucault's second Kant that the capacity to resist and to thereby emancipate oneself is not implied in the capacity to speak. Rather, it is self-confidence and courage that are needed for emancipation, which, in their turn, depend on supporting and encouraging others. In other words, it is far from unproblematic, in my view, to summarize universal intelligence and equality as the capacity to speak. Moreover, one should be cautious in relation to 'in principle'-statements about emancipation; statements for example that suggest that speaking beings can in principle always and everywhere emancipate themselves.

My rejection of Rancière's exclusion of contexts of multi-layered domination that make disagreement extremely difficult (without the encouragement of others), together with my search for a non-individualistic articulation of emancipation that Rancière's term collective or com-

munist intelligence seems to imply, bring me back to Jacotot. In my view, we need to address Jacotot's individualism before we can elaborate upon aspects of collectivity in Rancièrian emancipation, i.e. on aspects that put Rancière's irritating insistence on individual emancipation and the individual use of emancipatory reason into perspective. For Rancière seems to have inherited some elements of Jacotot's individualism that are hard to reconcile with the idea of political emancipation as a collective enterprise that we undoubtedly find in Rancière's oeuvre as well.¹⁹

Jacotot's anti-pedagogy is individualistic to the extent that it puts all emphasis on the individual will to learn. Moreover, it is the will of more or less isolated subjects that is the target of an emancipatory teacher's encouragement by his faith in all pupils' universal intelligence. What Jacotot, in my view, therefore has in mind when he talks about the universal intelligence of all speaking beings is a capacity that all speaking individuals share as individuals. The only interaction Jacotot mentions, and indeed highlights, is the one-way street of encouragement that leads from the teacher to the pupil in cases where the pupil's individual will is not strong enough. An indication of this one-way street might be the fact that Jacotot, to my knowledge, never let himself be encouraged to learn Flemish.

It is against the backdrop of this scenario that I would like to suggest that we widen the scene of teaching as encouragement and allow for practices of mutually teaching faith in equality.²⁰ For the rejection of teachers who claim to (principally) know more than their students does not imply that teaching by way of motivating and by encouraging efforts to learn are no longer important. To the contrary, everything depends on such support – not least in the eyes of Jacotot who, however, neglects the mutuality of encouragement. As far as the importance of (unilateral) encouragement is concerned, Jacotot even agrees, in a strange way at least, with Rancière's arch-enemy Pierre Bourdieu. For the latter's research on the French school and university system provides us with ample evidence that it is not primarily knowledge that is taught and tested unequally in schools and universities but rather the self-assured – 'believing', so to speak – way of presenting, defending or questioning knowledge.²¹ Therefore, everything depends on teaching and encouraging the belief in one's

learning and emancipatory abilities – in the matter of universal intelligence no less than in Bourdieu's project of propagating equality by way of analysing the structures that obstruct it.²² Such teaching, respectively the necessity thereof, should not be restricted to rather crass contexts of subalternity and inequality. If we take into account how tempting it is to believe in the hierarchy of rated and ranked knowledges, expertises, talents, universities, journals etc. – which is all the more important as we are living in a world where such thinking in terms of excellency is violently enforced – everybody is (at times) in need of encouragement as far as faith in universal and equal intelligence is concerned – teachers of emancipation no less than students.²³

Whereas pupils who are unable to realize their equality need encouragement in faith, those who already have faith in universal intelligence and claim to be followers of Jacotot, i.e. the emancipated, need actual demonstrations of emancipation – particularly where they least expect such demonstration. In other words: emancipated subjects need others who allow encouragement to happen and emancipate themselves with the help of such encouragement. Otherwise even Jacotot's followers would risk losing their faith – in his day no less than in ours. For all that followers of Jacotot and Rancière possess in terms of 'proofs' of the presupposed universal intelligence are actual verifications of equality. To put it differently: only as long as alleged teachers and so-called students of emancipation interact and exchange their roles can finite subjects who teach, and are being taught, keep alive what I would like to call a (more or less intensive) atmosphere or communality of active and truly collective intelligence; a communality that goes, let it be understood, beyond the additive concatenation of individual emancipations.

It is the frequency of the exchange of roles between teachers and pupils seeking emancipation that determines the emancipatory intensity of such communality. The frequency of such exchanges is important because it works against the reification of emancipation as a stable position and thwarts accounts of emancipation in terms of numerical expansion, the latter of which also presupposes that emancipation is a stable position that cannot be lost. Moreover, the frequency in question allows us to identify specific networks and communalities as more emancipatory than

others, i.e. to do precisely what Rancière denies when he insists that no groups but only individuals can be emancipated. However, my critical reading of Rancière's denial of substantially communal emancipation does not imply that he never mentions what I suggested to call a communality of emancipation, to the contrary. The exchanges (of letters), the philosophical clubs, reading groups, art magazines etc. of seemingly uneducated workers that Rancière highlights, notably in *Proletarian Nights* (Rancière 2012) are the best cases in point. It is especially in light of this book that readers of Rancière (myself included) cannot but be puzzled by his rejection of emancipatory communalities as opposed to emancipatory individuals. This rejection becomes even odder in the face of Rancière's at least sporadic use of the terms 'collective' or 'communist intelligence'.

