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AESTHETIC DISAGREEMENT AS A POLITICAL PROBLEM: A RANCIÈRIAN
PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The problem of aesthetic disagreement arises from the supposition that there is a kind of universality of aesthetic judgement; and the problem is politicalized when the judgement is regarded as relevant to the subject. This problem is the joint between the different perspectives such as Bourdieu's distinction of tastes and Rancière's discussion of the common. This research investigates the political significance of aesthetic disagreement from a Rancièrian perspective. First of all, Rancière characterizes the structure of politics as the distribution of the sensible, which means a mode of sharing and division at once. The division is maintained by presupposing a shared common language, and the disagreement arises from the divided understanding with regard to the common. Therefore, there are two ways to interpret Kant's aesthetics. On the one hand, Rancière reads the conception of disinterestedness as a suspension of any hierarchical division, which thus implies a method of emancipation. On the other hand, Bourdieu regards the conception of universality as a tool of suppression, which legitimatizes the bourgeois taste and denies not only the popular taste, but also the distinction between them. Regarding this theoretical confrontation, Rancière's critique is based on his presupposition of equality as a principle. For Rancière, equality is a principle that must be presupposed and verified in practice. The practice makes the process of subjectivation, which means a rupture of the hierarchical division and the appearance of a new subjectivity. In this process, the conception of the common is examined. In the end, aesthetic disagreement is not only a passive effect of the police distribution, but also an active factor that contributes to the political reconfiguration.

Keywords: Aesthetic disagreement, Rancière, equality, subjectivation

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Introduction

The Evolution of Disagreement

When involved in disagreement, an aesthetic judgement, taking the form that 'X utters that an object is beautiful', is politicized in the case that the utterance is not about the object or its aesthetic properties, but about the subject. There are three levels of meaning that can be derived from a situation of aesthetic disagreement when X utters an object as beautiful and Y disagrees. First, disagreement on the ascription. Y utters that this object is not beautiful. Second, disagreement on the taste. Y may admit that the object is beautiful for X, but does not recognize the taste of X. For Y, the object is not beautiful. Third, disagreement on the understanding. Y does not understand why X thinks the object is beautiful. This three-level interpretation traces the development of the problem of aesthetic disagreement from the pre-Kantian and Kantian philosophical discussion, to the Bourdieusian sociological critique, and to the Rancièrian political analysis.

1. From dispute to the common sense

Hume and Kant have been endeavouring to find a kind of generality or universality in judgements of beauty. For them, the aesthetic judgement is more about a matter of agreement rather than disagreement. Taste is hence a common sense.

Hume, in 'Of the Standard of the Taste', asserts that even though beauty is not an objective quality and the sentiment with regard to beauty is merely a conformity between the object and the mental faculties, there are certain general principles of taste. For example, Homer is admired across all nations and ages. Works of a real genius endure through time and maintain their authority over the minds of men. The general principles fail only when there are defects in the mental faculties, which is a particular instance but frequent. Good sense of beauty requires the perfection of the mental taste, or the delicacy of taste, on which 'all sentiments of the mankind are agreed'. (Hume, 1757, p. 220) Hume indicates two situations where men may vary in their judgements. The first is due to some defect or imperfection of the faculties. In this case, one taste could be better than another. The second is due to the diversity in the internal frame or external situation of the critics. In this case, no preference could be given and to seek for a standard would be in vain. In either situation, disagreement is on the ascription instead of

the taste. Fundamentally, Hume is in favour of a species of common sense with regard to tastes. For example, between Ogilby and Milton, or Bunyan and Addison, some people may give preference to the former authors, but the sentiment is 'absurd and ridiculous', and such a taste is neglectable. (Hume, 1757, p. 210) Therefore, although the mental faculties of human beings are often defective and judgements are not perfect, aesthetic disagreement is significant only between those with nearly equal tastes.

In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that a judgement of taste involves a kind of universality and necessity. Kant distinguishes the judgement of taste as of the beautiful (i.e., what we like) from that of the agreeable (i.e., what gratifies us). A judgement of taste is devoid of all interest. In other words, when someone likes something, he is independent of any private condition or inclination. Therefore, he must believe that it is justified to require a similar liking from others. (Kant, 1987, p. 211) Kant also thinks of the judgement of taste as having an exemplary necessity, viz. the judgement to be regarded as an example of some universal rule. (Kant, 1987, p. 237) Therefore, a person making a judgement of taste requires everyone to assent and holds that everyone ought to do so. For Kant, these two qualities are both subjective, viz. not based on a concept. Thus, a judgement of taste does not postulate everyone's agreement, rather merely requires it. From experience, there are situations where others disagree, and the subject often denies that they have good taste. Then, the question is how the judgement of taste, being subjective, has such universality and necessity. Kant says that it is because we have a basis that is common to all. (Kant, 1987, pp. 216, 232, 237) This basis, on which the subjective universality and necessity are conditioned, is the idea of a common sense.

As for the basis for presupposing a common sense, Kant's argument is as follows. Since our cognition must be universally communicable, the attunement of the cognitive powers that is required for cognition must also be universally communicable, otherwise cognition as the effect could not arise. The attunement varies in its proportion and there must be one attunement in which the inner relation is most conducive to the quickening of the cognitive powers. Then, the feeling of this attunement must be universally communicable because the attunement can be determined only by feeling. The universal communicability of a feeling presupposes a common sense. (Kant, 1987, pp. 238-239) For Kant, on the one hand, the common sense is a mere ideal standard of taste. It is like an objective principle, demanding universal and necessary assent, but in fact subjective. On the other hand, this subjective judgement is presented as a priori. In a judgement of taste, we are not merely judging the feeling of pleasure, but at the same time

judging the communicability of the feeling. (Kant, 1987, p. 289) Therefore, the judgement of taste is at the same time a judgement of the common sense. Taste itself is a common sense (as a sense shared) that is presupposed in everyone. Hence, it creates the possibility that in a situation of aesthetic disagreement, not the judgements, but the common senses, are in dispute.

2. *The Distinction between common senses*

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu demonstrates the division of two kinds of taste in Kant's aesthetics and one's refusal of the other. By distinguishing 'what we like' from 'what gratifies us', Kant establishes the aesthetics of (pure) taste. The primary concept is 'disinterestedness', which discerns the judgement of the 'pure' taste from that of the 'facile' or 'vulgar' taste. It refuses all that are related to enjoyment of the senses, representation, or signification, which is at the same time a 'popular' taste. Instead, it embraces a 'pure' attitude towards works of art, a 'pure' gaze in the contemplation of art. There are two ethos related to the two kinds of taste, and the difference is on the continuity or rupture between art and life. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 4-5) The pure taste applies an ethos that distances works of art from the natural and social world, from all practical ends, the necessities in particular. Art is a separate category, and superior to what is for living. By contrast, the popular taste applies the ethos that reduces the works of art to the things of life. The perception of a work of art is in continuity with the attitude towards the ordinary life. For example, the working-class people usually expect an image to fulfil a function, either for enjoyment or for moral education. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 41) They see the objects of art first as the representation of meaningful things. In other words, they lack the 'eye' for a 'pure' perception in order to see art as art.

If we are looking for a basis for the 'pure' perception, we may find nothing but the historically constituted principles of artistic legitimacy that is to be recognized by the specific aesthetic disposition, which is socially acquired. The pure gaze, as Bourdieu argues, is a 'historical invention linked to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production'. It means a shift from 'an art that imitates the nature' to 'an art that imitates the art'. The production of art refers exclusively to its own history, the past and present works of art, and demands to be perceived in this way. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 3) Thus, the (autonomous) art establishes the norms of its perception and also the legitimacy of such perception. At the same time, the consumption of art becomes a process of deciphering that requires a cultural code, which enables one to identify the familiar elements in the artistic universe. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 4) The beholders are

no longer the judges, rather those being judged by the norms in the artistic field, viz. whether they have the capacity to ‘correctly’ perceive the objects. As for the secret of acquiring the specific aesthetic disposition, it is no more than regular exposure to works of art, for example, in galleries and museums. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 50) The ‘eye’ for a pure gaze, therefore, is nothing about a natural capacity to see the beautiful, rather merely a cultural skill, as adhering to the cultural capital, produced and reproduced by artistic education.

Without a *raison d’être* for itself, the ‘pure’ aesthetics, then, is only founded on a refusal of its opposite, the ‘facile’ or ‘vulgar’ aesthetics. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 486) The ‘facile’ refers to anything that is easy to acquire or enjoy, as in contrast to the ‘difficile’, the demanding things. The pure taste refuses things that are easy, shallow, superficial, etc.; things that brings immediate pleasure from the agreeable. It demands the kind of pleasure that is culturally encoded, sophisticated, so that it may distance itself from the inferior tastes. Based on this refusal, the pure taste thus becomes a symbol of moral excellence, a measure of the true humanity. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 491) In this way, taste exceeds its aesthetic sense. Taste, or the lack of it, draws a distinction within human beings: those who have taste and thus whose humanity is approved, and those who are thought to have no taste and thus whose humanity is denied. As Bourdieu quotes Ortega y Gasset, it implies that some possess the organ of understanding (*compréhension*) and others have been denied such organ. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 31)

3. *The Division of understanding*

The division of understanding is further developed in Rancière’s political analysis. Let us first follow Rancière’s discussion in politics, and then we will see how the problem in aesthetics is parallel to it with regard to taste. In *La Méésentente (Disagreement)*, Rancière remarks that expressions about ‘understanding’, even in everyday usage, should commonly be interpreted by antiphrasis. ‘Do you understand me?’ is false question whose actual meaning is ‘You do not understand, and you do not need to’, ‘You are not able to understand, and you only have to obey’, etc. Here we see two different meanings of ‘understanding’: one literal, to understand the problem in question; and the other non-literal, to understand the order behind the expression. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 72-73) Taking the first meaning, the speaker is obliged to explain himself. He succeeds in making himself understood when the listener understands what he is saying and reaches mutual understanding. Taking the second meaning, the speaker is only to draw the

distinction between two categories of speaking beings. He wants the listener to understand that he is not able to understand what he is saying. The speaker succeeds when the listener is convinced that there are people who understand the problem, like the speaker; and there are people who do not, like the listener himself.

In the aesthetic context, the same pattern applies. 'Do you see the beautiful of the work of art?' is usually not a question initiating a dialogue, rather ending it. It expresses in fact a denial of the possibility and necessity of understanding. 'You do not need to see or understand the beautiful of the work of art; you only have to understand that you are not able to see the beautiful that I see.' By doing so, the speaker is to establish the order of taste as such. To the speaker belongs the superior taste, by which he is able to see the beautiful of the art. To the listener belongs the inferior taste, by which he is not able to see the same beautiful, rather only to see the distinction, and understand the superiority of the former and his own inferiority. As the former 'tastes' the beautiful as beautiful, the latter 'tastes' the superiority as unreachable and the inferiority as unchangeable. In the situation of a false dialogue, not only the effort to seek agreement, but also any attempt to propose disagreement, is in vain, because there is no conversation across ranks of taste. For the disagreement to be possible, it must appear in a different form, and before that, the dialogue must be recommenced by a proper response.

The response to the question de-multiplies at two levels due to the division between two meanings of 'understanding'. At the first level, 'Since we understand your orders, we share with you the same power to understand.' At the second level, 'We understand that by asking this false question, you are in fact saying that we do not need to, we are not able to understand, etc.' (Rancière, 1995, p. 74) The first-level response is straightforward. It sees the literal meaning of 'understanding', viz. the understanding of the words. The problem is only to understand what is said explicitly, because that is all the content to be understood. The second-level response involves a deeper reflection on the expression of 'understanding'. It sees the performance the speaker is doing: not to my words should you pay attention, rather to my position of speaking. The reflected response exposes the true meaning of the expression that has been disguised as an ordinary question. It exposes the attempt of the speaker to draw the distinction within human beings. With regard to the taste, it reveals such internal gap: the capacity and the account of taste. The superior and the inferior both have taste, but in different senses. The superior has the taste for the beautiful. Therefore, his judgement of the beautiful counts. The inferior has the taste in the sense that he understands his difference, or inferiority,

comparing to the former. He understands the taste (and his incapability of it) without having it. Therefore, his judgement does not count. (Here I borrow Rancière's description of the duality of *logos*. See Rancière, 1995, pp. 38, 44, 48, 71, 74.)

The reflected response can be interpreted in two opposite ways, either in terms of the account or of the capacity. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 74-75) In terms of the account, there are two languages: the language of the superior, which is counted, and the language of the inferior, which is uncounted. In the form of the false dialogue, the speaker is posing his language of the order as a common language. The universal of language is a decoy that silences the uncounted language. In terms of the capacity, there is only one language that is common to all. By establishing the order, the speaker is dividing the world into two: those who give orders and those who obey, those who claim the superiority and those who accept. The division of language is a lie that prevents the inferior to share the common language.

Hence, the response brings the dialogue to a different stage. Aesthetic disagreement is no longer a mere dispute between two judgements, rather a dispute on the common ground: whether we have the agreement on a common language, i.e., a common sense of taste. According to Rancière, there is a primary dispute on what the agreement on a common language implies. It implies either the well-functioning of the order, or the community and equality of all speaking beings. (Rancière, 1995, p. 78) If it is deduced that the order is given well by the superior so that it is understood by the inferior, then there is nothing commonly agreed but the mutual understanding of the order between superiority and inferiority. If it is deduced that the inferior is in the same community of the speaking beings, viz. as the equal of the superior, so that the former understands the order given by the latter, then there must be an agreement (on the common sense) within the agreement (on the order). The dialogue may continue around the existence of the second-degree agreement. More importantly, after the false question ends the conversation with the given order and divides them with a gap, the inferior and the superior, the listener and the speaker, are now on the same stage of debate over the very existence of a common ground.

Therefore, as Rancière puts it, the agreement on a common sense can be shown only in the form of the disagreement. (Rancière, 1995, p. 79) Since the inferior is denied having the common sense, any communication (in the first degree) between judgements across the rank is impossible. The dialogue must be transformed into a dispute (in the second degree) on the

common ground itself. For those who asserts there is a common ground, 'We can understand you because we share a common sense.' For those who asserts there is no such common ground, 'You cannot understand us because the taste is not commonly shared between you and us. Ours is superior and yours is inferior.' In terms of the internal gap of taste as either the capacity or the account of taste, the agreement on the capacity (as a common sense) can only be shown in the form of the disagreement on the account (as a division within human beings).

From Hume and Kant, to Bourdieu and to Rancière, we see the following evolution of the problem of aesthetic disagreement. For the philosophers, aesthetic disagreement is between judgements of taste, and they agree on the ideal taste. There is a general standard of taste based on the common sense that is shared by all human beings. For the sociologist, such common sense is a constituted concept. In a situation of aesthetic disagreement, taste itself is in the distinction between the pure, 'difficile' taste and the impure, 'facile' taste. The distinction within taste is in fact a distinction between different economic and social conditions. For the political philosopher, the incommunicability between the superior and the inferior is presented as a reality by ignoring the underlying agreement and understanding, i.e., the common sense shared rather than divided, between the two parts of the society. Given the situation that subjects are in the division of the sensible, the agreement can only be achieved by means of disagreement: We must presuppose a basic agreement on the common sense, and this presupposition itself is in disagreement.

The following questions arise. Firstly, there are some questions to be answered from Rancière's perspective. How does modern politics accomplish the aesthetic division of human beings, viz. the aestheticisation of politics, and how is aesthetics accompanied with political significance, viz. the politicisation of aesthetics? In the interaction between the two processes, aesthetic disagreement finds its significance as being a political problem in respect of the subjects. Secondly, there are questions concerning the sociological critique. On the one hand, it reveals the social constitution of taste and its internal distinction in terms of economic, cultural, and social conditions of subjects. On the other hand, it falls into a determinist logic and neglects other possibilities that could be created through education and emancipation. The sociological critique shall not be the end, rather only the start of a thorough inspection of the problem. Thirdly, there are questions asking for possible solutions to the problem. What is implied by aesthetic disagreement? What can be derived about the political being of subjects from the

problem? If it is regarded as a political problem, how would it be solved, probably, in the aesthetic way? With regard to the common sense, aesthetics has described an ideal regime of community for human beings. Now, when it encounters the reality, where we confront the problem of distinction and division, the aesthetic disagreement as a political problem truly starts.

Chapter I

The Identification of Politics with Aesthetics

In what sense is aesthetic disagreement politically significant? In order to answer this question, we should clarify the meaning of politics at first, especially with regard to how the aesthetic relates to it. Here I adopt Rancière's argument that politics is aesthetic in its principle. (Rancière, 1995, p. 88) Briefly speaking, politics is a matter of human being-together, about how their activities are organized and human beings live together. According to Rancière, it is done in an aesthetic way by defining the ways of doing and the ways of beings, in other words, what one can see, hear, and speak, which thus determines one's participation or not in the public life. This is what meant by his concept of the distribution of the sensible, which is at the core of his identification of politics with aesthetics. This is also where the aesthetic disagreement comes into question. The problem is *aesthetic* because it is about how one perceives the world; and the *disagreement* arises not only because of the lack of agreement, but also because of the absence of the possibility of understanding, given the distribution of the sensible. At the very least, an understanding is based on sharing a common ground for the discourse; however, the distribution is founded by the opposite, that is, fundamentally, a division of understanding. Therefore, aesthetic disagreement can be regarded as a consequence of the political distribution. The first chapter is the development of this argument. To be specific, firstly, politics is the activity of speaking beings, and speech as its subject matter has a double effect. On the one hand, it is the means by which human beings gather together as a community; and on the other hand it is the qualification that establishes a contentious relation within them. Secondly, any agreement or understanding is based on sharing a common language, and the common language at the same time defines a division and conceals the dispute in the form of consensus. Thirdly, the division of human beings is based on a distribution of the sensible, which means the distribution of ways of seeing and doing things, and hence one's perception of and participation in the world. Fourthly, the distribution denies the sharing of a common experience of the world, and results in a situation where the understanding is neither possible nor necessary. Overall, this chapter presents the political scene where the problem of aesthetic disagreement is involved and significant.

