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Rancière, Schiller, and “Free Play”

Politicizing the Game

I

Hardly anyone among the remaining disciples of what has become known – or discredited – as “French Theory” has drawn a similar amount of attention in recent years as has Jacques Rancière – with the exceptions, maybe, of Alain Badiou and Jean-Luc Nancy. The reasons for this are manifold. One of the most important ones is that he has managed not only to redefine both politics and aesthetics, but also to reconnect them in a provocative, and genuinely new way. In order to locate the significance of the second scholar that my title refers to – Friedrich Schiller – for the approach of the former one, I cannot avoid but to give an irresponsibly sketchy introduction into the most important contributions that the work of Rancière has to offer. These are:

1. The “assumption” or the “principle” (sometimes also called “method”) of a radical egalitarianism of everybody and anybody, growing out of the fact that everybody with the ability to speak has an equal right to do so.
2. This equality clashes – has never ceased to clash, and will most probably never cease to clash – with what he calls the police function of the state, whose function it is to assign everybody their proper place in society, thus by default excluding certain parts of society from having “a say” and being “a part”.
3. This clash is what he calls “politics” proper: The moment when those who potentially are a part, but have no part in the community created through police rules, ascertain a voice that proves that – below the neatly or not so neatly hierarchized space of the state – those who have no part are actually arbitrarily excluded from the order, since the moment they ascertain said voice, they prove that they actually *are* a part of those who have a voice.

4. Both the political and the police are thus inherently aesthetic, in that to allocate every member of the community a certain place, a voice (or no voice, respectively), a task, and a certain visibility, both constitute or influence what Rancière calls the “partition of the sensible.” The concept of the “partition of the sensible,” which is the English translation of the original French *partage du sensible*, loses – as does the German translation *Aufteilung des Sinnlichen* – the double meaning of the French word *partage*, which comprises not only the distributive aspect, but also that of partaking (*Teilhabe* in German). Any form of arranging (or rearranging) both the distribution of, but also the partaking in, aspects of the sensible – that is, voices (the audible), tasks (the doable), and what can be seen (the visible), thus partakes, in turn, in both the political and the aesthetic, as both merge in their attempts to do just that: to rearrange how we hear, see, and act upon, the world.¹

While the policing aspect of the management of communities has been going on for time immemorial, has been part and parcel of any attempt to define and order a community – and to define, accordingly, who belongs and who does not –, Rancière distinguishes, as far as the realm of the aesthetic is concerned, three historical regimes that – although they can be allocated to certain historical eras, and are part of a specific genealogy – never existed or exist in their ideal-typical purity:² The first one, immediately connected to Plato (and his notorious wish to banish poets from the *polis*), Rancière calls the ethical regime of images. As the name makes clear, the aesthetic as such – that is, as a distinctive discourse about, and definition of, art – does

¹ The main works in which Rancière develops these thoughts are, in the chronological order of their publication in English: *On the Shores of Politics*, London, Verso, 1995, abbr. *SP*; *Disagreement*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, abbr. *D*; *The Politics of Aesthetics*, New York, Continuum, 2004, abbr. *PA*; *The Philosopher and his Poor*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004, abbr. *PP*; *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, abbr. *AU*; *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, abbr. *AD*, and *Dissensus*, New York, Continuum, 2010, abbr. *Dis*.

² For the most concise delineation of these the regimes, cf. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12–19.

not yet exist. The ethical task of anything artistic is designed to reflect the allegedly "natural" hierarchy of the community of the *polis*, and is judged accordingly. Anything *poietic* – that is, anything genuinely new that might challenge the perfect order of the philosopher-king – poses a risk in that it also challenges the partition of the sensible as laid out by this self-same king; a king that has a very clear idea as to where each member of the *polis* "belongs". Workers, in Plato's view, simply do not have the time to have a say as regards things political; and any work that would suggest that much – let alone, even take such a worker as its subject – should be banned. If anything, the didacticism of epic heroes is what is called for; but since even that potentially entails some risks, the poets should better be banned altogether.