The above-sketch account of reinforcing processes of mutual emancipation would also make room for taking the weakness of the intelligences of both sides – of the emancipated and those who want to emancipate themselves – into account; not in order to analyse the (social) contexts and causes of such weakness as most sociologists according to Rancière do. As I tried to indicate, I rather think that accounting for the fragility of Jacotot's universal intelligence would allow us to envision a kind of emancipation that is no longer the property of an individual or a collective that speaks with one voice but, rather, an inter-active communality of mutual encouragement as far as faith in equality is concerned. Such communality would allow us to envision an emancipatory communality that no single individual or collective subject could ever establish and that, therefore, actually goes beyond a concatenation of individual acts of emancipation but also beyond collectives that speak with one voice. In other words: the inter-active communality of mutual teaching and being taught as to how one can be faithful to universal equality would enable us to invest concepts like 'collective intelligence' or 'communism of intelligence' with meaning and liberate Rancière from undecidedly oscillating between an almost empty communism and an individualistic account of emancipation. Education however, let it be understood, is just one of many scenes where faith in universal equality and demonstrations thereof work like a major provocation and are correspondingly difficult to perform – most notably today.²⁴

Let me conclude by contending that if my explication of communal dimensions in Rancière's account of equality is adequate we have to reject, or modify at least, his claims that we can make use of emancipatory reason only 'as individuals' (Rancière, 1999: 98) or that emancipation is 'transmitted from individuals to individuals' (Rancière 2010b: 169). If Rancière had always taken seriously what he says at a certain point, we have quoted above, namely that universal intelligence is a 'practice' as opposed to a property be it of individuals or collectives, he could not have rejected collectives, be they 'a society, a people, a state', without questioning the individual (Rancière, 1991: 98); not least because subjectivation always concerns just some specific dimension(s) of what seems to be an indivisible individual: for example the emancipation as a worker but not necessarily as a woman as well. In my view, Rancière is after a community of emancipatory activities that precedes and transgresses both individuals and collectives. He however lacks concepts (or inventions?) that would enable him to both go beyond the binarism of indivisible individuals and closed collectives and re-signify communism.

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¹ The relation between teachers and their pupils had already played a pivotal role in Rancière's *La leçon d'Althusser* (1974). In retrospect he writes in his 'Foreword to the English edition' of *Althusser's Lesson* in a Jacototian vein: 'My book declared war on the theory of the inequality of intelligences at the heart of supposed critiques of domination. It held that all revolutionary thought must be founded on the inverse presupposition, that of the capacity of the dominated.' (Rancière 2011: xvi)

² In the section 'Society Pedagogized' of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière refers to the debates of his days rather explicitly. (Cf. Rancière 1991: 130 f.)

³ For a contextualization of Rancière's account of emancipation within the field of so-called critical pedagogy cf. Biesta 2010: 43 f., Bingham and Biesta, 2010: chapters 2 and 3.

⁴ All of Rancière's early writings revolve around such claiming of equality. Cf. Rancière 2003, 2011, 2011b, 2012.

⁵ However, as Kant has noted already, there is an educational challenge in all processes of emancipation that, not for nothing, has been dubbed the educational paradox: the challenge as to how one can cultivate freedom through coercion. (Cf. Kant 1977: 711, Biesta 2010: 41 f.)

⁶ Nina Power (Power, 2009) to my mind is right in pointing out that Rancière does not pay enough attention to this current paradox.

⁷ Rancière's claim e.g. that 'social inequality is unthinkable, impossible, except on the basis of the primary equality of intelligence. Inequality cannot think itself' (Rancière, 1991: 87) is reminiscent of Habermas' claims in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984 and 1987). According to the latter, communication that treats all people involved equally is prior to all strategic uses of language.

⁸ Todd May's term 'active equality' therefore seems to me to be an absolutely apt characterization of Rancière's idea of equality (May, 2008: esp. 38-77).

⁹ Despite the fact that Rancière misleadingly speaks e.g. of a 'syllogism of emancipation' (Rancière, 1995 b: 45 ff.) he should not be blamed, to my mind, for a '*petitio principii*' (cf. Marchart, 2011: 138). For Rancière would be the first to admit that there is no logical, transcendental or similarly foundational base for egalitarian politics.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Rancière, 1991: 106 f.: 'government doesn't owe the people an education, for the simple reason that one doesn't owe people what they can take for themselves. And education is like liberty: it isn't given; it's taken.'