1. Politics as the activity of speaking beings

Rancière's discussion of politics starts from Aristotle's *Politics*. Aristotle argues that human beings are 'by nature' political beings because they alone among the animals possess speech (*logos*). In contrast to the mere voice, which is possessed by the other animals to indicate pain and pleasure, speech is peculiar to human beings to manifest 'the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the just and the unjust'. Speech enables human beings to perceive the moral qualities such as good and bad, right and wrong; and 'it is the community in these things that makes a family and a city'. (Aristotle, 1944, 1253a)

Aristotle distinguishes human beings from other animal beings for their capacity to be political. At the core of the distinction, it is human's possession of speech. With regard to this distinction made by Aristotle, there are several things – several minor distinctions – to be noticed. Firstly, there is a division of perception (*aisthesis*, 'sense' or 'feeling') between human and animal beings. Animals have merely the sense of pain and pleasure; while human beings have the sense of the harmful and the advantageous. It is obvious that there is some extra content in the latter, the *aisthesis* of human beings, compared to the former, that of animals. Secondly, there is a division in terms of their physical and mental faculties. Animals make mere voices while human beings are capable for *logos*. Here '*logos*' means not only 'to speak', but also 'to reason'. The dual meaning of *logos* in ancient Greek is significant in the distinction of human beings from animals. On the one hand, the two capacities are similar because speaking involves the physical process of emitting voices; on the other hand, they are different because speaking involves additionally the mental process of reasoning. Thirdly, there is the division of their functions. The voice serves as a sign to 'indicate' (*semainein*), while the speech is to 'manifest' (*deloun*). The capacity for manifestation is the superior qualification for politics, which belongs only to human beings.

The superiority of speech that distinguishes human beings as political consists of two aspects. On the one hand, as we have seen, it is the distinction of speech from voices. On the other hand, it is the capacity for the deduction from 'the advantageous and the harmful' to 'the just and the unjust', which is, as suggested by Aristotle, performed by speech, or more precisely, *logos*. In the end, it is the perception of justice and goodness that makes a political community. One way to deduce the just from the advantageous is by saying that the just is optimizing the advantage and reducing the harm. However, Rancière points out that this deduction from the 'advantageous' (or the 'useful') to the just is problematic because it is 'only made by the mediation of their opposites', that is, the 'harmful' and the unjust. By examining the problem

of the deduction, he locates ‘the heart of the political problem’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 21) I represent his examination as follows.

Rancière argues that the mediation has two problems. The first problem is that the ‘useful’ (*sumpheron*) and the ‘harmful’ (*blaberon*), strictly speaking, are not opposite terms. In Greek usage, *sumpheron* means ‘the advantage that an individual or a community obtains or expects to obtain from an action’. It refers to a relation to oneself. On the other hand, *blaberon* means either ‘the part of inconvenience that falls to an individual for whatever reason’ or ‘the negative consequence that an individual receives from his act or, most often, from the action of others’; and its etymological root, *blabè*, means ‘the objectively determinable wrong done by one individual to another’. Thus, it implies a relation between two parties. According to Rancière, this is why Thrasymachus, in Plato’s *Republic*, draws the false conclusion that ‘justice is the advantage of the superior’. For Thrasymachus, the profit for one is not necessarily the damage to another; and it is even the inferior that benefits more from the superiority. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 21-22) In other words, the *sumpheron* means the advantage that refers only to oneself; therefore, it does not necessarily involve the *blaberon*, that is, the harm or the wrong done to others. The superiority in the city implies a kind of justice as the advantage of the stronger; and it does no harm or wrong to the inferior, but only forms a reciprocal relation between the inferior and the superior. Here follows the second problem. According to Rancière, for Plato and for Aristotle, the just is the state ‘where the *sumpheron* has no *blaberon* as a correlate’. The advantageous should thus be disconnected from the harmful. Therefore, a good city is based on a good mode of distribution of the advantageous, instead of a balance of profits and damages, such as preventing the harm or the wrong done to others but at the same time benefiting from it. Justice, therefore, begins with a conception of ‘the common’ (*le commun*), which means ‘what the citizens possess in common’. It is about a distribution of the common, or in Rancière’s words, ‘the very measure according to which each party [*partie*] takes only the share [*part*] that is due to it’ and ‘the order that determines the distribution of the common’. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 22-23)

From this perspective, it is clear to see how *logos*, or speech, as distinct from voices, makes human being-together possible. On the one hand, at the first level, human beings have the sense of what brings them benefit or harm, which is a superior sense compared to that of what gives them mere pleasure or pain. Pleasure or pain makes an animal stay or leave; while benefit or harm makes human beings keep together or apart. On the other hand, at the second level, human

beings have the sense of justice with regard to the distribution of what they possess in common. Specifically, the distribution is about which part of the community has what share of the common that is proper to it to take. This is how the community takes shape. Human beings gather together because they can perceive the benefit and the harm, either from oneself or from each other; however, they live a common life only when they no longer balance the benefit and the harm, but start considering what they have as the common, and what they can do with it among themselves. This is the transition from ‘the advantageous and the harmful’ to ‘the just and the unjust’. The distribution of the common is the matter that requires the sense of justice; and it is the matter that can be perceived and manifested only by beings of *logos*. At this moment, the community starts to exist.

Besides the distribution of ‘shares’ (*parts*) of the common, another matter is involved here, that is, the count of ‘parts’ (*parties*) of the community. In order to distribute the common in accordance with the principle of justice, the city must figure out what share is proper to which party. According to Rancière, it is usually determined by counting the value that each party brings to the community. Here Rancière refers to Aristotle. Aristotle identifies three values or titles (*axiai*) of community: the wealth that belongs to the few (the *oligoï*); the virtue or excellence which gives the best (the *aristoi*) their name; and freedom that belongs to the people (*demos*). (Rancière, 1995, pp. 24-25) However, among these three values and three parties thus counted, there is a special one that will expose the truth that the count of the parties is actually a ‘miscount’. It is the party of the *demos* and the freedom as its value (or title).

Firstly, freedom is not a property or a title; it is a mere fact. Freedom belongs to the *demos* not because the *demos* somehow own it as their property, but simply because it is a fact that they are citizens instead of slaves. Slaves have no value in the count of parties, because they are not a part of the community; and the *demos* in fact ‘have no more value than slaves’, though they are not slaves. In a city, they are artisans and shopkeepers. They are those who speak but have no place to speak. Rather, they participate in public affairs only by devoting themselves to ‘work and reproduction’. In this sense, the *demos* are described as free not because they are actually free, but only because they cannot be enslaved by the *oligoï* since the debt slavery has been abolished. For the sake of the freedom, the *demos* are not regarded as being dominated by the *oligoï* or by the power of the wealth, but by the *aristoi* or by the power of the excellence. However, if we see the freedom as a fact rather than a property, we see that the *aristoi* are actually the *oligoï* disguised in the name of the freedom. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 26-27) This is

the first miscount revealed by the freedom of the *demos*. There are not parties of the rich and the noble, but solely the party of the rich; and on the other hand, there is the party of the *demos* who are the poor and the dominated.

Secondly, freedom is not exclusively proper to the *demos*, as the wealth to the *oligoï* and the excellence to the *aristoi*. Instead, freedom belongs to every citizen in the community. However, there is a good reason for which the *demos* may claim freedom as their property. It is that the *demos* have no other property, either the possession of wealth or the name of excellence, to claim. They have nothing but the thing that belongs to everyone, that is, freedom. Freedom is the only thing that they have, the only thing of which they have not been deprived. We may interpret it in two different ways. On the one hand, freedom is not the value that is proper to the party of the *demos*; therefore, it does not entitle the *demos* to have a part or share of the common in the name of freedom. In other words, they are entitled to have nothing. On the other hand, freedom is the value of the whole community; by claiming freedom as their property, the *demos* actually identify themselves with the community. In other words, they are entitled to have everything. In this sense, as Rancière says, the *demos* can have only ‘nothing or everything’. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 27-28) From these two interpretations, we see the following interrelation between the *demos* and the community. It is a wrong that the *demos* do to the community by claiming the property of the whole community as the property of themselves. At the same time, the wrong is due to another wrong that the community does to the *demos* by giving no value or title to them. This reveals the second miscount. The *demos* are counted in the way that they have no share or part of the common. They are the uncouned in the count of parties, or the party of the without-part.

The miscount in the distribution of the common reveals the inner tension of the human community. We may even say that it is ‘the fundamental paradox of [any] democratic politics’. (Chambers, 2013, p. 10) The human community is constituted when human beings start to deal with what they have as the common and determine a distribution of it. The distribution is determined in accordance with the count of parties of the community. Unfortunately, the count is always a miscount. With regard to the distribution of the common, it counts only two parties in a quite brutal way: there are those who have a part and there are those who have no part. These two parties have many names: the rich and the poor, the superior and the inferior, the dominator and the dominated, the ruler and the people, etc. They either take the part or no part in the distribution of the common. They are the two parties of the *sharing* of the common in

the form of a *division*. It is this distribution (i.e. sharing/division) that makes the actual configuration of the human community.

Now we may return to the beginning and see how *logos* plays a trick in this distribution. The distribution defines the division of two parties in the sharing of the common. One has the part of participating in public affairs; while the other does not. However, a problem arises. It must be admitted that they are both beings of *logos*, capable of speaking and reasoning, and distinct from animals. It means that the without-part can and should have a part in the public affairs. Thus, there is the inconsistency between the distribution as the dividing configuration of politics and *logos* as the shared capacity for politics. Aristotle gives his solution by creating a duality of *logos*: ‘the slave is the one who participates in the community of language in the sole form of understanding (*aisthesis*), not of possession (*hexis*)’. (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b; cited in Rancière, 1995, p. 38) For Aristotle, the division is reasonable because *logos* itself involves a matter of count. Some have the *logos* for public affairs; while others merely understand or perceive the *logos* without having it. The division is thus maintained. On the one hand, there are those who have *logos* and therefore participate in politics; they are those who actually discuss public affairs and make decisions. On the other hand, there are those who understand *logos* without having it and therefore do not participate; they should not have opinions on public affairs but merely obey the order that is given by the former. Simply speaking, they are the ‘hand’ that does things, instead of the ‘head’ that thinks and decides.

The imbalance of *logos* makes the community a contentious one, or a community of dispute. The dispute exists not only between the two divided parties (the rich and the poor, the ruler and the people, etc.), but also within the latter *per se*, due to its paradoxical essence of being. They are the party of the community that has no part; they are the speaking beings who do not speak. Therefore, the tension of the community in effect lies on the mere condition of the latter, the without-part. The dispute, either between the two parties or within the without-part, emerges as soon as they become conscious of their paradoxical condition and the truth of their equality. However, even though the dispute is a constant in the constitution of political community, it rarely happens as such. Agreement, or consensus, rather than disagreement or dispute, has been the theme of the human community. We have to investigate the reason before addressing the significance of disagreement.

2. *Agreement based on a common language*

We have seen that the political community of human beings is a community of dispute, because its configuration involves the miscount of two contentious parties. The manifestation of this miscount seems to imply the immediate appearance of the dispute and the recognition of the *demos*. However, in fact, the human community usually appears as the opposite, that is, a community of agreement. Here the agreement means two things, or two kinds of understanding. Firstly, it refers to the situation where the inferior understands and obeys the order given by the superior. This is the first-degree agreement, and implies a logic of obedience. Secondly, agreement refers to the situation where the inferior does not only understand the order, but also understands that they *should* obey the order. This is the second-degree agreement, and implies a logic of consensus. It is this second-degree agreement in question that is in opposition to the conclusion that the political community is a community of dispute. Therefore, the true question is: how is agreement as consensus possible? More specifically, how is the division of community maintained in the form of consensus despite the fact that it is constituted by contentious parties? The answer is: by means of a common language.

The answer seems absurd *prima facie*, especially considering in Rancière's context that the dispute within the community is in essence a dispute over the duality of *logos*. The dispute arises from the duality of *logos*, or a division of speech that some human beings possess it while others merely understand without having it. In this case, how could a common language be supposed between the two parties, not to say as a suppressive power in cooperation with the dividing system? To clarify it, let us compare two stories that Rancière has mentioned to illustrate the division. The first is about the Scythian slaves in Media. The Scythians had the custom that they blinded their slaves to subject them to their milking task. When the Scythian warriors conquered Media, they stayed there; and during that time, a new generation of slaves was born and grew up without being blinded. These slaves, with their eyes open, found that they were actually the same as their masters and had no reason to be slaves. So they decided to revolt. The Scythian warriors failed the first time when they tried to suppress the revolt with their spears and bows. Then a warrior told the others that they should not appear in front of the slaves holding weapons, because in that way the slaves would really believe that they were equals; instead, they should hold whips as whipping horses, so that they could make the slaves understand their slavery. The strategy turned out to be a success. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 31-32) The second is about the Roman plebeians on the Aventine Hill. In order to demand the equal political rights as the patricians, the Roman plebeians decided to leave the city and retreat to

the Aventine. They gathered there not to prepare for a revolt, but to do other things that were 'unthinkable for them'. As Rancière writes, the plebeians 'perform a series of acts of speech that mimic those of the patricians: they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of them to go and consult their oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them'. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 46-47) The plebeians have been regarded as beings without *logos*. Their acts of speech are unbelievable to the patricians because they should have been the human beings that emit mere voices, not speech.

Either between the Scythian warriors and the slaves, or between the Roman patricians and the plebeians, we see the same structure of dispute over their equality. However, the processes and the results are very different. When the Scythian slaves decide to start the revolt, they claim their equality by holding weapons as warriors. Once they are involved in the combat, they must also be warriors, and thus the equals. This is what the warriors learn from their first failure and what they find as the key to suppressing the revolt. The warriors respond not with weapons, as the evidence of the slaves' equality, but with whips, as the affirmation of domination. Whipping is another way of saying that by no means we would be equals: you may pretend to be equals as us, but we would not respond correspondingly because you are not the persons who should hold weapons; whip is whip just as domination is domination. Thus, the claim of equality is so easily dissolved. By contrast, the Roman plebeians do not demand the recognition of their equality from the patricians; rather, they manifest it by developing their own way of speaking. They do not argue with the patricians, because the latter would not understand. The most basic possibility of discourse is missing because they are not regarded as sharing the same *logos*. The key to the problem lies on their own condition of being, that is, the speaking beings deprived of speech. The only way to claim the equality is by manifesting that they have the same *logos* as the patricians: we are not regarded as equals only because we are denied speech; we may not speak in the same way as you do, but we have the capacity for speech; *logos* is *logos* and we have our own. What truly surprises the patricians is not that the plebeians dare to argue alternatively, but that the plebeians manage to do the same things as they do in an alternative way, which means that there is a stage for dispute and that they are indeed equals.

Rancière has not brought the two stories into such comparison. There is something too simple to demonstrate, but too important to ignore. That is, how the dispute, or the contentious relation between the parties, threatens the harmony of the divided community. In the first story, the division, or the domination, is not threatened by the inferior using the same language as the

superior, because the superior could easily deny it as the Scythian warriors do. Instead, in the second story, it is threatened by the appearance of an alternative language used by the inferior, as the plebeians on the Aventine do, which puts itself in dispute with the language used by the superior. The appearance of the alternative language is the evidence of the inferior having the *logos* instead of merely understanding it, and thus breaks the trick of the duality of *logos*. By disproving this basis for the division, it implies not only the equality of these two languages or two ways of speaking, but also the equality of the two parties of speaking beings.

Therefore, if agreement as consensus is to be achieved as a way of maintaining the division, it must be based on a kind of common language. Now we may look at the connection between consensus and the common language. Rancière defines consensus as ‘a certain regime of the sensible’ where ‘the parties are presupposed already given, their community constituted and the count of their speech identical to their linguistic performance’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 143) There are two things to be clarified. Firstly, for Rancière, consensus is not a system where the matter of division and dispute has already been solved; quite the opposite, it is a system that conceals the division and suppresses the dispute. It makes invisible the miscount of parties and the contentious relation within the community that follows. Simply speaking, by consensus, it means that the harmony of the community is preserved not by solving the problem, but by *dissolving* it. Secondly, it is done not simply by means of a denial, but in the double form of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, ‘[everyone] is included in advance’ by the consensual system defining the distribution of parties as given; however, on the other hand, it is defined only in order to prevent the appearance of the miscount, that is, ‘a part of the without-part’ and ‘a count of the uncounted’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 159) Paradoxically, following the logic of consensus, the community includes the without-part only to exclude them more effectively. Although it gives a way of sharing the common, the dividing line remains there in the community. Therefore, the consensus is in effect a way of coordinating at the same time the division and the suppression of the division, the gap and the patch on the gap.

In order to manifest the function of the common language, let us go back to the story of the plebeians on the Aventine. When the plebeians manage to develop an alternative language and perform the same acts of speech as the patricians, the patricians are forced to face the fact that the plebeians indeed have *logos*. The trick of the duality of *logos* is revealed and thus no longer works. Then they must find another way to maintain the division. Menenius Agrippa, who is a consul with plebeian origin, was selected by the patricians to talk to the plebeians. Menenius

told them a fable. The other parts of the body thought the belly did nothing but enjoying the pleasure from food; so they decided to stop feeding it. Then the body became exhausted. The other parts realized that the belly had been returning the nourishment to them rather than being idle. (Livy, *History*, II, 32) The analogue is clear: the belly refers to the patricians and the other parts of the body refer to the plebeians. The general formula implied by Menenius's fable is that the plebeians feed the patricians so that the patricians enable the plebeians to do what they do. However, there is still an element in the fable that has not been deciphered, that is, the nourishment that the belly returns to the other parts. It certainly does not refer to any trade between the patricians and the plebeians. Instead, it is something exclusively belonging to the former, that is, the knowledge of doing correct things for the best of the city. In other words, without the patricians' knowledge, the plebeians would not know what they should do. This knowledge, or this nourishment returned, is the correct use of *logos*, in other words, the art of speech or the art of politics. This is the reserved capacity for politics that draws a new distinction when the speaking beings without speech start to speak.