The second regime, which Rancière calls the "representative regime of art" (indicating that "art" as such is reckoned with for the first time), is intricately connected to Aristotle's *Poetics* and the concept of mimesis. In it, the aspect of *technē* gains importance. The arts as such are designed to mime the natural world, and they are now judged according to how and what degree they manage to do so successfully. The aspect of didacticism, as all familiar with the work of Aristotle know, is by no means excluded. But for someone like Plato, the sheer question whether *poiesis* is more or less successful does not count, as it should be abolished no matter whether it is successful or not; indeed, the more successful it is, the more dangerous it might become.

In what Rancière calls the aesthetic regime of art – a turn that he locates roughly between the middle and the end of the 18th century – things take a new turn. Art – or aesthetics as such – on the one hand gains an autonomy never imagined before; furthermore, it now allows itself to treat *sujets* inconceivable before. The naturalism of Balzac is what Rancière refers to; Charles Dickens and, 50 years later, Stephen Crane in the US, also come to mind. This emancipation, as regards both the production and the subject of art, is central to Rancière, as both provide aesthetics with a potential and a task not available before: To initiate, or to imagine, partitions of the sensible that were inconceivable before. Art's immanently political nature can now be "unleashed" in order to challenge the status quo, and in order to imagine communities with new voices, new tasks, and new allocations for those who "have no part" in the partition that any community establishes.

However, Rancière diagnoses yet another turn within this aesthetic regime of art: One that he terms “ethical”. What he refers to here is what one could roughly identify as the postmodern turn that he sees embodied in the works of Lyotard and Agamben (among others); a turn toward a reconceptualized Kantian sublime in the face of one of the most notorious concepts of postmodernism – that of the Other. With Lyotard and Agamben, Kant’s law – the “unveiled Isis”, – has been taken over by an unrepresentable Other in whose thralls we are and whose still veiled power – especially after Auschwitz – art can only attest to in perpetually representing its unrepresentability (cf. *Dissensus*, 91-104).³

Thus, the ethical turn within the aesthetic regime that Rancière diagnoses and criticizes, points back both toward the Kant of the *Critique of Judgment*, but also to the earliest phase of Plato’s ethical regimes of images – only that now the images show what cannot (or should not) be imagined which, in turn, connects them to the Kantian sublime.

II

Finally, we have reached the point at which we can start to locate the significance both of Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and especially one work of art that plays a huge role for both Rancière and Schiller – the *Juno Ludovisi* that not only forms the one example that Schiller actually refers to in his *Letters*, but the interpretation of which by Schiller is something that Rancière repeatedly alludes to.⁴ All of this has to be seen in light of the concept of play; or, more specifically, Schiller’s designation of aesthetics as “free

³ The main works of Lyotard and Agamben where this idea is developed are Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, and *Postmodern Fables*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998; *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* [1795], Mineola, Dover Publications, 2004. On Rancière’s references to Schiller and the Juno Ludovisi, cf. *Dis* 117–119 and 177–78; *AD*, 27–32; *PA*, 42–45.

play", that Rancière, in turn, repeatedly invokes in an exemplary manner.

First of all, it seems rather counter-intuitive that a philosopher with leftist inclinations would refer to Schiller – and especially his *Letters* – in order to make his point; this even more so as the Schiller of said *Letters* has a pedigree of rather harsh criticism from the left. A genealogy ranging from Friedrich Engels – who talks about Schiller's "flight into the Kantian ideal", as a result of which the "flat misery" of the political situation in Germany is being replaced by "the exuberant misery of the aesthetic illusion of liberty", via Lukács, in whose view the "apologetic tendencies" of the *Letters* turn them into a reactionary document, to Adorno, who polemicizes against the hope that the aesthetic appearance could "tear itself out of the swamp by its own bootstraps."⁵ However, it has to be mentioned that there have been numerous attempts recently to rehabilitate him, by the likes of Bernd Bräutigam, Rolf Grimminger, Dieter Borchmeyer, and others.⁶ Before we start to dig deeper into both Schiller's concept and the use Rancière makes of it, one aspect that unites both is sufficiently clear: The attempt to put a distance between themselves and Kant – and, before all, Kant's towering notion of the sublime. It is, I think, safe to say that many of the numerous inconsistencies that have been identified in the *Letters* can be attributed to the almost schizophrenic attempt on Schiller's side to on the one hand authorize his foray into the terrain of philosophy by referring to Kant's philosophy, while on the other hand trying to develop his own version of a proto-dialectics that are incompatible with the philosophical framework of the latter. In the case of Rancière, the use – or rather, abuse (cf. Rancière, *AD* 89–105) – of the Kantian

⁵ These are translations of quotes collected in the excellent historical overview of Schiller criticism in Stefan Matuschek's commentary of the German edition: Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2009, 231–235. All footnoted German quotations refer to this edition.