¹¹ Donna Haraway makes a similar point when she discusses the special 'vantage points of the subjugated' in relation to epistemological challenges (Haraway, 1988: 583 f.).

¹² Cf. also Rancière, 2010b: 168: 'Emancipation means the communism of intelligence, enacted in the demonstration of the capacity of the 'incapable': the capacity of the ignorant to learn by himself.'

¹³ 'Make no mistake about it: communism is not a blind, reductionist collectivism dependent on repression. It is the singular expression for the combined productivity of individuals and groups ('collectivities') emphatically not reducible to each other. If it is not a continuous reaffirmation of singularity, then it is nothing – and so it is not paradoxical to define communism as the process of singularization.' (Guattari and Negri 1990: 17)

¹⁴ Rancière does, however, frequently use the concept of autonomy when it comes to aesthetics and art theory (cf. Rancière, 2002). For a critique of Rancière's aesthetic autonomy and its political implications see Bennett, 2011.

¹⁵ In his 'Communists Without Communism' Rancière writes: 'Emancipation is the way out of a situation of minority. A situation of minority is a situation in which you have to be guided because following the path with your own sense of direction would lead you astray' (Rancière, 2010b: 167). Kant opens his essay on emancipation by contending: '*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another*' (Kant, 2008: 54).

¹⁶ In 'What Is Orientation in Thinking' Kant goes even a step further when he strips (individual) freedom of consciousness of the quality of real freedom: 'We do admittedly say that, whereas a higher authority may deprive us of freedom of *speech* or of *writing*, it cannot deprive us of freedom of thought. But how much and how accurately would we think if we did not think, so to speak, in community with others to whom we *communicate* our thoughts [...]' (Kant, 2008: 247; for an anti-subjectivist reading of Kant see also O'Neill, 1989: esp. 3-50).

¹⁷ According to Spivak, it is pre-eminently (neo-)colonialism that produces all kinds of crass and multiple forms of domination and subalternity; forms of domination, this is, which make it more than clear that it is cynical to assume that all speaking subjects can in principle under all circumstances – 'always, at any moment' (Rancière, 1991: 98) – speak for and emancipate themselves. From the perspective of such a postcolonial critique it is hardly surprising that Rancière completely circumvents all issues of (post-)coloniality. For they would challenge the ubiquity of the possibility of, if not the imperative to, individually emancipate oneself as defended by Rancière. (See also Rancière's negative answer to Sudeep Dasgupta's question about Rancière's relation to postcolonial studies (Dasgupta, 2008)). Emmanuel Renault formulates a similar objection when he writes about the mature Rancière: 'At the end of his journey, Rancière seems to have returned to a Sartrean philosophy of absolute freedom where everybody can free themselves from their social fate, a philosophy of political freedom grounded in the communist principle of equality rearticulated in the epistemological [...] terms of the 'equal competence of everybody' (Renault, 2012: 186).

¹⁸ Foucault distinguishes between the ahistorical Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason* who equals autonomy with the capacity to think, judge and emancipate oneself, on the one hand, and the political Kant who acknowledges the necessity of historical struggles for autonomy and emancipation on the other.

¹⁹ In *The Emancipated Spectator* Rancière, writes about a collective intelligence that would be more than the sum total of individual intelligences: '[...] it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations. [...] Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new [...]' (Rancière, 2009a: 17). See also Rancière, 2008: 173, 178, 180.

²⁰ To conceive of education as a practice where everybody involved is both a teacher and a pupil is neither new nor original. Antonio Gramsci is famous for noting in his *Prison Notebooks* that 'Every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 350). In a similar vein, Nina Power refers to Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* when she suggests that Jacotot and Rancière should conceive of educational processes as networks rather than as individual acts (Power, 2011: 6). Cf. also Mayo 1999 and Sternfeld 2009. For discussions of the accusation that Rancière's praise of Jacotot mistakenly neglects more recent developments in pedagogy see Bingham and Biesta 2010 and Pelletier 2012.

²¹ Research in inequality as analysed by Bourdieu but strongly rejected by Rancière would then again play a role. However, such analysis would be blind if it were not combined with Jacotot's and Rancière's faith in equality. Peter Hallward comes to a similar conclusion (cf. Hallward, 2009). See also Nordmann, 2006; Sonderegger, 2012.

²² See e.g. his suggestions as far as equality in art education is concerned (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991).

²³ Biesta (2007), Pelletier (2009, 2012), and Ruitenberg (2008) go so far as to claim that all kinds of organizations – first of all schools – betray equality because they imply (more or less) hierarchies. Therefore, institutional promises of equality and democracy come down to swindle. All that institutions can do is to make (undefined) room for equality and democracy to (hopefully) enter.

²⁴ Rancière's claim is disarmingly simple yet explosive the moment it touches on educational practice' (Power, 2011: 4).