We may say that Rancière has been rather optimistic about the plebeians' manifestation of their equal *logos*. In Rancière's view, by performing the acts of speech, the plebeians 'transgressed the order of the city' and 'became beings capable of making promises and entering into contracts'. When Menenius made the plebeians understand his fable, understand the necessity of the inequality between them, the plebeians and the patricians 'were already, just as necessarily, equal'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 47) In other words, only when the equality of *logos* is presupposed, the understanding of the inequality is possible. Here we see two aspects of this understanding, or this make-understand. On the one hand, positively, it proves that a person must have the equal *logos* when understanding it. The duality of understanding without having is a wrong form. On the other hand, negatively, the inequality is nevertheless maintained; and it is done successfully because the plebeians, as an equal party in the discourse, have understood the reason for inequality. Thus, although the patricians have to admit the equality of *logos* between the two parties, they still manage to draw another division and maintain the inequality. They say to the plebeians: we admit that you have *logos* and you can speak like us; but there is still something you do not understand, that is the art of speech, or the art of politics.

This is how a common language functions as the basis for a consensual system. It is first of all presupposed that there is a common language. Then, on the one hand, it takes the form of inclusion that the two parties may speak to each other like equals on the basis that they share a

common language; on the other hand, however, it takes the form of exclusion that one of them cannot use the common language correctly because they do not actually understand it. The trick that the common language plays here is no longer the duality of *logos* as ‘understanding but not having’, but the reversed form as ‘having but not understanding’. The reverse successfully transforms the simple *denial* of having into the *pardon* for not understanding, and thus avoids the problematic appearance of the speaking beings without speech. In this way, it manages to transform the dispute into a kind of understanding, and the domination of inequality into the justified distribution of roles.

The common language in effect presupposes a kind of universality. The common language presents itself as universal to all: everyone has it; and anyone who has it can enter into an equal discourse. However, the universality is a special kind. It is not an empirical one because it is obvious based on experience that not all people are regarded as understanding the language. It is not a logical one because, if there is any concept that could serve as the basis, it would be its opposite, the contentious relation within the community. If we are going to find a similar, we may say that it is somehow akin to Kant’s conception of the aesthetic universality. By arguing that there is a common language, one expects the sharing of the language from others. The difference is that in this case, the expectation is a fake one. By bringing up the expectation, one at the same time sets a standard: you fail the expectation if you fail to understand the language. Instead of expecting the other’s understanding, one expects the other’s not-understanding so that the fake universality may play the double trick of inclusion and exclusion. It establishes a logic of consensus by making people believe that there is a common language that they do not understand; and thus, the domination is justified. Therefore, the common language is never a language of the community. It is still an exclusive language seized by a specific group just as *logos*. The difference is only whether the division is drawn in the form of denial, which leads to the dispute, or in the form of consensus, which conceals it.

From the above discussion, we distinguish two forms of agreement. The first is, in the ordinary sense, the agreement among parties of the community, involved in an equal discourse, dealing with their dispute; however, it is never really achieved because the problem of dispute is in the first instance dissolved by the second one, the consensus. Agreement as consensus is achieved by means of a common language: by presupposing the existence of a common language, the consensual system maintains the division by admitting the inferior’s sharing of the common language while denying the possibility for them to understand it. Agreement, in

the end, becomes the disappearance of the fundamental contentious relation within the community, and thus conceals the true political problem.

3. *Distribution of roles and distribution of the sensible*

For now we have had the outline of the configuration of politics as the division in the form of sharing maintained by the consensual system. In this way, it transforms dispute into agreement and the domination into the distribution of roles. Then we can inspect the specific forms of such distribution. There are two forms, or two dimensions in which the consensual system is organized. The first is the vertical distribution of positions of ruling and being ruled; and the second is the horizontal distribution in the form of the division of labour. These two forms of distribution determines not only what to do and how to act, but also how one perceives the world. In the end, we will see that the distribution of roles is actually a distribution of the sensible, and that the configuration of politics is thus achieved in an aesthetic way.

Let us begin with the distribution of the positions of ruling and being ruled. First of all, it shall not be understood as a distribution of roles among some pre-existing subjects. Politics is not a matter of determining which party of the community shall rule and which party shall be ruled; instead, it is about identifying these parties in the relation of ruling and being ruled. In other words, the political relation is prior to the political subject. Rancière makes the point by referring to Aristotle's definition of the citizen: 'a citizen is in general one who shares in governing and being governed' (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1283b; see Rancière, 1997, p. 91) Therefore, it is in the relation of ruling and being ruled that the political subject is defined.

Then, how are the roles of ruling and being ruled separated? We can find the answer in the word 'to rule' (*arkhein*) as a form of action. Rancière says that '[if] we retake the Aristotelian definition of the citizen, there is a name of the subject (*politès*) that is defined by a part-taking (*metexis*) in a form of action (that of *arkhein*) and in the undergoing that corresponds to this action (*arkhesthai*)'. (Rancière, 1997, p. 92) There are two forms of action, the active one of ruling and the passive one of being ruled. Here Rancière refers to Arendt's explanation of the word 'to rule' (*arkhein*) as 'to begin'; and a further comparative reading can give us a clear view. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt talks about *arkhein* in contrast with another word, *prattein*. She reminds us that in Greek, both of the two words have the meaning of 'to act'. However, they refers to different kinds of action: *arkhein* means 'to begin', 'to lead', and

therefore ‘to rule’; while *prattein* means ‘to achieve’, ‘to finish’. (Arendt, 1998, p. 189) The significance of their difference is demonstrated elsewhere: ‘the truly kingly science [of statesmanship] ought not itself to act [*prattein*] but rule [*arkhein*] over those who can and do act’; ‘it perceives the beginning and principle [*arkhe*] of what is necessary for the polis, while the others do only what they are told to do’. (Plato, *Statesman*, 305d; cited in Arendt, 2005, p. 91) The comparison is obvious. The subjects that take part in the action of ruling are those who begin or initiate an action; they have the knowledge of what to do for the best of the city, and they know how to command. On the other hand, the subjects that take part in the action of being ruled are those who perform and complete the action; they are regarded as unaware of the art of politics, and they merely do and follow the command. In short, the distribution of the positions of ruling and being ruled is in the first instance a distribution of two different ways of doing things, two different forms of action, or the actual participation or not in politics. The doubleness of the action thus defines the relation of ruling and being ruled. In this relation, the two political parties are identified. They are commonly involved in politics, but their positions are clearly divided.

This vertical distribution is accompanied by the horizontal one, the division of labour. The division of labour starts from a rather innocent and beneficial scene. In *Republic*, Plato says that human beings live together in a city because ‘each of us lacks many things’ and needs each other to ‘suffice for our own needs’. Therefore, there must be different persons for different needs, most basically: a farmer for the provision of food, a builder for housing, a weaver for raiment, and a shoemaker and some other worker. (Plato, *Republic*, 369b-369d) This is the original picture of the division of labour. Plato gives two reasons for the arrangement. Firstly, it is an easier way to meet the needs that each person spends one’s whole time on the production of one good and shares it with others, compared with the way that each spends a part of one’s time on each task and does things only for oneself. Secondly, each person has a different nature and thus is naturally fitted for one task. Then, Plato deduces that one person would do better working at only one task. (Plato, *Republic*, 369e-370b)

The deduction starts from the economic efficiency of production and leads to a sociological exclusivity of division. At the beginning, the division of labour seems to be the arrangement that produces more goods in an easier way. However, there are at least two defects in the arrangement. Firstly, as Rancière notices, in this Platonic model, the strict division of labour is too efficient and ‘will quickly produce unexchangeable surplus’. (Rancière, 2004a, p. 4) In the

city where people live together to suffice for the needs of each other, the needs are in the first instance limited by the population of the city. People specialize their production only to the extent that each one's needs are satisfied. Even in the mature market economy, surplus production is not economically welcome. Therefore, it is absurd to suppose that the specialization should go so far that one would do only one thing all the time. Returning to the deduction, we can see that Plato plays a secret trick at the very beginning by replacing the maxim of sufficiency with the maxim of infinite efficiency that more is better. Secondly, taking a step back, it is also absurd to suppose that one should do only one thing if the purpose is to produce more. Each task of production has its right time, either a period in a day or a season in a year; so it always leaves some leisure time. (Rancière, 2004a, p. 5) If the city always needs more, each person should engage in multiple tasks, not solely according to their natures, but primarily according to the right time. However, in Plato's design, the priority is given to the former. We may find its rationality in a different understanding of 'the easier way': that is to say, not a more effective way to achieve the abundant production, but a less complex structure of arrangement. The simplicity is achieved by means of the exclusion of time, which eliminates the possibility of doing other things in one's leisure. Therefore, the division of labour defines the exclusion that one person shall do only one thing. This is Plato's second trick, covering up the simple exclusion in the name of production.

Then, what about people's different natures for different tasks? In fact, it is not one's nature that determines one's activity; on the contrary, it is one's activity that gives the name of one's nature. This can be derived from Rancière's reading of the relevant paragraphs. When the production is sufficient, Plato continues, the city will need warriors to defend the wealth and luxuries. War is a specific profession, and should be of greater concern; and therefore should not be the occasional task of someone who has one's own occupation. Plato makes the comparison to the knucklebones player: 'no man in the world could make himself a competent expert at [knucklebones] who did not practise that and nothing else from childhood'. (Plato, *Republic*, 373d-374d) Rancière points out that in Plato's view, a shoemaker cannot be a warrior for the same reason that the shoemaker cannot be a good knucklebones player: because warriors and knucklebones players are both '[children] of superfluity'. A city needs warriors after it has the superfluous production of wealth and luxuries. It thus leads to 'a hierarchy of natures'. (Rancière, 2004a, p. 13) On the one hand, the nature of a warrior is formed by the education of the philosopher, who is preserved from the artisans. On the other hand, an artisan is simply the

person ‘who is forbidden to engage in any [other] activity’ by nature. (Rancière, 2004a, pp. 14, 17, 22-23)

Furthermore, the truth of the division of labour is not the exclusivity of different specific occupations, but the order of the hierarchy. As Plato continues the investigation, he admits that an artisan is actually allowed to do anything as long as it is an artisanal task. It would not do great harm to the city ‘if a carpenter were to undertake to do the work of a shoemaker, or a shoemaker the work of a carpenter, or if they were to exchange their tools and their wages’. (Plato, *Republic*, 434a; cited in Rancière, 2004a, p. 28) It is because ‘*these* two things are completely equivalent’; and their natures, and the nature of any other artisan, are ‘interchangeable’. The strict division exists only ‘[between] the artisan and the warrior’, ‘between the warrior and the ruler’. (Rancière, 2004a, p. 29) Thus, the horizontal division of labour is in fact a way of reinforcing the vertical distribution of ruling and being ruled.

Then we can answer the next question: why is it aesthetic? Or, why is the political distribution of roles an aesthetic one? Here, we need to clarify the meaning of the ‘aesthetic’ in Rancière’s context. For Rancière, the ‘aesthetic’ does not refer to the theory of viewing works of art; instead, it takes the rather original meaning of the word and refers to ‘one’s relationship with the perceived world’, (Rancière and Engelmann, 2019, p. 10) or ‘the system of *a priori* forms determining what [is presented] to sense experience’. (Rancière, 2013, p. 8) With this in mind, we can understand why the distribution of roles is in fact based on the distribution of the sensible, and thus Rancière’s identification of politics with aesthetics.

The distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*), as defined by Rancière, is ‘the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it’. (Rancière, 2013, p. 7) It is not hard to see how the political structure related to the definition. Firstly, as the French word ‘*partage*’ has two meanings, sharing and division, the *partage du sensible* has the same doubleness. This is exactly how the consensual system works against the contentious politics. The presupposition of the common language establishes the shared possibility of the seemingly equal participation in the community; and the distribution of roles defines its form. However, the division is at the same time implied in the duality of *logos* or the common language, the doubleness of action, and the non-interchangeability between the natures of an artisan and a warrior. Secondly, the distribution, as both sharing and division, is

aesthetic because it is about the ways of seeing, doing, and speaking. When the artisans are put into their occupations and forbidden to engage in other activities, they are actually in the same situation as the Scythian slaves who are blinded in order to do no other things than the milking task; they, as the being ruled, are regarded not as the head to think or initiate an action, but merely as the hand to do and perform the action; they are deprived of the *logos* or the capacity to understand the common language, so that their speech has no actual difference from animal voices.

Citton (2009) has demonstrated the two sides of the sensible, that is, its passivity and activity. On the one hand, the sensible passively results from the distribution, which determines the ways of seeing and experiencing things. On the other hand, we ‘actively categorize’ the images of things; and the sensing mechanism is not only ‘socially constructed over time’, but also ‘individually reconstructed each time we sense anything’. (pp. 121-122) Therefore, there are two logics about the distribution of the sensible. One is passive and deterministic; and the other is active and practical. These two logics are both about how we see things and what can do in the world.

When we recognize the aesthetic essence of the political structure, the dispute that has been concealed by the consensual system emerges again. Rancière thus discerns two antagonistic forms of distribution of the sensible: *police* and *politics*. His definition of the two concepts is as follows.

The police is, in its essence, the law, generally implicit, which defines the share or absence of share of the parties. But to define this, we must first define the configuration of the sensible in which each is inscribed. The police is thus first of all an order of bodies that defines the distributions between the ways of doing, the ways of being and the ways of saying, which makes such bodies assigned by their name to such a place and such a task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that makes such an activity visible and such another not, that such a word is heard as discourse and such another as noise. (Rancière, 1995, p. 52)

[And the politics is the activity] which breaks the sensible configuration where parties and shares or their absence are defined by a presupposition that by definition has no place there: that of a part of the without-part. This rupture is manifested by a series of acts that reconfigure the space where parties, shares and absences of shares have been defined. Political activity is that which displaces a body from the place assigned to it or changes the destination of a place;

it makes visible what had no place to be seen, makes heard a discourse where only noise had its place, makes heard as discourse what was heard only as noise. (Rancière, 1995, p. 53)

It is noticeable that the politics thus defined is not a separate process from the police; on the contrary, it happens wherever there is a power that defines the police order and there is a power that disagrees with it. It is not a conflict between two political parties; instead, it is a conflict between two processes, the denial of a party (that is, the without-part, the subject of the miscount, etc.) and its appearance. It is also the representation of the everlasting conflict between the system of consensus and the relation of dispute or dissensus in the community; or between the logic that there is a hierarchical order and the logic that all parts of the community are equal beings.

In addition, the police and the politics are not only two forms of the distribution of the sensible, or two forms of what we usually call ‘politics’; they also manifest two ways that we can relate politics, in general, to aesthetics. On the one hand, the police establishes the order by assigning a person to one’s specific or proper position, and defining what is visible or invisible for the person, what the person can or cannot do and say. It thus defines the possibility and impossibility of one’s perception of the world. On the other hand, if the politics attempts to break the order, then it must be first of all a rupture that happens in aesthetics, which means, how a person experiences and perceives the world. Before going further in this direction, I propose that the (political) rupture (in aesthetics) in the first instance emerges from and appears as some kind of disagreement.

4. Disagreement and lack of understanding

First of all, a clarification is necessary that disagreement in this sense is not the lack of agreement between two persons or between two opinions; in that case, disagreement and agreement are homogeneous because they share the same basis, which is the possibility of the argument or discourse, so that agreement or disagreement is merely the outcome of the discourse. Instead, the profound disagreement is the situation where this basis is absent. It is the situation where there is not the possibility of a discourse, where there is not a common ground. In the ‘Preface’ of *La Méésentente*, Rancière distinguishes disagreement (*mésentente*) from two other similar concepts, misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) and misunderstanding (*malentendu*). In an interlocution, misrecognition is due to each person’s unawareness of what

the other is saying; and misunderstanding is due to the ambiguousness of what they are saying. The former requires the supplement of knowledge and the latter requires the rarefaction of words. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 12-13) By contrast, disagreement concerns more profoundly ‘the presence or absence of a common object’ between two persons, ‘the sensible presentation of this commonality’ and their quality to present it. The extreme form of disagreement, for Rancière, is that ‘where X does not see the common object that Y presents to him because he does not understand that the sounds emitted by Y compose words and arrangements of words similar to his own’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 14)

The commonality is the main concern of the problem of disagreement; and two matters are related to it: its sensible presentation, and the subjects’ quality to present it. Firstly, in a situation of disagreement, what is in question is that the sensible presentation of the commonality is in fact its absence. As we have seen in a police order of the distribution of the sensible, by defining the division between ways of seeing, doing, and speaking, it draws the division between experiences of and practices in the world. For example, the blinded Scythian slaves have no idea that they are the same as their masters; it is not possible for them to see the commonality when they have been put into the darkness, not to mention to act like equals. The common object that could be the cornerstone of a discourse is in the first instance absent. The experience, and thus the understanding, of the commonality is impossible. Secondly, it is accompanied by the division of the subjects’ quality or capacity. The duality of *logos* establishes a logic that the slaves only perceive but do not possess the *logos*. They are unqualified for politics simply because they are regarded as lacking such capacity. It denies in the first instance the existence of a common speech (*logos*) between them, which is the basis for a possible conversation. For this reason, the Roman plebeians cannot speak to the patricians, because they would simply not be heard or understood. The only way for them to start a conversation is by retreating to the Aventine Hill, which is to make appear the lack of the common ground; and then find a way to manifest their equal quality and thus the commonality. From these two aspects, we see the following tautology. The commonality is out of the question because the people are regarded as unqualified to talk about the common object; at the same time, they cannot talk about it because the experience of the common ground is denied.

This denial of the commonality distinguishes disagreement from mere misrecognition and misunderstanding. It refers to a more profound lack of understanding, that is, a situation where understanding is not needed. Rancière emphasizes the gap between two meanings of ‘to

understand'. The expression 'Do you understand me?' has two meanings. On the one hand, it could be regarding the problem in question, which means 'Do you understand the problem we are talking about?'. In this case, the speaker aims at the mutual understanding with the listener. On the other hand, it could be merely performative. In this case, it should be interpreted by antiphrasis. The true meaning of the question 'Do you understand me?' is actually a denial of understanding: 'I know that you do not understand me; you are not able to understand me and do not need to understand'. What is the matter is not the problem in question, but the division, the order, or the hierarchy between the speaker and the listener. It is to show that there are different speaking beings: those who understand the problem, and those who do not and thus only need to follow the order. (Rancière, 1995, pp. 72-73) In other words, the speaker aims at the opposite, the lack of understanding, which affirms the order of the division.