⁶ Dieter Borchmeyer, „Kritik der Aufklärung im Geiste der Aufklärung: Friedrich Schiller“, in Jochen Schmidt (Hg.), *Aufklärung und Gegenaufklärung in der europäischen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989, 361–376; Rolf Grimminger, „Die ästhetische Versöhnung: Ideologiekritische Aspekte zum Autonomiebegriff am Beispiel Schiller“, in Jürgen Bolten (Hg.), *Schillers Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984, 161–184.

sublime by Lyotard and Agamben threatens to subject aesthetics yet again to an ethical regime.

Let us first have a look at why Schiller – and especially said *Juno Ludovisi* – is so important for Rancière. First of all, this is because both the statue and Schiller's commentary on it embody, in a nutshell, what Rancière calls the "aesthetic regime of art", which is characterized by a paradoxical duality. I would like to quote him at length here:

'The statue is 'self-contained', and it 'dwells in itself', as befits the traits of a divinity: her 'idleness', her distance from any care or duty, from any purpose or volition. The goddess is such because she wears no trace of will or aim. Obviously, the qualities of the goddess are those of the statue as well. The statue thus comes paradoxically to figure what has not been made, what was never an object of will. In other words: it embodies the qualities of what is not a work of art [...]. Correspondingly, the spectator who experiences the free play of the aesthetic in front of the 'free appearance' enjoys an autonomy of a very special kind. It is not the autonomy of free Reason, subduing the anarchy of sensation. It is the suspension of that kind of autonomy. It is an autonomy strictly related to the withdrawal of power. The 'free appearance' stands in front of us, unapproachable, unavailable to our knowledge, our aims and desires. The subject is promised the possession of a new world by this figure that he cannot possess in any way. The goddess and the spectator, the free play and the free appearance, are caught up together in a specific sensorium, cancelling the oppositions of activity and passivity, will and resistance. The 'autonomy of art' and the 'promise of politics' are not counterposed. The autonomy is the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art. In other words, the artwork participates in the sensorium of autonomy as it is not a work of art.

Now, this 'not being a work of art' immediately takes on a new meaning. The free appearance of the statue is the appearance of what has not been aimed at as art. This means that it is the appearance of a form of life in which art is not art. The 'self-containment' of the Greek statue turns out to be the 'self-sufficiency' of a collective life that does not rend itself into separate spheres of activities, of a community where art and life, art and politics, life and politics are not severed one from another. The Greek people are supposed to have lived such a life, the autonomy of which is expressed in the self-containment of the statue. The accuracy or otherwise of that vision of ancient Greece is not at issue here.... The plot of a 'free play', suspending the power of active form over passive matter and promising a still unheard-of state of equality, becomes another plot, in which form subjugates matter, and the self-education of mankind is its emancipation from materiality, as it transforms the world into its own sensorium. (*Dis* 117/8)

This is a concise resume of Schiller's dialectical sublation of the *Formtrieb* and the *Sachtrieb*, of the sensible and reason, and it indicates what interest this statue – and Schiller's reading of it – might have for Rancière. For him, as for Schiller, only "unpolitical" (that is, autonomous) art can have a political effect. This is what Schiller emphatically calls

for in a passage that circumscribes both the immaterial, but consequently also the "useless" character of art:

This Art must abandon actuality and soar with becoming boldness above necessity; for Art is a daughter of Freedom, and must receive her commission from the needs of spirits, not from the exigency of matter [...]. Utility is the great idol of the age, to which all powers must do service and all talents swear allegiance. In these clumsy scales the spiritual service of art has no weight; deprived of all encouragements, she flees from the noisy mart of our century. (26)⁷