For the gap of the two meanings of understanding to establish the order, there is an underlying logic. Although understanding is not needed, it nevertheless must first be expected or required. When the speaker is to express 'You do not need to understand' by asking the performative question 'Do you understand?', it is a manner, at least seemingly, of requiring the understanding on some equal ground, 'You must understand, right?', before stepping back to the superior position, 'Of course not, you cannot understand as I do'. The trick works only because the fake expectation of understanding is prior to its real purpose, the lack of understanding. Therefore, while the commonality is denied, a kind of universality is on the contrary presupposed. There must be some kind of universality; and it is a very similar situation to that of the taste. As Kant says in the third *Critique*: when a person says that a thing is beautiful, 'he *demand*s that [others] agree. He reproaches them if they judge differently, and denies that they have taste, which he nevertheless demands of them, as something they ought to have'. (Kant, 1987, 213) Simply speaking, the universality forms a circle: one supposes it, and demands it from another person; then denies it when the other fails to meet it; but still holds it as necessary. In the case of the taste, the circle is at risk when it encounters a different judgement. In the case of politics, it breaks when the universality is no more necessary, which gives a more convenient result: there is indeed a division.

Nevertheless, the presupposition of universality implies two opposite logics. On the one hand, there is the logic of consensus, which is the *police* logic. It justifies the denial of the commonality by establishing the division of understanding. It says that if X cannot understand Y, then X fails the expected equality that has been expressed by Y; and it proves that they are

not equals and there is not a common ground for a conversation between them. In effect, it replaces the (police) distribution of the sensible as the cause of such lack of understanding, and conceals the fact that they do not share the same sensory experience of the world because they have been, in the first instance, put into different places, which set the limit on what is sensible or not to them. On the other hand, there is the logic of equality, which is the *political* logic. The most basic equality between X and Y can be derived from the presupposition of universality once it is detached from the trick that divides the understanding. If the universality is presupposed to some extent, then there must be a kind of equality between the two subjects. When Y says that X cannot and need not understand, X is then free from the regime of words built by Y. It creates the alternative space for X to develop another possible understanding and speech about the object; and a common ground for a conversation reappears when X expects or requires Y to understand X's own speech. In this way, it brings out the (political) redistribution of the sensible that breaks the division of understanding.

Furthermore, two kinds of disagreement are associated with the two logics respectively. The first is the passive disagreement as the lack of understanding. It is the situation where the commonality is absent and not experienced by the subjects. The subject X is in disagreement with the subject Y simply because X cannot understand what is literally expressed by Y; and such disagreement is exactly the real meaning expressed by Y, that is, there is no need to understand because there is nothing common between them. It is the simple result of the distribution of the sensible; and it follows the police logic by taking the lack of understanding as *naturally* given. The second is the active disagreement as the dissensus. The dissensus is the rupture that is put into the consensual system. It makes visible and experienced the absence of the commonality and thus challenges the rationality of its absence. The subject X, although may still not understand Y, now senses that the lack of understanding is due to something concealing and denying the commonality and equality between them, instead of the nonexistence of such commonality or equality. Such disagreement is then expressed by manifesting the equality. It attempts to break the given division of ways of seeing, doing, and speaking, and leads to the redistribution of the sensible. It is the political logic that makes sensible what has not been sensible.

Therefore, the disagreement happens primarily in the regime of the sensible; and it profoundly regards what is sensible to whom and what is not. If we go back to the very beginning, we can see that it is related to the miscount of the division of speaking beings in the community, the

inclusion and exclusion of the consensual system, and the aesthetic configuration of politics. Between the logic of dispute and the logic of consensus, the logic of equality and the logic of domination, the disagreement emerges from the sense that there is something not commonly understood while it is something that should be common or universal. This gives us a new perspective to consider the aesthetic disagreement: it does not only refer to the disagreement between different aesthetic judgements or opinions, or between different tastes; rather, it is the disagreement between the differentiated, divided experiences. It challenges any exclusive reading of the Kantian universality, and at the same time, appeals to its significance of equality for the reappearance of a common ground. Aesthetic disagreement, in this sense, is potentially a political problem.

Chapter II

Aesthetic Experience as Egalitarian Experience

As a political problem, aesthetic disagreement is about the experience. On the one hand, with regard to the aesthetic experience, as either the experience of the world or the experience of the beautiful, the distribution of the sensible is relevant. It defines the division or sharing of different ways of seeing and doing things, and puts such distribution as naturally given. On the other hand, a presupposition of universality is nevertheless held. As the subjective universality in the Kantian sense, no matter whether one can understand or be understood, the subject holds the aesthetic experience as universally valid to all. It thus breaks any division that has been built on the division of understanding. It finds in itself what has been concealed, that is, the principle of equality. All people must be equal and there must be a common ground for all, so that one may believe that some subjective experience is universal. Therefore, another experience is associated with the aesthetic experience, that is, the experience of equality, or the egalitarian experience. Between the aesthetic experience and the egalitarian experience, it is the Kantian inference through the four moments of the aesthetic judgement of taste: disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without a purpose, and necessity (of the universality) conditioned on the presupposed common sense. The problem arises here. Bourdieu's social critique of the judgement of taste strives for the 'return of the repressed', which means the recognition of the inferior, vulgar taste that has been repressed by the Kantian superior, pure taste. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 485) The sociological critique in effect undermines Rancière's emancipatory reading by denying the Kantian aesthetic disinterestedness as an illusion, and confirming a distinction or division between the different tastes in its critique of the pure taste. Therefore, the equality that is aesthetically derived by Rancière is in question. We can recognize the debate by asking two questions: firstly, whether the disinterestedness is merely an illusion; and secondly, how the answer to the first question serves its purpose, which refers to either the emancipation from the distribution (Rancière), or the recognition in the distinction (Bourdieu). With regard to this debate, the second chapter is developed as follows. Firstly, I go through Kant's analysis of the moments of the judgement of taste, and Rancière's reading of its significance on the political emancipation, especially in terms of the Kantian disinterested gaze. Secondly, I discuss Bourdieu's social analysis of the pure taste and Rancière's critique on the former's sociological method. Thirdly, I argue that the key to understand Rancière's theory is his presupposition of equality as a principle, which is a

principle that must be presupposed and verified in practice. It is the principle of equality that distinguishes Rancière's approach of emancipation. Overall, the aesthetic disagreement cannot be reduced into a problem of the distinction of tastes; instead, it should be understood with reference to the principle of equality, in other words, as a debate over the existence of a common ground among all people.

1. *The Kantian disinterested gaze*

As we have seen, the Kantian universality attributed to the judgement of taste is a source of the significance of aesthetic disagreement; and its interpretation remains ambiguous. It can be interpreted either in the police logic, which means an exclusion based on the trick of the duality of understanding; or in the political logic, which implies the confirmation of a common ground. Therefore, before we dive into the controversial reading of the universality, it would be better to take an examination on the context of this concept, that is, Kant's inference through the four moments of the judgement of the beautiful.

To begin with, we, human beings, have the ability to judge what is beautiful. The judgement is an aesthetic one because it refers solely to one's feeling of pleasure. In the judgement, what matters is the presentation to the subject (one's 'feeling of life', or 'the feeling of pleasure'), instead of the presentation of the object's existence. Therefore, the judgement of the beautiful is *devoid of any interest*. Kant makes the point by contrasting the 'pure disinterested liking' with the 'liking connected with interest'. A liking could be connected with interest when we like the object either because it is agreeable in sensation, or because it is good for some purpose. Both of the two likings are associated with the object's existence. By contrast, the liking of the beautiful is merely in 'contemplation', which is 'indifferent to the existence of the object'. This ability is called taste; and hence we have the first moment of the judgement of taste, disinterestedness. (Kant, 1987, §§ 1-5) Kant's inference to the second moment, the universality, is direct. If the subject 'is conscious' that the liking is devoid of any interest, one must realize that the liking is not dependent on any private conditions. Then the subject shall believe that it is justified to demand a similar liking from everyone else, even though the liking is a subjective feeling. Thus, the judgement of taste involves the subjective universality. (Kant, 1987, §§ 6-8) As for the third moment, Kant claims that the judgement of taste is based on the form of *purposiveness* of the object *without a purpose*. To define these two concepts, 'a purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause', and the

purposiveness is ‘the causality that a concept has with regard to its object’. In thinking of a purpose, we think of the object in its presentation and hence the causality; and what we call pleasure is our ‘consciousness of a presentation’s causality’. Further, there are some ‘objects, states of mind, or acts’ that do not presuppose the presentation of a purpose (or, of a causality); however, we still ‘assume that they are based on a causality’ because we can ‘explain and grasp’ them only in this way. In the case of the judgement of taste, since it is devoid of any interest, it cannot be based on a purpose. Therefore, the liking can only be ‘the mere form of purposiveness’ in the presentation of the object. (Kant, 1987, §§ 10-11) The forth moment is related to the second one. The judgement of taste has a kind of *necessity* in the sense that when one demands other to assent, one also holds that they *ought* to do so. Kant’s argument for this necessity is as follows. The judgement of taste has the necessity because we presuppose that there is a common sense; we *can* and *must* presuppose a common sense because our cognition, our mental state (i.e., the attunement of imagination and understanding), and our feeling of such attunement, are universally communicable. (Kant, 1987, §§ 18-22) To summarize, the aesthetic judgement of taste is independent of the object’s existence and free from the subject’s private conditions; therefore, it involves a claim for universal assent; the pleasure we experience from it is due to a form of purposiveness without reference to a real purpose; and the universal liking is necessary because of a common sense, which is presupposed on the basis of the communicability of our cognition and feeling.

In Wolfe (2006) has noticed, Kant’s aesthetic theory has paved the way for Rancière’s identification of politics with aesthetics. In Rancière’s view, Kant’s aesthetics implies a significance of emancipation. It is an aesthetic one in the sense of causing a rupture in the order that has been defined by the distribution of the sensible. The aesthetic emancipation is based on the aesthetic experience, which is disinterested, universal, without a purpose, and necessary; and in the aesthetic experience, one can be led to the experience of what has been concealed and invisible, that is, the equality. Rancière’s emancipatory reading of Kant starts from the conception of the disinterestedness. Rancière refers to two correlated examples. The first is made by Kant. In § 2 of the third *Critique*, Kant mentions that in order to appreciate the form of a palace, one must ignore the factors of interest, such as the vanity of the great persons who own the palace, and the sweat of the working people who build it. (Rancière, 2006a, p. 2) The second is from Rancière’s own study on the 1830s workers. In *Proletarian Nights*, he refers to the text of a floor-layer, Gabriel Gauny, which describes a moment during his day working. ‘Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room so long as he has not finished

laying the floor. If the window opens out on a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms a moment and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the possessors of the neighbouring residences.’ (Gauny, 2017, p. 61; qtd. in Rancière, 2012a) And Rancière regards it as an exemplification of the Kantian disinterested gaze. For Rancière, the disinterestedness is equivalent to a kind of intentional ignorance, which displaces the subject from the binding conditions, and creates a heterogeneous space of free perception. In order to see the emancipatory significance of this ignorance, we should at first recognize what has made the oppression.

The (aesthetic) oppression has been implied through the distribution of the sensible, which is, simply speaking, about what is presented as given to the *sense*. The perception of the given, which makes our experience of the world, involves two faculties of human mind, corresponding to two different meanings of the word ‘sense’ (*aisthesis*). On the one hand, it is the sense, as the mere perception or sensation, that present the given to the mind; and on the other hand, it is the sense as the understanding that makes sense of the given. (Rancière, 2009b, p. 1) These two faculties represents two ways to experience and perceive the world. The first is that the understanding dominates the sensation, which is ‘the order of knowledge’; for example, when a palace is seen as the work by an architect, built for the purpose as a building. The second is that the sensation dominates the understanding, which is ‘the law of desire’; for example, when the palace is seen as the symbol of the owner’s nobility, or the object of others’ jealousy. (Rancière, 2009b, pp. 1-2) These two ways of perception are both ‘interested’ because they are dependent on the existence of the object, instead of the presentation of its mere form. In the latter case, the perception is subjected to the personal and social conditions of property, in other words, owning or not owning, wealth or poverty, etc.; and in the former case, the perception is subjected to the professional or technical knowledge. However, the two faculties are not equal. The order of knowledge defines such a hierarchical relation between the two faculties that the passive sensation is always subordinated to the active understanding. Our perception of the world makes sense only when we know something of it; the mere perception has no meaning. Here the knowledge (*savoir*) does not only refer to a way of seeing the world from a technical perspective, like the rational cognition of an object’s material components, construction, suitability to its purpose, etc.; but it also refers to, in the Platonic sense, a professional way of seeing it following an order of distribution. For example, when a worker is supposed to know how to build a palace, the worker is at the same time supposed to know the palace only with regard to the relevant technique, and ignore the other perspectives of seeing it, such as the

appreciation of its beauty. In this case, the knowledge defines the mode of distribution, and the ignorance excludes the other possibilities. This is why Rancière has to propose an alternative interpretation of knowledge and ignorance as the complement to a too simple scheme that 'knowing is liberating'. (Rancière, 2006a, p. 3) There is the kind of ignorance oppressing and knowledge liberating: the oppression works if the subject is ignorant of one's condition of being, and the liberation is possible when one starts to know. But there is also the kind of knowledge oppressing and ignorance liberating. The knowledge, as a way of experiencing the world, could be oppressive, as the system of distribution replaces the rational, technical knowledge with the distributive, professional knowledge. In this situation, a kind of ignorance is closer to the idea of liberation and emancipation.

To be disinterested is to ignore (and thus be free from) the conditions that restrict the perception. Kant's claim of disinterestedness proposes a specific way of seeing the world, i.e., an aesthetic perspective. Taking an aesthetic perspective means two things. Firstly, the disinterested gaze takes the object as neither an object of knowledge, nor an object of desire. (Rancière, 2009b, p. 2) When one truly appreciates the beauty of a palace, one must have ignored the fact that it belongs to someone as a property, and thus avoid either the pride of owning it or the self-pity and jealousy of not owning it. One must also have forgotten one's obligation to build it or the labour dedicated, so that the palace is not perceived as the embodiment of a social relation. In other words, what matters in the aesthetic perception of the palace is not how we sense or make sense of it, but its beauty and our pure experience with regard to it. The disinterestedness requires a mentality that is indifferent to either of the tendencies. The mentality is a coordination of the two faculties, understanding and desire, or in Schiller's terms, the sensuous impulse and the formal impulse. According to Schiller, both of the impulses are from the nature of human. The sensuous impulse aims at alteration while the formal impulse aims at persistence; the former excludes spontaneity while the latter excludes dependence. They 'compel the mind' and therefore need restriction. Therefore, a new impulse, the play impulse, would appear. (Schiller, 2004, XII-XIV) The two impulses are combined and harmonized in the play impulse for the sake of the complete humanity. Thus, it sets the subject free from the compulsion of either impulse. This is the first mode of the aesthetic perspective, the coordination emerging from the formula of 'neither/nor'.

Secondly, the disinterested gaze creates 'a specific sensorium', a specific time and space of aesthetics. (Rancière, 2005, p. 14) When the floor-layer enjoys the room and the view through

the window, he does so ‘as if’ he is at his own home. It by no means involves any desire or fantasy of owning that room; on the contrary, it is based on the imagination that is only about the presentation of the beautiful environment in his mind. It is a specific moment when the daywork no longer bothers him; and it is a specific space where only the object of the beautiful is presented. At this moment, the experience of the world is purely aesthetic, devoid of any knowledge or desire. All the private or social conditions that have defined a hierarchy are now suspended and invalidated. The disinterested gaze preserves such a world of ‘aesthetic appearance’ that is indifferent to the real world; or in Schiller’s words, that ‘neither seeks to take the place of reality nor needs to have its place taken by reality’. (Schiller, 2004, XXVI)

The aesthetic experience based on a disinterested gaze thus makes possible the autonomy of aesthetics. The autonomy is relative to what Rancière calls an ethical regime of art. In this regime, works of art have no autonomy. They are viewed from an ethical perspective with regard to their origin and their purpose: what truth content they bear, what effects or significance they have on individuals and the community, etc. (Rancière, 2013, p. 16) In the ethical regime, the experience of works of art always leads to a higher purpose, which is related to the ethos, or the soul of a person or a city. Therefore, a dividing line is drawn. A work of art is either the image of some divine purpose (for example, knowledge or morality), or merely ‘an imitation of a phantasm’. (Plato, *Republic*, 598b) However, Rancière, with reference to Schiller, finds a special case that eludes the ethical perspective to see the art. It is a Greek statue of the Juno Ludovisi. The goddess is an idle one, distant ‘from any care or duty, from any purpose or volition’. (Rancière, 2002, p. 135) In the contemplation of the statue, it is ‘neither charm, nor is it dignity, that speaks to us ... because it is both at once. ... The whole form reposes and dwells within itself, a completely closed creation ...’. (Schiller, 2004, XXV) The idleness, or the distance from any duty, makes an aesthetic moment in the ethical regime. On the one hand, the statue of the Juno Ludovisi cannot be identified as an art with reference to any aim or purpose; therefore, it *is not* a work of art. On the other hand, it *is* a work of art, an art of the beautiful, because it brings up the aesthetic perspective with regard to its pure beauty, its ‘dwelling within itself’ as a ‘completed closed creation’. We can see the profound relation between the statue’s ‘is/is not’ and Kant’s third moment of the beauty, purposiveness without a purpose. In the ethical regime where art is perceived with a purpose, the statue of the idle goddess cannot be grasped. It falls out of the division between the ‘good’ art and the vulgar imitation. It imitates neither truth nor phantasm. It must have some purpose but there is nothing to be its purpose except the pure beauty, for it is a closed creation and refers to nothing else.

Therefore, we find only such purposiveness that its causality resides with itself, without a purpose. The experience of the purposiveness without a purpose makes it possible to find an aesthetic perspective even in the ethical regime of art, by which art gains its autonomy.

The autonomy of aesthetics is also relative to a representative or poetic regime of arts, which implies a hierarchical perspective. The representative regime gets rid of the definition of art with reference to some extrinsic purpose; instead, it defines arts with some intrinsic principle, that is, the principle of representation. The representative principle defines, or ‘isolates’ a specific ‘art’ (a specific way of doing and making), that is, imitation, from a more general domain of arts (in the general sense, as ways of doing and making). Works of art are identified as the products of imitating; and the products are called ‘imitations’. (Rancière, 2013, p. 16) By defining art in this way, the representative regime also defines a hierarchy. The hierarchy is not only of imitations regarding, as Rancière has mentioned, what is representable and what is not, the genres of the representation, the forms and the subject matter, the norms and criteria, etc. (Rancière, 2013, p. 17) But it also exists, more generally, regarding the ways of doing and making (and thus, poetic); for example, between imitation and mere production, intelligence and labour, knowledge and need, etc. This is how the hierarchy of imitation is reflected in the social space. According to the principle of representation, the different ways of doing and making are thus divided and evaluated; and so are the occupations and the people who engage in the activities. Therefore, the representative regime is in essence a distribution of human activities, of doing and making; and it is also a distribution of the sensible, because it at the same time determines how we perceive and make sense of such distribution, recognizing and assessing our activities according to the hierarchical order of representation. Therefore, the regime of representation, or of poetics, provides no aesthetic space. We may understand it as a reverse of Aristotle’s poetics, that the plot of a tragedy represents human’s action. (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a) On the contrary, it is that human activities must follow a logic of theatre. Each action has its proper time and place, and each person should play one’s proper part; because everything has been properly arranged and evaluated, and that makes a good order.

The aesthetic experience, then, eludes such order. It identifies art not based on any division or hierarchy, but on the specific mode of experience of the object. As De Pascale (2021a) has pointed out, the ‘aesthetic suspension of the supremacy of form over matter and of intelligence over sensibility introduced by Kant paves the way for the aesthetic revolution of sensitive existence’. (p. 128) The experience is not from either reason or sensation, but from the harmony

of them, in some way. It is a specific state of mind, which is free, and we call it aesthetic. It makes it possible to see an object free from a new perspective, which is neither by referring to some external purpose, nor by hierarchizing and classifying the sensible world, but by applying the aesthetic power of human mind, by applying a disinterested gaze. The aesthetic experience based on the Kantian disinterested gaze thus creates a 'heterotopia'. (Rancière, 2010, p. 20) It means a rupture, a specific point where not oppositions within human nature are neutralized, and the hierarchies accordingly defined are overthrown. Instead, it gives its own rule of perception and experience of the world (as demonstrated by Kant's four moments of the beautiful). This is the significance of aesthetics; and this is why Rancière says that aesthetics 'is the thought of the new disorder'. (Rancière, 2009d, p. 13) The significance is not only about individuals, but also about the society. As Schiller says, (aesthetic) taste 'brings harmony' in the individual as well as in the society. For an individual, 'the perception of the beautiful makes something whole' of human, because the sensuous nature and the rational nature 'must accord with it'; and for the society, 'the communication of the beautiful unites society, because it relates to what is common' to all. (Schiller, 2004, XXVII) This gives Rancière the idea of a generalization of Kant's aesthetic theory, that the *genius* is not the privilege of a genius, and the disinterested gaze is not the privilege of an aesthete; rather, it is a capacity that belongs to everyone.

Now we have seen that Rancière's project of aesthetic emancipation is built on distinguishing aesthetic experience as a specific way of perceiving and experiencing the world. This approach, however, encounters Bourdieu's social critique of the pure aesthetics. Bourdieu's *La Distinction* was published in 1979, when Rancière was writing *La Nuit des Proletaires*, which was then published in 1981. In Rancière's words, in that book, Bourdieu 'has consecrated six hundred pages to the demonstration of a single thesis: that the [aesthetic] ignorance is a deliberate misrecognition of [...] the fact that disinterested aesthetic judgement is the privilege of those alone who can abstract themselves'. (Rancière, 2006a, p. 2) In other words, the Kantian free taste is actually 'the consecration of bourgeois taste', while the 'working people can only have a taste born of necessity'. (Rancière and Engelmann, 2019, p. 31) Rancière's reading of Bourdieu in this way stimulates his critique of the sociology and the complementation of his own theory. Before delving deeper into Rancière's theory of aesthetic emancipation, it is necessary to take a review of Bourdieu's critique, especially with regard to their differences and, if possible, similarities.

2. Bourdieu's sociological challenge

In Rancière's reading of Kant's aesthetics, he refers to the disinterestedness for the detachment from the experience that has been determined by the social conditions; and implicitly, refers to the purposiveness without a purpose for the possibility of elusion from any dividing or hierarchical perspectives. In cooperation with Schiller's development of Kant, Rancière validates the universality of the aesthetic experience as 'common to all'. However, one thing seems to be evaded, intentionally or not, that is, Kant's claim of necessity as the fourth moment of the beautiful, which is closely related to the proposition of the common sense. For Kant, the necessity of the liking of something beautiful is not a mere footnote of the universality. When one says that 'everyone *ought* to like the beautiful object as I do', it is not merely paraphrasing that 'I *demand* everyone's liking'; rather, it is saying that this demand has some kind of ground so that it is necessary. In other words, it is not only an expectation of others' assent, but rather a norm that is exemplified by one's own liking and applied to all. This is where Rancière seems to have little regard; and this is where Bourdieu builds his social critique of the Kantian pure aesthetics.

We can find a start from Bourdieu's conception of the taste for works of art. For Bourdieu, a work of art is encoded with some meaning; and it requires the relevant cultural competence to perceive or decode, for example, to recognize the styles of a period, a school, or an author, or to be familiar with 'the internal logic of works'. Someone who has no such competence sees only the 'sensible properties' of a work, such as the sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, etc., which make the 'primary stratum' based on the ordinary experience; and one cannot see what is signified by the work, which makes the 'secondary stratum of meanings'. Therefore, as Bourdieu says, 'the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*)'. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 2-3) The perception of a work of art involves cognition, that is, the decoding process, which requires the possession of specific artistic or cultural competence. (Bourdieu, 1968, pp. 589-590) Thus, the taste for work of art is by no means of necessity. On the contrary, it is contingent as the social conditions that have determined the possession of such competence. At the same time, works of art define a specific way of perception, that is, the artistic way. Bourdieu calls it 'the aesthetic disposition'. A work of art as a work of art, encoded with the artistic meaning (for the specific cultural competence) and validated in the 'artworld', imposes 'norms of its own perception' and defines it 'as the only legitimate mode of perception'. Taking the example of Post-Impressionist paintings, they assert '*the absolute primacy of form over*

function, the mode of representation over the object represented'. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 28-30) These norms profoundly relate to, on the one hand, the pure artistic intention of the artists during their production, and on the other hand, the pure gaze of the spectators during their appreciation.

For Bourdieu, the pure gaze is an invention. (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 203) It is invented by means of a distance, a distance that the pure gaze keeps from the ordinary attitude towards the world. As Ortega y Gasset says, the ordinary attitude refers to 'the passions, emotions and feelings which "ordinary" people invest in their "ordinary" lives'; however, the modern art systematically refuses all of these. It refuses 'all that is "human"', and also the continuity between art and life. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 4) The invention of the pure gaze thus makes the distinction between two tastes, the pure one and the popular one; respectively, each defines an aesthetics, which is at the same time an ethos. The popular aesthetics (or ethos) means a 'systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life'; and by contrast, the pure aesthetics (or ethos) means the 'elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world'. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 5) To be specific, the popular taste takes a work of art as if it is a thing of life. It expects the art to perform a function or fulfil a purpose. For example, when viewing a painting, one tends to ask what the painting intends to mean (in the sense of representation) or what use it has. By contrast, the pure taste holds the principle of art *qua* art. It regards art as an object of a specific sphere, which cannot be mixed with an ordinary thing. It requires a specific mode of perception, a specific attitude that is not applied in the daily life. In other words, art is autonomous and distinct from ordinary life.

This distinction, then, transforms into a kind of excellence. The excellence, in the first instance, is in terms of understanding. Art requires a pure taste and it is not for everyone. Instead, it is a privilege of those who possess the qualified competence. Bourdieu refers to Ortega y Gasset again. It draws a distinction within human beings: there are those who understand, and there are those who do not; the former are regarded as possessing the 'organ of understanding' and the latter are denied such organ. Therefore, art plays another role, a social role to distinguish the 'best' from the 'common people', and helps them 'to know and recognize one another in the greyness of the multitude', so that they can 'be few in number' and 'fight against the multitude'. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 31) In this way, the excellence is deposited as an essence of being. As Bourdieu says, aristocracies 'are essentialist'. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 24) They take their superiority in taste, manner, and life as a result of their excellence in essence, rather than a

result of their possession and the systematic reproduction of economic and cultural capitals. The essentialism makes them believe and recognize their excellence, and at the same time requires them to live their lives in the way that accords with it. Therefore, taste is not only the (aesthetic) sense of appreciation, but also the (social) sense of differentiation or distinction. It does not only guide the 'best' to the recognition of their excellence through their understanding, but also places the common people into their inferiority in the name of their not understanding.

Therefore, Bourdieu regards Kant's aesthetics as a guarantee of such distinction and as a repression of the popular. Firstly, the disinterestedness is a disconnection or distance from the ordinary experience. As Kant defines the beautiful in contrast to the agreeable, the 'pure' taste is defined in a refusal of the 'facile' or easy taste. Any pleasure or enjoyment that one can gain in the ordinary way is denounced as crude or vulgar. In opposition, it is the pure taste that is 'difficile' or demanding, which requires the acquisition of the cultural competence. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 486) The Kantian conception of disinterestedness is thus no more than a refusal of the former so that it keeps the taste 'pure'. Secondly, the disinterestedness imposes a repression. The conception defines taste in the singular, which means, there is only one legitimate taste, that is the pure taste. It reserves the word only for the 'pure' experience that is free from any practical necessity, and thus denied the popular taste. What is denied at the same time is the social relation. The pure taste requires cultivation, and thus belongs to the elite; while the popular taste is easy and vulgar, and belongs to the masses. By starting the analysis of taste from the conception of disinterestedness, the Kantian aesthetics is in effect based on 'the universalization of the dispositions associated with a particular social and economic condition', based on which the philosophers indulge in 'their illusion of universality'. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 493) Besides, through the function of the habitus, the cultivated, acquired taste is mistaken as natural, and the social distinction is also mistaken as natural. (Loesberg, 1993, p. 1040) In this sense, the universality of aesthetic judgement, which is directly inferred from the conception of disinterestedness, takes the exclusive sense.

Bourdieu's critique of the Kantian aesthetics is in opposition to Rancière's reading. For the former, the experience of disinterestedness belongs to the elite, and creates the experience of distinction. For the latter, it implies an emancipatory and egalitarian experience. To be specific, 'reaching an aesthetic attitude is the basis for the possibility of social upheaval, as it marks the beginning of the emergence from the sensual situation in which the people are imprisoned'. (Rancière and Engelmann, 2019, p. 32) This is the standpoint of Rancière's critique. Firstly,

Bourdieu's sociology is a 'demystification' of Plato's political myth. It reaches the same conclusion and in effect only replaces 'the philosopher king' with 'the sociologist king'. Plato tells two myths in his *Republic*. The first is the myth of the three metals, which is 'a noble lie' to justify the hierarchical order and the division of labour. (Plato, *Republic*, 414b-415d) The second is the myth of the free choice of the souls, which is supposed to be the 'truth' that souls have the freedom to choose among different lives, and the only thing to know is to distinguish the good form of life. (Plato, *Republic*, 617d-619b) However, the sociologist tells the opposite. According to the sociologist, on the one hand, , the noble lie actually tells the truth. The society in fact functions by assigning each person to one's own place, and defines the distinction. People share different, if not antagonistic, tastes and modes of experience of the world. The distinction is thus made to ensure that the well-ordered hierarchy is not disrupted. On the other hand, as a result, the truth of the free choice is a lie. Any claim of universality is an invention, or illusion, that serves only the purpose of exclusion. The common people are incapable to acquire the same taste as the elite; and they can never understand the common language or do the same as the latter. Obviously, by retelling the Platonic myths as sociological truths, the sociologist's demystification actually reaches the same conclusion of domination and exclusion. Therefore, in Rancière's words, the sociology is in effect 'the confirmation, indeed the radicalization' of the Platonic politics. (Rancière, 2004a, pp. 178, 204)

A few lines should be added in terms of the critique based on interpreting Plato's myths. Pollaert (2024) has shown an alternative use of Plato's myth by Rancière. For example, by referring to the myth of Teuth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Rancière argues that the invention of writing has the emancipatory power by upsetting 'the relations between the order of speech and that of social occupations'. (p. 11) For Plato, it is a bad thing that writing (or written speech) makes it possible for everyone to speak. However, for Rancière, Plato's critique of writing exactly points out its power to reconfigure the order of speech. Therefore, in general, the reading of Platonic myths could be ambiguous, either repressive or emancipatory; and Rancière's critique is about Bourdieu's sociology since it echoes the repressive reading of Plato's myths.

Secondly, with regard to the domination and the exclusion, Bourdieu's sociology establishes a tautology. The sociologist's propositions form a 'perfect circle': on the one hand, those who are excluded are excluded because they are not aware of the true reasons for their exclusion; on the other hand, their ignorance of the true reasons for their exclusion is a structural effect of the system that excludes them. (Rancière, 2012d, p. 161) The key of this circle is the

misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), which means the ignorance, or the lack of understanding of the exclusive logic. The system works well because of the misrecognition of the dominated; at the same time, it is producing the misrecognition. One may say that Bourdieu's sociology intends to provide a theory (or, *theoria*) to recognize this system; however, his theory, or his viewpoint, falls into the circle and becomes part of it in the end. It succeeds not only in recognizing it, but also confirming, from a scientific perspective, such logic of exclusion. Although he intends for the 'return of the repressed', the repressed, or the 'popular' taste, the 'ordinary' way of perceiving the world by the common people, is only recognized within the structure of distinction, where it is now more radically excluded from the other side. In other words, Bourdieu, in effect, unintentionally proposes a 'science' of exclusion. In order to denounce the system of exclusion, he denounces the validity of universality and thus eliminates all the other possibilities, including that of a common ground that could be derived from it. The repressed is saved from the misrecognition; however, unfortunately, it is again repressed in the distinction.

Thirdly, Bourdieu's sociological critique ignores the possibility of emancipation that has been historically connected to Kant's aesthetics. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that Kant's aesthetics is 'ahistorical', because it is based on only the 'experience of a *homo aestheticus*', that is, 'the subject of aesthetic discourse constituted as the universal subject of aesthetic experience'. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 493) Rancière points to the opposite that Kant's aesthetics has its historical context and Bourdieu's critique is itself ahistorical for its ignorance of that context. The time when Kant's *Critique of Judgement* was published has its significance, which is one year after the beginning of the French Revolution. Therefore, instead of defining a bourgeois distance between the pure and vulgar tastes, the Kantian aesthetics, especially about the universality of the judgement of the beautiful, is to find 'the perceptible equality' and 'the humanity' that could be 'the joint surpassing of the culture of the dominant and the culture of Rousseauist nature'. (Rancière, 2004a, pp. 197-198) And what follows, the proposition of the communicability of the mental state that implies a common sense, then is not an illusion, but a common ground based on which the problem of exclusion may find a solution. It refuses not only the distinction or division that has been drawn either by the hierarchical system or by the scientific cognition, but also the structural misrecognition that happens on the sensible basis and causes the troublesome circle of sociology. It then implies a true return of the repressed, in the sense that the repression is itself a lie.

Besides, one might have noticed another crucial difference between their standpoints at the beginning. When Rancière is to develop his reading of the Kantian disinterested gaze, he takes as example one's experience of appreciating a palace or the view through a window. However, when Bourdieu is to propose his critique, he has in the mind the paintings and more generally works of modern art that have been placed in an artistic tradition. The former refers to, if not all natural, at least the aesthetic objects that exist in the ordinary life. These are by no means things of which the appreciation requires some cultural competence. With regard to these objects, the aesthetic experience is in the position much closer to the ordinary experience, even a moment within the ordinary life; instead of, like the artistic experience, being apart from the ordinary life. When Rancière proposing the aesthetic regime as the third regime of art, it takes 'the material and situations of everyday life' as the 'grounds for aesthetic contemplation'. (Tanke, 2010, p. 10) Therefore, the 'disinterestedness' has different meanings for Rancière and Bourdieu. What is problematic in Bourdieu's reading is that for him, the disinterested gaze involves a process of cognition. By 'recognizing' the 'misrecognized' fact that 'to see is to know', he adds what is not aesthetic, especially in the Kantian sense, into the study of the aesthetic experience, that is, the artistic and cultural knowledge. This is also reflected in the questionnaire that supports his analysis. The questionnaire contains a series of questions asking about names of singers, films, and classic music. As an investigation on the taste, there is no 'taste' or aesthetic experience happening during the process, but only a test of knowledge. By doing so, the sociologist replaces what he calls the pure aesthetics with the cultivated taste. The latter, instead of the former, is set as the true target of his critique, and is what is truly vulnerable to his critique. As Meyer (2002) has noticed, for Bourdieu, 'the beauty is not the aesthetic'. (p. 264) By doing this replacement, the sociological critique is only to verify its own presupposition, that is, there exists a division of taste, which is also a division of understanding and knowledge that is socially formed. It concludes that the common people have no taste about the pure aesthetic objects based on the evidence that they do not understand the questions about these objects. However, the questions are composed primarily under the presupposition that there is a division of taste based on a division of knowledge. The fact is the reverse: they do not understand the questions, and they do not share the knowledge, because they have not been exposed to the relevant aesthetic experience.