Art's 'freedom' is thus paradoxically achieved through a radical disjunction from the material world and categories of "usefulness", to then acquire an exemplary model function that feeds back onto the material world due to the fact that it initiated a break from it before. What is central here is, of course, the concept of freedom. And this concept – or rather, the two concepts of freedom that vie for predominance – circumlocate Schiller's ambivalent confrontation with Kant. Interestingly enough, this Gargantuan fight is almost exclusively led in the footnotes. It is as late as at the very end of the 19th letter that Schiller finally makes an effort to distinguish between the freedom of – or provided by – reason, and the freedom embodied in aesthetic experience. Thus, in the footnote to said 19th Letter, he concedes:

To avoid any misconception I would observe that wherever I speak of freedom I do not mean the sort which necessarily attaches to Man in his capacity as intelligent being, and can neither be given to him nor taken from him, but the sort which is based upon his composite nature. By only acting, in general, in a rational manner, man displays a freedom of the first kind; by acting rationally within the limits of his material and materially within the laws of actuality, he displays a freedom of the second kind. We might explain the latter simply as a natural possibility of the former. (96, FN)⁸

⁷ „Diese [die Kunst des Ideals. T.C.] muss die Wirklichkeit verlassen, und sich in anständiger Kühnheit über das Bedürfnis erheben; denn die Kunst ist eine Tochter der Freiheit, und von der Notwendigkeit der Geister, nicht von der Notdurft der Materie will sie ihre Vorschrift empfangen [...]. Der Nutzen ist das grosse Idol der Zeit, dem alle Kräfte fronen und alle Talente huldigen sollen. Auf dieser grossen Waage hat das geistige Verdienst der Kunst kein Gewicht, und, aller Aufmunterung beraubt, verschwindet sie von dem lärmenden Markt des Jahrhunderts.“ (12)

⁸ „Um aller Missdeutung vorzubeugen, bemerke ich, dass, so oft hier von Freiheit die Rede ist, nicht diejenige gemeint ist, die dem Menschen, als Intelligenz be-

only to hasten to add, in yet another footnote that he himself calls “superfluous” that, although these two freedoms have to be clearly discerned, aesthetic freedom is *not* free of rational freedom, and that

[...] the mind in its aesthetic condition, although it certainly acts freely and is in the highest degree free from all restraint, is by no means free from laws, and that this aesthetic freedom is to be distinguished from the logical necessity of thinking and from the moral necessity of willing only by the fact that the laws which guide the operation of the mind are not realized, and because they meet with no resistance do not appear as compulsion. (99)⁹

Here he recapitulates the Kantian paradox that the human will is free inasmuch as it accepts the categorical imperative – and is thus not “free from all restraint”, but only free to will a law that does not originate in itself. However, this highly problematic relationship between the two – and the special role of aesthetic freedom – is even exacerbated by two different relationships of the two as they appear in what I would like to call the dialectical and the historical relationship, respectively; and Schiller perpetually oscillates between the two. A closer look might enable us to identify the one qualification that distinguishes the two: the ‘playfulness’ of aesthetic freedom that certainly does not have any place in Kant’s empire of reason.

III

Let me make clear how these two relationships differ: In the dialectical scenario, the aesthetic constitutes – in an almost crystal clear, He-

trachtet, notwendig zukommt, und ihm weder gegeben noch genommen werden kann, sondern diejenige, welche sich auf seine gemischte Natur gründet. Dadurch dass der Mensch überhaupt nur vernünftig handelt, beweist er seine Freiheit der ersten Art, dadurch, dass er in den Schranken des Stoffes vernünftig, und unter den Gesetzen der Vernunft materiell handelt, beweist er seine Freiheit der zweiten Art. Man könnte die letztere schlechtweg durch eine natürliche Möglichkeit der erstern erklären.“ (81 FN)