There are also other perspectives to read the differences between Rancière and Bourdieu. For example, Pelletier (2009b) regards Rancière's work as 'anti-social science'. On the one hand, social science 'defines its object of study in terms of ... its position in the social order', while

the social order itself is unequal; and on the other hand, Rancière's work is based on 'the equality of speaking beings', which means 'undoing' the unequal basis on which the social science discourses 'legitimates themselves'. (p. 268) Reading Rancière's work as anti-social science or anti-sociology is usually based on regarding the opposition between sociology and politics as parallel to the opposition between Rancière's conceptions of police and politics. As Toscano (2011) argues, as part of his critique of Rancière, this anti-sociology 'risks producing a sterile and moralistic dualism'. (p. 228) The moralistic dualism of politics asserts that there is a good thing (the politics) and there is a bad thing (the police) with regard to political matters. It is therefore a 'strong form of ideology'. (Jameson, 2009, p. 198) However, Rancière's critique of sociology is not in such a simple structure, or, as Pelletier (2009a) says, in terms of merely the 'performative effect' of Bourdieu's sociology rather than its 'methodological validity'. As we have seen, Rancière's critique is at least based on both. Besides, I will show that the methodology is one of the crucial factors that causes the divergence between them. Before that, let us focus on their arguments in terms of the Kantian disinterested gaze.

Overall, the debate between Rancière and Bourdieu then could be summarized as follows. For Bourdieu, the Kantian disinterested gaze is an illusion that is invented by means of universalizing the aesthetic experience of the aesthetes, and such universalization represses the aesthetic experience of those who are the subjects of the popular. The misrecognition of the illusion should be corrected, and the popular experience should be recognized in the distinction. On the other hand, for Rancière, the distinction between the pure and the popular tastes is another form of repression, which reinforces the order of distribution that each takes one's own place. The Kantian disinterested gaze, on the contrary, creates a moment of ignorance of such distribution, and displaces or frees the subjects from their conditions of being. Thus, it implies a logic of emancipation. Besides, as De Pascale (2021b) has pointed out, the sociological system of explanation is 'a logic of brutalization that divides humanity and intelligence into inferior and superior', and it must be overturned in order for the emancipation to be possible. (p. 76)

Despite of the confrontation between their theories, we may still find some similarities. For example, when Bourdieu proposes distinction as the structure of the society, in which the experiences and the practices of the subjects are to some extent determined by their social and economic conditions, it could be taken as another version of what Rancière intends to indicate with the concept of the distribution of the sensible. Further, the division, or the exclusion, is

made by means of some operation. Rancière finds in Aristotle's politics that it is the *logos* that distinguishes human from animals, which further becomes the symbol that distinguishes citizens from slaves, the noble from the common. And Bourdieu, through his investigation on the development of modern art, reaches a similar conclusion that the art, as a symbol of moral excellence, marks the distinction between humanity and animality, culture and nature, the pure and the barbarous, etc. On these aspects, we could say that they share some very similar critical perspectives with regard to the social and political problems such as domination, repression, and exclusion.

Besides, Sonderegger (2012) regards Bourdieu's and Rancière's approaches of critique as 'complementary'. There are some 'common grounds' between their critique. For example, they both use theories of critique 'as a tool and as a weapon' to reveal the 'structures of dominance and violence' that have been concealed in human life; and they both attempt to 'establish fixed criteria of critique', i.e. equality and recognition. (pp. 257-258) Based on these common grounds, their theories have different focuses. Bourdieu's theory suggests the 'difficulty ... of an effective critique' of domination; while Rancière's theory emphasizes the 'possibility of successful critique and resistance'. (p. 248) Therefore, Bourdieu's critique is described as 'negative' and Rancière's critique as 'affirmative'.

Then, we shall ask: what is it that leads them into such confrontation? The first difference is on the methodology. Bourdieu does sociology as a science, which requires the theorist to take the objects as scientific objects and to find out what we can know about the mechanism behind their existence. His social critique is based on this pattern of sociological observation. However, Rancière 'refuses to link the political theory to the results' of sociology. (Deranty, 2003a, p. 152) By contrast, Rancière bases his critique on what he has learned from the 1830s proletarians' practices of self-emancipation. We may describe his method as anthropological or historical, and then philosophical; but the primary method, as he says, is the 'method of equality'. For Rancière, a method is 'not the path that a thinker follows', but the path that one 'constructs'. (Rancière, 2009c, p. 114) This leads to the second difference, which is about their focuses on the social and political problem. Bourdieu's sociology, as a science, is to 'recognize' what has been unrecognized or misrecognized. The aim of its critique is recognition, or consciousness. However, Rancière's critique, by constructing its own path, aims at figuring out what we can do given all the problems that have been given. And he is unwilling to 'accept the extent to which Bourdieu attempted to practise science in action'. (Robbins, 2015, p. 756) It explains

their divergence on the attitude towards the ignorance or the distance implied by the Kantian disinterestedness. For Bourdieu, it must be recognized as the illusion so that one can know the ‘truth’ of the social distinction; however, for Rancière, it is the basis on which one can ignore and distance oneself from one’s social condition. And this method, or this path that Rancière constructs as ‘it must be so’, is equality.

3. *Equality as the presupposed principle*

Equality is one of the key concepts for us to understand Rancière. In *Disagreement*, Rancière asserts that equality is the only principle of politics. (Rancière, 1995, p. 54) The assertion is radical, but justifiable from his perspective. Firstly, politics is primarily concerned with equality. The politics, in Rancière’s sense, refers not to the activity of political matters, rather the activity antagonistic to the police, as the rupture of any hierarchical order and the displacement of a subject from one’s condition of being that has been defined by the order. The politics is defined in contrast to the police. In other words, it exists in a heterogeneous logic; it happens only in its confrontation with the hierarchical order that defines a distribution of places. Therefore, if politics has any concern, it is primarily about the inequality that exists in a police order, and the equality as its opposite. Secondly, equality is a principle that is presupposed. Rancière proposes equality as a ‘principle’ not by taking it as something given, an essence or a goal of political activities. Instead, it is a ‘presupposition that must be discerned in the practices that implement it’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 57) In other words, equality is not a principle that guides the actions, (see Myers, 2016, p. 46) rather the principle that must be presupposed in the first instance and verified in practice.

Rancière takes equality as a path that is constructed and a principle that is presupposed. However, we shall find the ‘possible’ in the ‘impossible’. (See Dillon, 2005, p. 433) In order to start such a path or to presuppose such a principle, there must be some clues of equality in the logic of inequality, so that one is able to discern the possibility of the politics in the police. To start with, according to Rancière, the justification of inequality implies a recognition of equality. In the story of the Aventine plebeians, when Menenius was to convince the plebeians of their inferiority, of the inequality between them and the patricians, he must have supposed that they had the capacity to understand the fable, which means, the same *logos*, not only as the capacity for speech, but also for reason. When the plebeians understood the inequality, they were already equals. (Rancière, 1995, p. 47) Therefore, it is the equality that has been the basis

of the inequality. This expression needs to be clarified to avoid a misunderstanding. Equality is not a basis that produces inequality; it is neither a basis that supports inequality. Instead, it means that for the functioning of inequality, there must be a relation of equality implied. (Rancière, 2016c, p. 112)

The principle of equality emerges from the practices. It shall be noticed that the implication of equality is not just there waiting to be discovered. Before that, it is the practice of the plebeians that establishes a stage for the dispute between the ‘unequals’, and makes it necessary for the patricians to justify the inequality. At that moment, one may start the deduction that the function of inequality always implies a relation of equality. What did the plebeians do? They refused to bear their being as plebeians in the city without the power to speak; they retreated to the Aventine Hill, where ‘they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of them to go and consult their oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 47) Simply speaking, they, regarded as beings without speech and reason, start to do what they have been supposed not to do, the practice of *logos*. We cannot fail to recognize the connection between the Aventine plebeians and the 1830s proletarians in Rancière’s theoretical framework. For the proletarians, in Rancière’s words, being a worker means to ‘sell one’s labour every day, make a living, sleep at night, rest and then start again the next day’. (Rancière and Engelmann, 2019, p. 30) However, some of workers in the 1830s chose to refuse this pattern. They devoted themselves to a series of activities that, we could say, consisted of their self-emancipation. They did what they were supposed not to do: reading philosophy, writing poems or letters about their own life, etc. In the cycle of days and nights, production and reproduction, the equality has been something impossible given their conditions of being; however, ‘the question was not to demand the impossible, but to realize it themselves, to take back the time that was refused them’. (Rancière, 2012b) The practice carried out by the 1830s workers gives us a more ‘pure’ view. They are not in some way to fight for the recognition of the equality; in their self-emancipation, there is no such thing as ‘the other part’. They read, write, and discuss, only because they can, and even, they must do that. It is a part of their life. There is no good reason to exclude these activities from their life; and there is no good reason to exclude them from these activities by defining their being as workers. Therefore, the equality, for them, is not a claim, not a goal; rather, it is the simple fact. If we could discern anything from it, it would be the principle of equality that can and must be presupposed, even, and especially, in the given order of distribution.

When the workers (as beings of hand) start to engage in the other activities (viz., things of head), it manifests the equality of intelligence. This is what Rancière further develops in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. This book starts from an ‘intellectual adventure’ of a lecturer in French literature, Joseph Jacotot, in the 1810s Louvain, where he was going to teach some local students. However, the language became a problem: many of the students did not speak French, and Jacotot did not speak Flemish. Then he found a bilingual edition of *Télémaque*, and asked the students to learn the French text with the translation. The result was surprising: the students managed to understand the text and write their thinking in French. Then, he was inspired to teach what he himself did not know, such as painting and the piano. (Rancière, 1991, pp. 1-2, 14-15) The pedagogic experiment challenged the old belief about what a master was to do. The belief was held that the master was to ‘explicate’, to transmit the knowledge to the students, by ‘the reasoned appropriation of knowledge and the formation of judgment and taste’, so that ‘a student was thus elevated to as high a level as his social destination demanded’. (Rancière, 1991, p. 3) However, the logic of explication implies a problem. As Rancière says, ‘[to] explain something to someone is first of all to show him he cannot understand it by himself’. It is ‘the myth of pedagogy’ that divides the world into the ‘knowing minds’ and the ‘ignorant ones’, and intelligence into ‘an inferior intelligence and an superior one’. (Rancière, 1991, pp. 6-7) Therefore, instead of eliminating the incapacity for understanding, explication is in fact creating it. (Ross, 1991, p. 67)

In opposition to the myth of pedagogy, we find in Jacotot’s teaching experiment what we may call a ‘miracle’: that people can learn what they do not know. *Prima facie*, this statement seems too plain, or even meaningless. Of course one learns what one does not know; that is why one learns. However, the plainness implies a supposition, that is, one learns from someone else; otherwise, one can learn nothing. It is therefore a circle that verifies the inequality of intelligence. Those who are inferior in intelligence learn from those who are superior, because they can *understand* only when others *make* them *understand*. Otherwise, understanding is impossible because they are inferior in intelligence. At this point, we see the double meaning of ‘make-understand’: on the one hand, it refers to the unknown knowledge that is to be understood, which follows the logic of teaching or explication; on the other hand, it refers to the fact that they cannot understand, in other words, their inferiority in intelligence, that is to be understood. In the latter sense, it follows the logic of repression. Now, we see why the plain statement that ‘they learn (by themselves) what they do not know’ is a miracle; because it is unthinkable in the situation where divided or unequal intelligence is supposed. It begins at and

ends in an alternative point, the equality of intelligence. Instead of the incapacity of understanding, it is the capacity of understanding that is presupposed, and verified. It manages to tell us a new thing, that ‘there is no hierarchy of *intelligence capacity*’. (Rancière, 1991, p. 27) This is a pedagogical revolution. The pedagogy is conducted no longer by creating the incapacity or the hierarchy between the knowing and the ignorant, but by the opposite, relying on the capacity of those who do not know. It thus distinguishes an emancipator from an explicator. What the former does is the ‘empowerment’, which means not a ‘transmission of power’ or knowledge, but the ‘realization-actualization of a power’ that lies ‘within the agent himself’. (Citton, 2010, p. 30)

Thus, it reverses the question. The question is not why the equality of intelligence is thinkable; instead, it is how intelligence without equality is not possible. Rancière makes the following argument for the identification between intelligence and equality. Intelligence is neither the power to understand the knowledge (as what the ‘inferior’ intelligence is supposed to do); nor the power to make the ignorant understand (as what the ‘superior’ intelligence does). According to him, intelligence is ‘the power to make oneself understood through another’s verification’. In other words, people understand each other as equals. Therefore, the two concepts, intelligence and equality, ‘are synonymous terms’. (Rancière, 1991, pp. 72-73) It should be noticed that there is a change from ‘make others understand’ to ‘make oneself be understood’ in accounting for the intelligence. In the former case, there is an unequal hierarchy; but in the latter case, intelligence is possible only by supposing others as equals. The equality of intelligence, therefore, is the cornerstone of communication. In consequence, Rancière proposes that the equality of intelligence is ‘the common bond of humankind, the necessary and sufficient condition for a society of men to exist’. (Rancière, 1991, p. 73) To be simple, the sociability of human beings relies on the presupposition of equal intelligence.

At the same time, the question concerns taste. As Kant states that the judgement of taste has a kind of necessity, he finds its subjective principle as a common sense (*sensus communis*), which is the basis for the necessity that is common to all. The common sense, as the principle of the necessity, is a presupposition. And the basis for this presupposition is the ‘universal communicability of a feeling’; more specifically, the feeling of a specific state of mind, that is, the attunement of cognitive powers (i.e., imagination and understanding). (Kant, 1987, §§ 19-21) In the case of aesthetic judgement, Kant says, ‘the imagination is free when it arouses the understanding, and the understanding, without using concepts, puts the imagination into a play

that is regular'; and the attunement creates a feeling, instead of a thought, of the mental state that is universally communicable. This common sense, then, as a way of thinking, has its maxim, which is 'to think from the standpoint of everyone else'. It requires the subject to take a '*broadened way of thinking*', which means, to override the subjective conditions of one's judgement and to reflect on it from the universal standpoint. This is the maxim of judgement; and taste is exactly the 'ability to judge a priori the communicability of the feelings'. (Kant, 1987, § 40)

Therefore, aesthetic disagreement can never be reduced into a distinction between tastes; because taste, as the capacity of human mind to judge the universal communicability, has the only form as singular. With regard to the distinction, the tastes (pure or popular) of various works of art are merely an expression of preference. The expression is the same as 'make-understand', which is in effect an expression of exclusion. It involves not a judgement of feeling, but that of knowledge, knowledge that has been gained and reproduced in the structure of distinction. The 'judgement' is based on a state of mind that seeks not the communicability to and verification from others, but the distance, distance that could be abstracted as a sense of privilege. In order to validate this privilege, it ignores the most simple fact that the judgement of taste is what it is only when believed to be universally communicable to everyone else. It is a 'common sense' that the sense is common to all. Taste, then, represents another kind of intelligence, which must be presupposed to be equal to all. The presupposition of equality is more than a construction of universality; and it is more than a mere contingent performance. (See Love and May, 2008, p. 67; Hallward, 2009, p. 149) The reason is, using Kant's term, exemplary. If there has been a moment when a worker moves one's gaze from the hand to the view of the surroundings, or redirects one's mind from the work to the cultivation of perception and thought, then there is the basis for what we can and must presuppose, that is, the principle of equality. With this presupposition, we recognize its necessity: it has happened; and it is not by contingency.

Now, we can add the following clarification about the meaning of aesthetic disagreement. It does not deal with why people have or argue about different judgements; and it does not deal with what accounts for it, such as tastes in the plural. Instead, it deals with what follows: the denial of another's judgement, of the taste, and, through tracing the conditions of being which in any sense cause such taste, the refusal of the being itself. The aesthetic, alone, has such 'momentum' that drives one's judgement from the subjective to the universal, and, purely,

without any interest or purpose, to the test of the common sense, the communicability of the most basic human feelings, which concerns the possibility of human society. It goes on until we find ourselves at the point of divergence between the logics of exclusion and inclusion. It thus concerns the fundamental problem of politics, the way of human being-together. Then, we may say what Rancière says, disagreement is ‘not only an object’ of theorization, but also a ‘method’. (Rancière, 2011, p. 2) Behind the problem of aesthetic disagreement, it is always the confrontation of the duality: between the presuppositions of inequality and of equality that we may have unconsciously implied, the logics of police and of politics to which we submit our judgement and thus contribute. At the same time, aesthetic disagreement is the very point where these presuppositions and logics are put on the stage. In the light of the same moments that we attribute to the aesthetic judgement, of our conception of the common, they are there for our recognition, examination, reflection, and decision. In the end, what matters would be what seems far from the ‘aesthetic’: not seeing, but doing. Or, the practice. And for that, specifically, Rancière has coined a new term: subjectivation.

Chapter III

Subjectivation and Dissensus

With the universality and commonness that we attribute to the judgement of taste, aesthetic disagreement is the situation where these concepts are put into a test. These concepts related to an aesthetic judgement make the *a priori* supposition that the taste of the beautiful is a capacity that is equally common to all, and the judgement is subjectively universal. However, aesthetic disagreement, as a division with regard to the perception and experience of the world, poses the *a posteriori* challenge that these concepts have no valid foundation and are merely invented as such. This is the problem that aesthetic disagreement proposes; and the solution that is to save the 'virtue' of the taste is simply by re-affirming the presupposition of equality. As a 'presupposition', the principle of equality is the beginning of the political practice; and as a 'principle', the presupposition of equality is the ending of the discourse about aesthetic judgement of taste. It is the necessary condition to ground the universality and commonness of taste; and it is the sufficient condition to make the impossible possible. Taking a Rancièrian formula, the disagreement emerges from the wrong. In the situation of aesthetic disagreement, it is a wrong that taste is regarded as a capacity that is 'common to some' rather than 'common to all', that the subjective universality is functioning as a dividing line instead of a bridge of communicability. The manifestation of the wrong leads to the disagreement; and the consciousness of the disagreement creates the possibility of subjectivation, viz. the emergence of the new subjectivity that is not subjected to the distribution of the sensible, but emancipated from it. It creates the space of dissensus, in opposition to the space of consensus as defined by the distribution. This dissensus is then the heterogenous way to fix the wrong that has existed in a repressing system and is manifested by the discourse about aesthetic disagreement. The third chapter is developed as follows. Firstly, I present Rancière's conception of subjectivation in the context of political and aesthetic disagreement, and compare it to the conception of recognition. Secondly, I will discuss how the process of subjectivation creates a space of dissensus as a space of emancipation in contrast to consensus. Thirdly, common sense, for Rancière, is closer to dissensus rather than consensus, especially with regard to its role in aesthetic emancipation. Finally, I propose that the Rancièrian subjectivation creates new subjectivity within community, in the sense that the new subject is actually a community subject, which is both political and aesthetic.