⁹ „[...] das Gemüt im ästhetischen Zustande zwar frei und im höchsten Masse frei von allem Zwang, aber keineswegs frei von Gesetzen handelt, und dass diese ästhetische Freiheit sich von der logischen Notwendigkeit beim Denken und von der moralischen Notwendigkeit beim Wollen nur dadurch unterscheidet, dass die Gesetze, nach denen das Gemüt dabei verfährt, nicht vorgestellt werden und weil sie keinen Widerstand finden, nicht als Nötigung erscheinen.“ (84 FN)

gelian fashion, the synthesis, the harmonic sublation of a thesis – the sensible, passivity, etc. – and an antithesis – the rational, activity, etc. Conceptually speaking, that is, the aesthetic presumes the pre-existence of both thesis and antithesis, both of which it then sublates. This becomes manifest in the following paragraph:

[...] the distance between matter and form, between activity and passivity, between sensation and thought, is infinite, and the two cannot conceivably be reconciled....

Beauty, it is said, links together two conditions which are *opposed to each other* and that can never become one. It is from this opposition that we must start; we must comprehend and recognize it in its whole purity and strictness, so that the two conditions are separated in the most definite way; otherwise we are mixing but not uniting them. Secondly, it is said that Beauty *combines* those two opposite conditions, and thus removes the opposition. But since both oppositions remain eternally opposed to one another, they can only be combined by *cancellation*. Our second business, then, is to make this combination perfect, to accomplish it so purely and completely that both conditions entirely disappear in a third, and no trace of the division remains behind in the whole. (88–89)¹⁰

This, however, diametrically runs against the didactical and diachronic bridge-function that he ascribes to aesthetics – or, rather, the aesthetic education that he envisages: "In a word, there is no other way to make the sensuous man rational than by *first* making him aesthetic...

¹⁰ „[...] der Abstand zwischen Materie und Form, zwischen Leiden und Tätigkeit, zwischen Empfinden und Denken [ist] unendlich..., und [kann] schlechterdings durch nichts ... vermittelt werden.... Die Schönheit, heisst es, verknüpft zwei Zustände miteinander, die einander entgegengesetzt sind, und niemals eins werden können. Von dieser Entgegensetzung müssen wir ausgehen; wir müssen sie in ihrer ganzen Reinheit und Strengigkeit auffassen und anerkennen, so dass beide Zustände sich auf das bestimmteste scheiden; sonst vermischen wir, aber vereinigen nicht. Zweitens heisst es: jene zwei entgegengesetzten Zustände verbindet die Schönheit, und hebt also die Entgegensetzung auf. Weil aber beide Zustände einander ewig entgegengesetzt bleiben, so sind sie nicht anders zu verbinden, als indem sie *aufgehoben* werden. Unser zweites Geschäft ist also, diese Verbindung vollkommen zu machen, sie so rein und vollständig durchzuführen, dass beide Zustände in einem Dritten gänzlich verschwinden, und keine Spur der Teilung des Ganzen zurückbleibt.“ (73) The English translation features a footnote with a (not fully convincing) explanation as to why the German "aufheben" has not been translated as "sublated", which would indeed bring to the fore the highly dialectical operations that characterize the entire *Letters*.

since the moral condition can *be developed only from the aesthetic*, not from the physical condition” (108, 110; emphasis mine).¹¹

This, paradoxically, turns aesthetics into a preliminary, or preparatory, state that will be abolished once the rational state has been achieved. Aesthetics, as means to an end, thus makes itself unnecessary once the transfer from the physical state to the rational one is achieved. However, to serve as a bridge, between the physical and the rational state, both have to be presumed as existing already; otherwise this would, metaphorically speaking, be like building a bridge from one shore without knowing whether there actually is another shore on the other side. In the historical scenario, this would mean, in the last instance, to *relinquish* the ‘playful freedom’ achieved in the aesthetic state to the patriarchic freedom of the law.