1. *Subjectivation versus recognition*

Generally, subjectivation means the emergence of some new subjectivity. We could understand it from two aspects, political and aesthetic. In Rancière's writing, subjectivation refers more to the political aspect. It is closely related to his distinction between the two forms of politics, the police and the politics, each of which implies a mode of being of the subject. We may consider it from a Foucauldian doubleness of 'subject', as being at the same time the active subject and the subjected one. In the police logic, the being of the subject is 'negative'. According to the distribution of the sensible, a subject is allocated to a specific position, subjected to the visibility that is defined by it. In this sense, the subject exists with regard to a specific field of perception and experience. However, in the political logic, subjectivation means the visibility of the invisible, the count of the uncounted. Politics itself is 'a matter of subject, or rather of modes of subjectivation'; and subjectivation is 'the production by a series of acts of an instance and a capacity for enunciation'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 59)

We can take it as a definition of subjectivation, and there are several points worth of notice in the definition. Firstly, subjectivation refers to the production of a 'capacity for enunciation'. The police order is defined in terms of the possession of *logos*, about whose speech is counted as speech and whose speech is counted as mere noises. The definition of human beings as political beings in the sense that they are capable of *logos*, in the first instance, affirms a kind of universality. On the one hand, all human beings shall be recognized as political beings for the sake of their possession of *logos*. On the other hand, however, the universal attribution of *logos* serves as the standard that denies the capacity of the without-part. In the end, it is a denial of their political being. Politics, as the process antagonistic to the police, is then the restoration of the denied capacity, the 'return of the repressed'. Therefore, the principle of equality is in terms of the equal capacity, the most basic capacity of speech, of reason, which is the basis for a being to be recognized as political, or, in other words, of a community. Here the enunciation is not only about making a voice or saying a word (*parole*); rather, it is about whose speech (*parole*, or *logos*) is regarded as incorporating the reason (*logos*). It is an ironic situation. While the *logos* is regarded as the universal attribute of human beings, there is a part of them whose capacity of *logos* must be manifested before being recognized. As one says that all human beings are equal, and such equality has to be re-affirmed. Then, subjectivation is the manifestation that they have the same capacity, and thus, are equal beings.

Secondly, subjectivation happens as an ‘instance’. Although the politics is regarded the process antagonistic to the police, it does not mean that politics goes in parallel and has the same power in the formation of the subjectivity. The political subjectivation should be taken as an instance, or, a particular, eventual moment. The police order does not always guarantee the political emancipation. ‘Where there is repression, there is resistance’ is a slogan that appears only in the situation of its consequent, that is, when there is resistance, instead of its antecedent, the repression. At the same time, if there is a lesson we can learn from the biopolitics, it would be that the balance usually rests on the point where the repression is at its maximum and resistance at its minimum, which constitutes the most stable state. Therefore, we would probably find a very negative answer to the general question, ‘what is the situation of the political subject’, that is, the subjectivity as being subjected, regulated. However, Rancière’s conception of subjectivation shows that the stableness is not that solid. A rupture appears whenever one starts to realize the most basic fact, that all people should be equal. It is this simple consciousness of what a subject should be that marks the emergence of a new subjectivity. This is the moment when one realize that everyone has the capacity to ‘have a part’; this is the moment when one starts to regard oneself as equal, instead of the subjected according to something ‘naturally given’. What is truly ‘natural’ is nothing more than the universality of the capacity that makes one a human being, and thus, ‘naturally’, the presupposition of equality.

Thirdly, subjectivation is achieved by means of ‘a series of acts’. The consciousness of equality makes only the beginning of a political process, an idea of what a subjectivity should be. The process of subjectivation happens only in practice, through ‘a series of acts’. It does not refer to acts such as claiming or fighting for equality, which are, we may say, ‘external’ acts. Rather, it refers to the ‘internal’ acts that naturally follow the consciousness of one’s equality. At that moment, one starts to think about what one sees, experiences, and does, viz. one’s part in the distribution of the sensible; and starts to realize the lie and the truth about universality: the exclusion on the one hand, and the unlimited possibility on the other. It generates a new desire. It is neither a desire for the necessities of living, which sustains one’s condition of being, nor for the knowledge, which intends to transcend the condition of being. We may borrow Schiller’s term and call it a desire for ‘play’, because it is from a kind of curiosity and passion, to explore what is possible for oneself to do, to experience, and to live one’s life. Its intention is disconnected from one’s condition of being, neither sustaining nor negating it, but to create a new space out of it. Therefore, the practice consists of a series of acts that explore the boundary of the division of the sensible. It is exemplified by the Aventine plebeians who put

their own *logos* in practice; the 1830s proletarians, in their nights, doing literature, music, and philosophy as part of their lives; and many other groups of people doing similar things. These acts are not to include the activities that do not belong to them into their lives; instead, they are doing what they could do but have been excluded from their lives. Therefore, the acts are not to prove their equality, or to gain the recognition of their equality; they are simply the practice of their equality. The subjectivation, as the emergence of a new subjectivity, is not earned after the acts; it is achieved as long as there is the consciousness along with the practice.

These examples tell us who the ‘subject’ of subjectivation is. Rancière demonstrates it with reference to the ‘proletarian’. He traces one of the first uses of this term to the prosecution against Auguste Blanqui for rebellion. During the prosecution, he was asked about his profession. Blanqui answered, ‘Proletarian.’ Then the prosecutor said, ‘It is not a profession.’ He responded, ‘It is the profession of the majority of our people who are deprived of political rights.’ (Rancière, 1992, pp. 60-61) In this conversation, we see the doubleness of the ‘proletarian’. On the one hand, it is not a proper name. According to any mode of distribution of the social parts, there is no such a role as ‘proletarian’, because it performs no function, and serves no purpose. Etymologically, the word ‘proletarian’ is from the Latin, ‘*proletarii*’, which means ‘the prolific people’, denoting those who have no wealth and serve the state only by producing offspring. In other words, they are human beings who are not ‘political’, who are taken as the ‘domestic animals’ of the state. On the other hand, Blanqui’s answer, taking ‘proletarian’ as a profession, in effect makes it a proper name. It gives name to those who have had no name, and thus are not identifiable within the social structure. The effect is more than linguistic. The name is given to the ‘outcast’, which refers to ‘those who are denied an identity in a given order of police’. (Rancière, 1992, p. 61) It demonstrates the paradoxical situation of the subject. By naming the part of the society without a name, it reveals that they are the without-part who should have a part, the human beings whose political rights have been deprived and should be restored.

The process of subjectivation can be recognized when the wrong of police is manifested. The wrong is not only in terms of the count of miscount, or the part of the without-part, but also in terms of the affirmation of political and human rights. In his discussion of the Rights of Man, Rancière asserts that ‘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’. (Rancière, 2004b, p. 302) Here Rancière presents two forms of ‘rights’, which are more clear if we paraphrase them as follows. In the

first instance, the subjects have the rights, but are deprived of such rights; at the same time, they are denied the rights, but can demonstrate that they have such rights. On the one hand, the subjects have not the rights that they should have. According to the Declaration of Rights, all people should be 'free and equal'. This written inscription gives us 'an abstract ideal' about what a subject should be, and 'a form of visibility of equality'. (Rancière, 2004b, pp. 302-303) However, the actual situation makes it a lie, because it has always be a situation of inequality, and the people are never free or equal. On the other hand, the subjects have the rights that they have not had. Even in the repressing situation of inequality, they can create a situation, not to enact these rights (because they have not had such rights), but only to verify the concepts implied by the inscription of rights, that is, freedom and equality. (Rancière, 2004b, p. 303) For the verification, the subjects act 'as if' they are free and equal beings. It is not the pretence, but the practice itself, in the form of a series of acts, that defines and affirms their equality. In such way, they restores the human rights.

The concept of subjectivation is to some extent the end of Rancière's political theory. Firstly, it is the process that happens at the point where the two logics, police and politics, encounter each other. On the one hand, the police follows the logic of governing. By assigning different roles and positions to different parts of the society, it creates a hierarchical order in the form of a distribution of the sensible. It is a division in terms of knowledge or intelligence, visibility, and practice. It is a denial of the supposed universality. In the end, it is a space of consensus in which the structure of division is taken as naturally given. On the other hand, the politics follows the logic of emancipation. It strives for the rupture with any given order. Instead, it explores the possibility of seeing, learning, and doing for a person despite of his or her social conditions of being. It is the practice of the principle of equality, and creates a space of dissensus as antagonistic to the police order. Secondly, subjectivation manifests the miscount of the count of parts. When Aristotle identifies the people as *demos* by the virtue of freedom, he neglects the fact that they are the part of the city who only cannot be reduced into slavery; and freedom is the only thing that they have, because it is the thing that everyone has. Thus, the *demos* refers to the part of the community that is identified with the whole. However, their true name is the proletarian. As Blanqui says, they are those of the people who are deprived of their proper rights. They are those who have not what they should have, those who are not what they should be. Thus, the proletarian refers to the without-part that is differentiated from the whole. While the *demos* is 'the count of the uncountable', the proletarian is 'the uncounted in the space where they are counted as uncounted'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 63) Thirdly, subjectivation

bridges the concepts of equality and freedom. On the one hand, in Rancière's theorization, when freedom is considered as a value within a distribution, it leads only to the miscount that counts the part as the whole. Freedom exists in the sense that nothing else belongs to the *demos*. On the other hand, in the process of subjectivation, equality is taken as a presupposed principle instead of some given ideal. The principle of equality is presupposed in such way that it should be put into practice. The acts that verify the principle are those that rupture the definition of ways of seeing and explore the possibilities of doing and living. Therefore, freedom without equality is merely an empty concept; and equality without freedom is merely an unpracticable principle. In this sense, the concept of subjectivation incorporates the two ideas that have usually been put in opposition.

There is one thing to be clarified. Subjectivation, as the emergence of a new subjectivity, or the count of the uncounted, should not be confused with the recognition of the subject. Apart from the meaning of identifying an object from some already possessed knowledge, recognition usually means recognizing or acknowledging the validity of one's opinion, position, or status. According to Rancière, on the one hand, recognition in this sense contains a moral point of view, which makes it 'an act of confirmation'; on the other hand, it also implies a second-order meaning, which is about 'the conditions behind such a confirmation' and 'the configuration of the field'. (Rancière, 2016b, pp. 84-85) For example, Aristotle's distinction between the *logos* (speech) and the *phônè* (mere voice) defines a structure of recognition, which is always a structure of dispute. Recognition happens within such a structure. When a subject strives for the recognition of one's identity, or requires others to respect the identity, the subject has already put oneself within the given distribution of identities, which is the same field where one's identity is not recognized. In other words, the struggle for recognition aims at a paradoxical target. It demands the equal respect with regard to different parts of the society; however, these parts are in the first instance defined in the hierarchical, unequal structure. Their 'identities' are merely an alternative of the names given by the structural distribution, so that they may claim 'the impossible', that is, equality. Unfortunately, it only leads to a confirmation of 'the impossibility of the impossible'. They stay within the old configuration of the field; and they look for their target in the field where the target itself does not exist.

From this perspective, we could see why Bourdieu's effort on 'the return of the repressed' by recognizing the popular in distinction is not enough. For Bourdieu, the problem is a structural distinction exclusion or silencing of the popular, vulgar part. The field of aesthetics is

configured in the name of a refined concept of universality. This concept proposes a series of criteria to distinguish taste as a particular faculty from not only other more common faculties, such as sensation or rationality, but also the ordinary tastes. It thus preserves the pureness of this kind of 'fine' taste. Bourdieu's approach is an approach of recognition. The distinction of tastes might be misread as a confirmation of the hierarchical order; but it is not. Bourdieu brings out the concept of distinction in the first instance as a structural observation of such hierarchy or the exclusivity. This is why when he strives for the return of the repressed, he keeps the distinction as a basis. He remains the view that there is a distinction between two types of taste, so that he may say it is *de facto* right and *de jure* wrong. On this basis, he may argue that the repressed, popular taste must be recognized. Bourdieu's approach remains within the structure of distinction. As the cost, he brings the concept of universality into a more superficial level, that is, as an illusion to conceal the repression. By contrast, for Rancière, things are reversed. Since the social structure is constructed in the first instance by means of count of parts, in the form of a distribution of values, the hierarchy is *de jure* right. The rightness is given by itself. However, the defect of the hierarchy is that it is *de facto* wrong. The universality of aesthetic judgement is only misused as a standard of exclusion. It is the truth that implies the equality of all tastes (if we use the word 'taste' in the plural), which is the more profound truth that is the basis for the universality. Therefore, any hierarchical order in terms of taste is wrong in essence. Subjectivation is the process that happens by nature, in accordance with the truth of equality and universality, and manifesting the wrongness of the constructed distinction and exclusion. Therefore, it is not some illusion of universality that is covering the repression; instead, it is the hierarchical structure, by giving itself the right count, covering the reason why it is wrong, that is, the most basic fact of universality and equality. In this sense, we have a new view on the repressing space. In the process of subjectivation, the repression defuses, and the space is reconfigured.

2. *The Space of dissensus*

With regard to the process of subjectivation, two aspects are mentioned, disidentification and reconfiguration. These two aspects do not only distinguish subjectivation from recognition, but also indicate what is implied by subjectivation, that is, the production of a heterogeneous space of dissensus. Combining these two aspects, subjectivation does not only mean the emergence of a new subjectivity, but also the production of a heterogeneous space of dissensus. To start with, subjectivation is 'a process of disidentification or declassification'. (Rancière, 1992, p.

61) This is the opposite to the logic of recognition. The process of recognition requires the subject to be aware of one's conditions of being in the first instance. With this kind of self-awareness, the subject identifies one's being in the social structure. Then, the subject may strive for others' recognition of his or her identity. By contrast, subjectivation starts from the opposite, a kind of ignorance. It starts at the moment when the subject forgets one's specific position in the society, forgets what has been assigned to him or her by the distribution of the sensible as the supposed 'proper' way of seeing and doing things. In this sense, when Gauny the floor-layer paused his work and turned to enjoy the view through the window of the house that did not belong to him, his gaze was 'disinterested'. (Rancière, 2016a, pp. 141-143) In this disinterested gaze, or the gaze of ignorance, the beautiful view through the window is neither an object of desire, which results from a distribution of property and space; nor an object of knowledge, which requires the worker to focus only on the work of laying the floor. The worker forgets the veil – the structure of distribution that defines hierarchy and impossibility – that covers the truth – his or her essential being as a free and equal human being. It is a moment of disconnection when the worker disconnects the eyes from the hands, the aesthetic faculty from the desire and, and oneself from the structure of repression. It is also a moment of another kind of 'recognition', that is, the moment when the worker recognizes the universality in the aesthetic appreciation and the equal being in oneself. In the end, this recognition is rooted in the consciousness of one's essential being that cannot be deprived. Therefore, disidentification is not only, in the negative sense, a refusal of recognizing the subjects as a part of the structure of distribution in the form of 'part-taking'; but also, in the positive sense, a cancellation of the repression that has been implemented on them, and a revelation of their equality in aesthetic capacity and intelligence.

In consequence, it 'goes together with the reconfiguration of the field of experience'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 59) The configuration happens at several levels. Most basically, it is a reconfiguration of the way of experience. The distribution of the sensible is not only a definition of what is sensible or perceptible to whom, but also a normative definition of what is the proper sense of one's living world. For example, for the floor-layer, his technical knowledge requires him to focus on the floor. It divides the sensible world into two parts. One is the surface of the floor, which is all to which he should pay attention, to make sure that the floor is plane and the work is well done. The other is the outside world, the neighbouring view through the window, or even the decoration of the house above the floor. These things do not belong to the floor-layer. 'This job bends this man under violent fatigues that can only be understood by trying them, for

it is by dragging himself on his knees that he lays this parquet flooring whose work harassed him, whose freedom enchanted him.’ (Gauny, 2017, p. 61) The distribution of the sensible defines the physical space from the inside of the house to the outside view as a hierarchical space. There is a part under his gaze, and there is another part that is beyond his experience. Subjectivation starts from recovering the space as an equal one, by breaking with this division and presenting what has been excluded in his experience. In this way, the worker reconfigures the way that he experiences the world, not as something that is divided by his profession, but as what the world is aesthetically presented to the mind. The reconfiguration of experience leads to the reconfiguration of practice. As a bridge, there is firstly a change on the distribution of space and time. The distribution of space and time is in terms of two things. On the one hand, it is about the allocation and arrangement of the space and time for one’s activities. The view through the window has not been a part of the floor-layer’s field of experience. In a Platonic view, he should not take care of the space outside, and he should not have the time to do so. However, reconfiguration happens at the fleeing moment when he stops his work, lifts his head, and moves his gaze from his hand towards the window. It is a moment when he takes a ‘break’, which means both a rest during the work, and a rupture from the given field of experience. On the other hand, it is about the inner structure of one’s mind for perception and understanding. The reconfiguration amounts to a process of subjectivation when the subject becomes conscious of the configuration of the given, when the subject crosses the boundary of the division of space, and the restriction of the allocation of time. It disconnects the inner sense of space and time from the regulation of work, and restores it as what is related to the aesthetic experience of the world. Thus, it changes the basis for what is possible in practice. It reconfigures the distribution of possibility and impossibility of seeing and doing things. Since the structure of space and time is reconfigured, the allocation of activities, which is dependent on it, is ruptured. The subjects may find other activities other than the circle of work and rest; for example, the 1830s proletarians who devoted their nights to literature, music, and philosophy, which constituted their beings other than mere workers or prolific people. From the experience of the world to the practice in the world, in the end, subjectivation implies a reconfiguration of the given, the distribution of the sensible itself.