The ‘playfulness’ of the aesthetic ‘free play’, however, only works dialectically, and not historically: As freedom from both the purely sensible, material world, and from the law of reason. Both constraints have to be left behind to achieve the playfulness that aesthetic experience promises. The possibility to be free of both material and paternal constraints – and to play games that as yet are not subject to any rules – exists, in real life, only in the state of childhood, phylogenetically speaking. Ontogenetically, this early phase – from which, strangely enough, the *Juno Ludovisi* comes to us – is the childhood of humankind; this ideal state about which, in the quote above, Rancière writes: “The Greek people are supposed to have lived such a life, the autonomy of which is expressed in the self-containment of the statue. The accuracy or otherwise of that vision of ancient Greece is not at issue here.” This autonomy of Greek life, which not only Schiller, but Hegel still presume is, as we know – and as Rancière himself is prepared to admit – highly questionable. The homogeneity of the *polis* that forms the basis of Aristotle’s ethics is, as I have showed elsewhere,¹² predicated on extensive mechanisms of exclusion: the exclu-

¹¹ „Mit einem Wort: es gibt keinen andern Weg, den sinnlichen Menschen vernünftig zu machen, als dass man denselben *zuvor* ästhetisch macht.... weil *nur aus dem ästhetischen*, nicht aber aus dem physischen Zustand der moralische sich entwickeln kann“ (92, 94; emphasis mine).

¹² For this, as well as a thorough analysis of the Kantian sublime, cf. Thomas Claviez, *Aesthetics & Ethics. Otherness and Moral Imagination from Aristotle to Levinas and from Uncle Tom’s Cabin to House Made of Dawn*. Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008.

sion of those which, according to Rancière, have no part. It is, however, only in view of the freedom from any constraints (or exclusions) that the aesthetic as defined by Schiller, in clear contradistinction to Kant and the sublime law, can enact such a play.

Equality then means, at least in one half of Schiller's concept of aesthetics (he indeed he hardly uses the word equality) the absence of any constraint, any law. Neither, that is, the material constraints that would force the workers in Rancière's book *The Night of the Workers* to read at night (when they should sleep), nor the constraints imposed by a policing state that wants to keep them without a voice. As far as equality goes, Schiller mentions it at the very end of the *Letters*, where he writes: "Here, then, in the realm of aesthetic appearance, is fulfilled the ideal of equality which the visionary would fain see realized in actuality also" (140).¹³ This equality, however, is only reached through educating the "lower and numerous masses", in which – according to a Schiller still under the impression of the French Revolution – "we find crude, lawless impulses which have been unleashed by the loosening of the of the bonds of civil order, and are hastening with ungovernable fury to their brutal [*tierisch*] satisfaction."¹⁴ Not only does Schiller here talk about animals – a distinction that, drawn by Aristotle, Rancière takes up to show a partition that disenfranchises those who allegedly only howl like animals from those who have a genuine voice in the politics;¹⁵ moreover – and more problematic – there is the fact that, in order to educate, you have to presume that there is someone to be educated – that is, someone as yet uneducated; someone, consequently, certainly not "equal" to the one who is doing the educating.¹⁶ That is, the existence of the artist qua educator – and art qua educational and liberating tool – is itself part of a partition of the sensible that allows for both; a partition that allots both

¹³ „Hier also in dem Reiche des ästhetischen Scheins wird das Ideal der Gleichheit erfüllt, welches der Schwärmer so gern auch dem Wesen nach realisiert sehen möchte“ (123–124).

¹⁴ „[...] sich uns rohe gesetzlose Triebe dar[stellen], die sich nach aufgelöstem Band der bürgerlichen Ordnung entfesseln, und mit unlenksamer Wut zu ihrer tierischen Befriedigung eilen“ (20).

¹⁵ Cf. *Disagreement*, 21–22.

¹⁶ For a critical analysis of Rancière's concept of education, especially as regards his *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, cf. the excellent collection of essays gathered in Jason E. Smith and Annette Weisser (2011).

educated and educator a place. The aesthetic regime thus paradoxically presupposes the very partition that – at least in its dialectical version – it tries to abolish; and one in which, in its historical version, it tries to abolish itself.

Lastly – and here I would like to come back to the figure of the *Juno Ludovisi* – does it indeed not play any role whatsoever whether what we – or, for that matter, Schiller – project onto the statue, or what Rancière repeatedly, and in a more general manner, calls the “promise” of the aesthetic, can be assumed to have existed? Can, in the case of the statue, the promise of “the ‘self-sufficiency’ of a collective life that does not rend itself into separate spheres of activities, of a community where art and life, art and politics, life and politics are not severed one from another”, be kept apart from the supposition that “the Greek people ... have lived such a life” – especially in light of what Rancière criticizes as the “ethical regime” of Plato and the “ethical turn” taken by Lyotard and Agamben? That is, can Rancière, though keen to avoid any closer reference to any ethics implied in his approach, playfully circumvent to address it? And address it in a way that, in turn, takes into account the pitfalls of Schiller who wants to have the Kantian cake of morality and dialectically eat it, too? Joseph Tanke, in his very lucid introduction to Rancière, legitimately questions whether “the overall lesson of [Schiller’s] aesthetic is equality” (146), or not rather, as the concept of ‘free play’ would seem to suggest, freedom. However, as Tanke points out, this raises the subsequent question “why ... the mind’s freedom” would imply “a promise of equality with others?” (ibid.). The rather simple answer to this question is that freedom always also constitutes the freedom to be different. And while Rancière’s concept of equality – which, as he argues, has to be “presupposed” in order not to be perpetuated indefinitely – plays an equally important role as does “dissensus” in his work, there does not exist, in my view, a thorough discussion as to how the two correlate to each other. In fact, I would argue that the two enjoy the same, ambivalent relationship as do the precarious dichotomies in Schiller’s (proto)dialectics: they are somehow “sublated”, but rather in the sense of “cancellation” that the English translation of Schiller’s letter uses. A thorough reading of Rancière suggests that, as in Schiller, the two are also caught up in two different “dialectics”, one dialectic-synchronic, the other didactic-diachronic. On the one hand, dissensus and equality are co-existent, and partly precondition, partly contradict each other: it is the assumption of

equality that creates the dissensus, and it is only through dissensus that something like equality may be expressed, let alone achieved. On the other hand, if dissensus would come first, it would affect the central assumption of equality, as there might be a dissensus as to this very equality. One of the roots of this problem is that Rancière tries to desperately avoid the problem of ethics which he connects with the hierarchical regimes imposed by both Plato and Lyotard/Agamben (cf. *Dissensus*, 62–75), but that are also inextricably linked to notions such as equality and dissensus. In fact, and paradoxically so, ethics only exists due to dissensus (otherwise, there would be no need for it), but has, traditionally, been based on assumptions of sameness. If one were to take otherness seriously, however, one would indeed have to fall back on notions (if modified, cf. Claviez, 155–171) of the sublime – as do Lyotard and Agamben. This, in turn disrupts any dialectical or playful sublation or cancellation of the aesthetico-political game that Rancière pursues, as both equality and dissensus seem to inhabit the very relationship between those terms in both Schiller and Rancière. The Other – as Emmanuel Levinas, who leads a spectral existence in the writings of Rancière, has shown us – if taken seriously, undermines both freedom and equality.¹⁷ And it defies any notion of "gaming".

¹⁷ Although Rancière repeatedly resorts to the "Other" writ large, and even alludes to the concept of the "face" so central to the ethics of Levinas (most prominently in *Disagreement*, 135–140) he, strangely enough, to my knowledge at no point takes issue directly with Levinas. Levinas' ethics of the other is developed in his two major works *Infinity and Totality*. Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969 and *Otherwise Than Being*. Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1981.

Abstract

In seinem gesamten Oeuvre unterscheidet Jacques Rancière wiederholt zwischen einem „ethischen Regime der Bilder“, das er Plato zuordnet, einem „repräsentativen Regime der Kunst“, dessen Ursprung er in Aristoteles verortet, und einem „ästhetischen Regime der Kunst“, dessen Name eng mit Friedrich Schiller verbunden ist. Dieses ästhetische Regime, dessen Aktualität und bleibende Relevanz Rancière entgegen aller vermeintlichen Unterschiede von Realismus, Moderne und Postmoderne behauptet, basiert stark auf dem emanzipatorischen Potential, das Schiller in seinen Briefen *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* dem „freien Spiel“ der ästhetischen Erfahrung zuschreibt. Die kritische Analyse der Briefe, die hier vorgenommen wird – insbesondere bezüglich der problematischen Absetzbewegung gegen das kantische Erhabene – soll die Grenzen einer solchen politischen Lektüre Schillers für das Werk Rancières aufzeigen.