Subjectivation thus creates a heterogeneous space of dissensus. Here the concept of dissensus has two meanings. Firstly, it means an alternative space apart from the space of consensus. According to Rancière, consensus is ‘a certain regime of the sensible’ that presupposes ‘the disappearance of any gap’ between the contentious parties, the disappearance of ‘the system of

appearance, of the miscount and dispute', and 'the disappearance of politics'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 143) In the end, 'exclusion is simply another name for consensus'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 158) The consensual system is the covering of a division created by the exclusion, and a presupposition of such division as naturally given. Subjectivation is the process that manifests the wrong of this division. The dissensus created in the process is thus 'a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given'. (Rancière, 2004b, p. 304) This distance between consensus and dissensus is represented by two different perspectives of thinking about the matter. The first is the ethical perspective. With reference to its original meaning, *ethos*, the ethical perspective regards experience as the function of a faculty that is possessed by those who belong to a specific location. (Rancière, 2009b, p. 4) On the one hand, the faculty is said to be 'common to all'; on the other hand, there is a distribution of the capacity so that some are regarded as having it while others are not. The distribution is in an ethical way in the sense that it is in accordance with the social distribution of their positions. The second perspective is aesthetic. The aesthetic means a neutralization of the difference that has been established in the ethical logic. Based on that, it is a redistribution of what is common and what is different. (Rancière, 2009b, p. 5) This neutralization or cancellation of the given opposition makes it possible to create a space of dissensus in addition to that of consensus. Therefore, it is an aesthetic heterotopia in which there is no determination that is given. (Rancière, 2010, p. 21)

Secondly, dissensus means the confrontation between two different worlds. Dissensus is the situation 'putting two worlds in one and the same world', and the political subject is 'the capacity for staging such scenes of dissensus'. (Rancière, 2004b, p. 304) In other words, dissensus means the revelation of the contentious relation that has been dissolved by the consensual logic. The pattern of 'two worlds in one' refers not only to the two parts of the community, those counted and those cast-out, but also two logics of interpreting the same thing: universality as a concept of exclusion or commonness, being-together in the form of police or political, presupposition (as the basis) of hierarchy or equality, etc. In the confrontation, the dissensus overthrows any given order of 'sensing' or 'making sense of' the world, and brings into appearance what has been absent.

In addition, as Biesta (2010) has argued, Rancière's theory of politics is not meant to 'create constant chaos and disruption'. (p. 50) Instead, it is 'always local and occasional'. (Rancière, 1995, p. 188) Likewise, the space of dissensus is not a space of chaos or disruption. It is the

local and occasional appearance of the principle of equality, and the instance of its encounter with the order of inequality. Therefore, the space of dissensus should neither be regarded as a space of order, nor as a space of chaos.

3. *Disagreement and common sense*

With regard to ‘dissensus’, there are two concepts that have been put to the opposite. They are ‘consensus’ and ‘common sense’. In some of Rancière’s texts, these two words are used negatively. For example, consensus ‘means closing the spaces of dissensus’; and ‘dissensus ... is a division put in the “common sense”’. (Rancière, 2004b, pp. 304, 306) However, although ‘consensus’ is a negative concept in Rancière’s context, the concept of ‘common sense’ has more meanings in a broader view. In this part, I compare another pair of concepts, disagreement and common sense, to Rancière’s duality of dissensus and consensus. Taking a Rancièrian perspective, ‘disagreement’ can be used as another name for ‘dissensus’; however, ‘common sense’ is not a synonym for ‘consensus’. On the contrary, common sense is relevant to a series of questions that the concept of dissensus proposes; in addition, it also indicates how a dissensus or disagreement is possible in a consensual situation where everything in a specific mode of distribution is given.

Let us start with the concept of disagreement. In the Preface of *La Mésestente*, Rancière gives his definition of a situation of disagreement.

By disagreement, one means a given type of situation of speech: the one where one of the interlocutors at the same time understands and does not understand what the other says. The disagreement is not the conflict between the one who says white and the one who says black. It is the conflict between the one who says white and the one who says white but does not mean the same thing or does not mean that the other says the same thing under the name of whiteness. (Rancière, 1995, p. 12)

To clarify, disagreement is not a situation about different opinions or perspectives. In that sense, regarding aesthetic disagreement, we can apply the maxim: *De gustibus non est disputandum* (‘In matters of taste, there can be no disputes’). Instead, disagreement is about understanding or meaning, that is, how one *understands* another or what another *means* by saying something. It is particularly a French perspective, considering the polysemy of the French word ‘*entendre*’

(as ‘to hear’, ‘to understand’, ‘to mean’, and ‘to agree’) and its derivative, ‘*mésentente*’, translated as ‘disagreement’ with many meanings lost. Therefore, a situation of disagreement is a multiple. It is the situation where one *hears* another but does *not understand* the other; this not-understanding is because the other does *not mean* the same thing as what one *means* by saying what one *hears*. This is the picture of *disagreement*. The picture presents many things: the presupposition of a common object, its distribution (as sharing and division), the division of two ways of sensing and saying it, an encounter of the divided parts, and a question of the common itself.

Disagreement makes sense only when we have presupposed a kind of universality. As Rancière regards equality as the basis of inequality, disagreement has a basis as ‘agreement’. Disagreement is possible only when there is an expectation of agreement. When the expectation is absent, the situation of disagreement is reduced into a mere divergence of opinions. For example, although people may ‘disagree’ on their tastes for food, a reasonable person would not presume that the other must agree; and there would not be any disputes between two reasonable persons over taste in this sense. Therefore, disagreement exists at the very gap between the expectation of agreement and the reality of divergence. The reason can be nothing but the presupposition of a particular kind of universality. On the one hand, human mind has the tendency to perceive a judgement as universally valid for all. As an object in disagreement, the judgement is believed to be more than merely regarding sensory experiences. On the other hand, the universality stemming from this tendency is subjective. In other words, it is not based on any type of knowledge that has an objective certainty. This twofold characteristic makes the basis for a situation of disagreement.

The disagreement, in its multiple form, unfolds on this basis. Since the universality is neither purely subjective nor objectively grounded, a judgement conveys the *meaning* in a special form of interlocution. ‘Do you see what I mean?’ This sentence is a signal saying that there is no further way to convey what is *meant*, and that there is no other way to verify whether the listener *understands* or not. The only sign of the other’s *understanding* is the other’s *accordance* to the statement. Due to the confidence on the universality and the difficulty in *meaning*, one transforms *understanding* into *accordance*. ‘If you understand, you would agree.’ However, although the universality is valid in the subjective mind (as Kant has analysed), it is fragile in the reality. The judgement is then reversed. ‘Since you do not agree, it must be that you do not understand what I mean.’ This is how the presupposition of a common object leads

to a situation of disagreement, and the disagreement appears as a lack of understanding. Then the trick of universality steps in and transforms into a distribution as both sharing and division at once. On the one hand, disagreement is in the form of a division of understanding. The division is drawn between those who understand and those who do not understand. The former part refers to those who *accord*, those who confirm the subjective presupposition of universality; and the latter part refers to those who *disagree*, those who fail the subjective standard of universality. On the other hand, disagreement is at the same time a sharing of understanding. For the sake of the universality, which is contributing to the validity of one's judgement, the division is regarded not as a division between understanding and not-understanding, but that between understanding and the insufficiency for understanding. Understanding, in the form of part-taking, is taken like properties. Some people have more, while others have less. Therefore, in the gap of the universality, there grows a hierarchical reading of understanding; and disagreement becomes a distribution of understanding. People share the capacity of understanding, but the capacity is divided in a hierarchy. Then the disagreement transforms into a hierarchical division of two ways of sensing and saying. There are those who are sophisticated, and there are those who are vulgar. Then it is believed that the hierarchical division explains everything. Disagreement is now not because of a lack of understanding, but because of a *misunderstanding*. In the view of the division, the common object is divided into the two ways of sensing and saying. 'You do not *understand*, because you must have *misheard* what I *mean*.' Although the two parts are sensing a common object and saying a common language, it is believed that they *mean* different things. 'We disagree in the end, because I mean the sophisticated and you mean the vulgar.' Furthermore, 'You do not understand because you do not hear that I actually mean the distinction between us.' This makes the ultimate situation of disagreement.

On the one hand, this multiple of the situation represents a police process. It produces and reproduces a hierarchical structure of distribution. On the other hand, the unfolding of disagreement is political, because it reveals that the division is generated rather than naturally given, and that the presupposition of a kind of commonness perennates through the whole process. For this reason, it deviates from the consensual logic and incorporates itself into a logic of dissensus. In this sense, disagreement proposes a series of questions with regard to the common. As Rancière says, disagreement and dissensus 'imply that it is a struggle about what politics is' and a struggle about 'such original issues' as who we are, what makes us a 'we', and what we can see and say about 'having a world in common'. (Rancière, 2009c, p. 116)

With regard to the problem of the common, let us start with the ‘common sense’ with the quotation mark. By saying that dissensus is a division put in the ‘common sense’, here the concept of ‘common sense’ does not refer to a Kantian *sensus communis*, which means a sense that is common to all, and guarantees the necessity of the universal liking. (Kant, 1987, § 40) Instead, it refers more to its ordinary meaning, a ‘good sense’ (*bon sens*) that takes something as naturally given. It is more similar to a Bourdieusian understanding of what makes a specific community. For Bourdieu, the concept of ‘common sense’ is akin to his conception of ‘habitus’ as ‘a structured and structuring structure’. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 171) It refers to things that are regarded as ‘commonly known or even tacitly accepted’ within a community; it refers to ‘the consensus of the community’; and it refers to ‘the sense of community’ that is provided by ‘this commonly-shared sense of the world’. (Holton, 1996, p. 39) On the one hand, this ‘common sense’ creates a ‘common’ world in the same structure of division of the society. ‘Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world.’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 468) On the other hand, this ‘common sense’ works in the logic of consensus regulating the sensing and making-sense (i.e., two aspects of *sens*) of the world. The reason is that the ‘common-sense world’ is ‘endowed with the *objectivity* secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world’. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80) This is the negative sense of ‘common sense’, regarding which, from his perspective, Bourdieu also says that the ‘construction of a scientific object requires first and foremost a break with common sense’. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 235)

On the other hand, common sense, properly speaking, has a positive significance. Common sense can be interpreted into multiple meanings in Rancière’s context; and these aspects of common sense together make the concept a political one. Firstly, it means a sense that is common to all. Rancière develops this idea from Kant’s conception. For Rancière, the common sense in Kant’s third *Critique* implies ‘the possibility of communication’ and ‘a possible language across class boundaries’. (Rancière, 2012d, p. 166) In this sense, common sense means not only the communicability of a certain mentality in the situation of aesthetic judgement, but also the communicability of people’s sensing and making-sense of the world. Behind this common sense, it is the presupposition of equality in terms of speaking and practicing. Taking a method of equality, it ‘reinscribes the force of descriptions and arguments in the equality of common language and the common capacity to invent objects, stories, and

arguments’. (Rancière, 2006a, p. 12; 2009b, p. 19) Therefore, it is the common sense that makes the presupposition of equality valid and practicable. Besides, it is also the basis for democracy, since a democratic society, as De Pascale (2024) has argued, is a society that ‘makes images, notion, dreams and aspirations available to *everyone*’. (p. 52)

Secondly, it means a sense of the common. The common has been used to designate what is common to the community, and in Rancière’s critical context, what is the object of ‘part-taking’ or the distribution of parts. Here by interpreting the common sense as a sense of the common, it does not refer to one’s consciousness of his or her having a part of the common, and thus involving oneself into the quarrel over the distribution and the fight for a share; instead, it refers to the recognition of the fact that one’s having a part or no part is in the pattern of sharing the common. The common that has been divided and shared is not only the common wealth, but also the common capacity and common participation in public affairs, and thus a common world. The common sense is what follows the reconfiguration of ‘the partition between those who were or were not destined to care for the common’. (Rancière, 2011, p. 7) Therefore, the common sense means the recognition (or the recovery of the recognition) of what is common as a whole; and by doing so, it puts a rupture in the given distribution.

Thirdly, it means a sense of community. A similar interpretation has been made by Arendt. (See Arendt, 1989, p. 27; Norris, 1996; Degryse, 2011) However, in Rancière’s context, the meaning is different. Rancière distinguishes two types of communities, one that is ‘about the identity of being of doing and saying’, the other that is ‘founded on the simple equality of speaking beings’ (Rancière, 1994, p. 98) The first type is a police community organized in the form of distribution of the sensible; and the second type is a political one according to the principle of equality. Therefore, common sense is the sense with regard to what a community should be, how people should be organized in a community. It involves not only the discourse about these questions, but also the practice that forms and reforms the community. As Rancière says, common sense ‘is a question of verifying in one’s acts the possibility of constructing a common world in which they function as maxims of action’. (Rancière and Briault, 2017, p. 186) In addition, such community of equality that based on the common sense, as Lijster (2022) has argued, is a ‘dissensual community’ that involves an ‘acting as if’, which means, on the one hand, it is not an actually existing, but ‘an imaginary, anticipated community’, and on the other hand, it is a community that is ‘based on praxis’. (p. 153)

4. *From the subject to the community*

Through the analysis of disagreement and common sense, the process of subjectivation can be re-identified in terms of the community. On the one hand, subjectivation starts with a subjective instance of experiencing the world as an aesthetic object, which leads to an experience of equality. On the other hand, subjectivation implies the recognition of such instance as communal. This transition from an individual subject to a community bridges the gap between a simple aesthetic situation and an overall political reconfiguration.

First of all, what the political subjectivation produces is a ‘multiple’. According to Rancière, the process of subjectivation happens in the Cartesian form as ‘*ego sum, ego existo*’ (‘I am, therefore I exist’); but the subject is not this ‘I’ in the singular, rather a ‘we’ in the plural as ‘*nos sumus, nos existimus*’ (‘We are, therefore we exist’). (Rancière, 1995, p. 59) The ‘multiple’ does not only mean a change in the form of the subject (from ‘I’ to ‘we’), but also a change in the form of the predicate (in terms of ways of being and existence). This change is related to the political subjectivation as disidentification. As Rancière says, the multiple that is produced by subjectivation is ‘not given in the police constitution of community’. (Rancière, 1995, p. 60) A police community defines the subjects by means of a distribution of their ways of being, and it creates their existence as identities that are specific to their ways of being (for example, ‘Be ruling those who labour their mind; be ruled those who labour their hand’). The effect is both individual and collective. It means that the distribution puts the subjective experience into a sensorium that is specific to an identity which is appointed to a group of people. Therefore, disidentification happens as the subjects disconnect their experience from the identities that are distributed, and find their *existence* in the alternative ways of *being* that cannot be previously defined. By means of *being* differently, the subjects *exist* differently.

The multiple also means that the subjectivation is a ‘collective subjectivation’. (Rancière, 2009c, p. 121) For Rancière, the collective subjectivation does not mean that the subjects ‘frame a collective body’; rather, it means ‘a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience’. (Rancière, 2016a, p. 147) This common experience is what has been shared by the ‘collective working subject’ as ‘being-worker’, which means two kinds of things. On the one hand, negatively, it is the experience of exploitation and inequality; that is, the ‘traumatic experience of entering the world of work’, and the ‘discovery of ideal forms of enjoyment’ that are reserved for those who possess leisure. On the other hand, positively, it is

the experience of emancipation and equality; that is, the ‘effort to distance oneself ... from the working condition’, moving one’s gaze from the hand to the surroundings in a break, and taking back the night-time by devoting it not to rest for the work tomorrow, but to the ‘individual transformation and collective *oeuvre*’. (Rancière, 2012c, p. 210) It is exemplified by those characters of *La Nuit des prolétaires*. ‘Who are they? A few dozen, a few hundred proletarians who were twenty years old around 1830 and who, at that time, decided, each on his own, to no more tolerate the intolerable.’ (Rancière, 2012a)

From this ‘each on his own’ to the collective subjectivation, there is the link between an individual subject and a community, between disidentification and reconfiguration. What functions as the role of such link is the common sense. The common sense works through its three interpretations. Firstly, when an individual subject has the aesthetic experience in a disinterested gaze, the experience is free from any given distribution of the sensible. Therefore, the subject must assume that the experience is universal. This universality is not in any trick of exclusion, but as the universality in the sense of equality. It is a subjective experience of the principle of equality. Based on the equality, the subject assumes that there is a sense that is common to all. Secondly, since there is a sense that is equally common to all, it overthrows the division that has been made according to a division of the ‘senses’, either the possibility of sensing the world, or the limitation of making sense of the world. It also overthrows the mode of distribution of the common that has been taken as naturally given, or that each person should mind one’s own thing and nothing else. Therefore, it makes it possible for the subject to think about the alternative or the heterogeneous ways of being; furthermore, to image the idea of the common, which has been divided and covered. Thirdly, imaging an idea of the common or a common world is a revelation of what has been the wrong, which means the existence of the subjects who have been subjected to the division. It stimulates the consciousness of the division between two kinds of communities, one organized in the mode of distribution and the other founded on the principle of equality. In the end, the sense of community forms the basis for the process of subjectivation.

Finally, the common sense puts a rupture into the consensual division. On the one hand, disagreement, as the synonym of dissensus, is the description of this political scene. It designates a disagreement – not between two parties of a community, rather – between a community that is reconfigured by the principle of equality and the same community that has been configured in the form of a division. It designates a disagreement – not as a quarrel due

to different opinions or perspectives, rather – as a dispute arising from the impossibility of a discourse. It designates a disagreement – not on a distribution of shares, rather – on what should be regarded as common to all. On the other hand, disagreement, as an instance, is the situation of the rupture of the police structure. It starts from the consciousness of something that is experienced as universality. It appears, in the confrontation of the universality with the reality, as a situation of not-understanding. It comes to the suspension of the misunderstanding and nevertheless presupposing a common sense. It ends in a question of the common and thus recognizes the disagreement itself. All in all, we may say that the political disagreement is aesthetic; and the aesthetic disagreement is political.

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