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Inhuman Evanescence

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In On the Shores of Politics Rancière describes the task of politics as giving substance to the evanescent moment which regulates the multiplicity of ecstatic pleasure found in the demos, what he calls a 'jubilant' ethics. Evanescence is found in the 'in-between.' The evanescent moment is defined as the event of 'the philosophical realisation of the art of politics' (Rancière, 1995: 19). As these three trajectories of art, politics and philosophy coalesce to transform themselves as in-between discourse they emancipate the evanescent moment from being an ideational or mythic impossible utopia, opening out the possibility of a realisable utopia. The future of the image and the flesh of words are found through their seduction in excess of meaning as anticipation, gesture and effect. These ideas have many resonances with queer theory. As Rancière corporealises politics, so too queer theory takes representations of subjectivity and sexuality away from centralised human positions into a dissipative multiplicity.

Rancière's exploration of the philosophical encounter between art and politics shows that the effacement of a centre effaces the concept of the subject as not empirical but constitutive, and 'becoming-inhuman ... is the very language whereby *aesthetic* fiction is opposed to *representative* fiction' (2007: 126). Genius, according to Rancière, is 'not knowing,' jubilation not being an ethics found in the unrepresentable but nonetheless encountered. The category of the human seems a broad and ambiguous category, but at its core the human is used as a vindication for the search for affirmation of the powers inherent in those who seek their own categorisation as worthy subjects who simultaneously decide who counts as human and who does not. The concept precedes selves to coalesce multiple intensities into categories prepared for the possibility of existing, not the potentialities of existence. The parameters of the human offer liberation to their oppressed when alterity is included in the subsets of different possibilities of being human or when the other achieves

acceptable levels of registers of being human enough. Being human can be said to be capable of one kind of perception and perceptibility. This mode is formulated by all orders of signification and all things having to be signified so they may be ordered. Nothing escapes. Concepts of the inhuman and a-human do not oppose the human. The prefix a-, a-desire, a-signification and a-human, denotes without connoting. It is before, between and beyond, most importantly without signification and opposition. 'A-' prefixed terms are no less concrete or material for being such, they simply demand the 'we' that perceives after. We seek catalysts to become inhuman and a-human in order to go without. A-humanity is neither human nor not human. The very category itself is no longer available, either for purposes of evaluation or existence. Sexuality is an example where becoming-inhuman requires a not-knowing and not-being, not through what Rancière critiques as nihilistic humanism, but the human becoming-aesthetic, an enfolded corporeal aestheticisation of politics, not a series of empty shopping-list perversions. Art offers us the connection with assignifiable particles that demand either we perceive beyond human comprehension, or the art cannot emerge. A-humanism does not seek additions, opposites or radical others. The inhuman shows the hypocrisy of history evaluating worthy, rational and civilised behaviour premised on the spectre of the category human being register of the qualities of actions and knowledge. Unethical behaviour is described as inhumane, while the human is refined in its capacity for unethical behaviour and the amorphous not-human (usually animal) is maligned as representative of the unethical qualities which make us human, but which we rationalise as not human because we have the power to name them as such. Becoming a- and inhuman gifts the comfort of being a subject to possible encounters with the outside – within self and connected to other elements as a band of consistency, potentiality beyond possibility, thought beyond knowledge, perception beyond what we believe is able to be perceived (and how). The scariest part is that we continue to exist when there are no categories. The gift of self should be scary, because politics is about risk. Rancière's ethics offer techniques of regulating the risks and limits of queer and the politics of sexual aesthetics – the evanescent in-betweens of desire, seduction and the body as anticipation, jubilation and gesture.

A democracy of queer raises a series of issues which both address the past political mobilisation of a queer voice and queer addressee, leading to the difficulty of thinking a community of queer. I will lead this to a configuration of queer subjectivity as an artistic mode of expression – queer as art. Through Rancière's elaborations of the art of words and the art of images, played out in a theatre of material expression which replaces any adherence to the pitfalls of the idea of performativity, this article will explore the suggestion by many philosophers, such as Lyotard (1991), Guattari (1995), Foucault (1997), Blanchot (1993, 2003) and Deleuze (1994), that art belongs to and makes us inhuman and a-human, negotiating the very premise of the human, and thus by being art, queer is beyond the human. A turn

toward queer desire in thought potentialises an inhuman and thus ethical mode of desire.

Where does Rancière's work fit in with the more established paradigm of the constitution of queer theory as a theoretical and activist movement? The catalyst for my, and arguably most, lines of queering through Continental philosophy comes from the rich body of work, which has prevailed especially since the early 1990s, particularly from theorists such as Judith Butler, Teresa de Lauretis, Eve Sedgwick, David Halperin and others. This essay will take Rancière as part of the group of theorists of the inhuman cited above to show that not only can all texts be queered but we can, optimistically, queer all theorists to dissipate and make dissonant the uses, effects and perverse relations between theorists and subjects to open up futures. This leads to the question why I have chosen a very specific trajectory within which to contextualise the queering of Rancière, which is through the 'canon' of Continental philosophy and, especially in light of the crucial role feminism had to play in the inception of queer theory, why I have not chosen feminist Continental philosophy for my queering which could occur through, for example, Luce Irigaray, Michelle Le Doeuff, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Arguably, it is the very philosophers who risk the criticism of fetishising and subsuming queer and feminine alterity which need to be addressed in order to disorient these risks. These feminists have done precisely this, so this essay can be considered, as well as an alternate trajectory to the queer theory of the 1990s and today, one which comes from, but will not explicitly deal with, these feminists' work on art and within Continental philosophy.

The inception of queer theory was marked by its adamant inflection with politics, where discourse and activism were not bifurcated. Butler considers Foucault's persistent troubling analysis of sex as taking the category of sexuality as a 'monolithic unity' (1994: 3). Butler's critique seeks to take one of the key thinkers of Continental Philosophy out of that canon and into the, at least discursive, streets. Thus early queer theory paved the way for discussions of what could, problematically, be called activist queering of 'real life' experiences; race, AIDS (the number of authors dealing with both these issues are enormous) which has been extended to other modes of illness (Diedrich, 2007), disability (McRuer, 2007), the concept of political, activist and subjective freedom (Winnubst, 2006) amongst many other elements of subjectivity. Here lies a necessary contradiction. These despotic elements of alterity colliding with queer add on to multiply elements of singular constitutive paradigms which elicit oppression so that the other is now emphatically more than one. Discussion often limits itself to what has been (experience) and what is to come (sometimes inclusion, sometimes a radicalisation of modes of perception). Liberation comes in my use of Rancière and other theorists of the in- and a-human through the falling away of the human rather than the becoming-human which is still needed but along a different trajectory of enquiry. Lee Edelman demarcates that 'the most crucial and constitutive dramas of human life are those that can never be viewed

head on, those that can never be taken in frontally, but only approached from behind' (Edelman, 1994: 175). Edelman claims the front on gaze sees nothing, which Irigaray's work would dismiss as a phallogoc search premised by female sexuality/genitalia as having nothing to see or seen as nothing only through a human gaze (Irigaray, 1985: 47). His mastery of Freud is one of anally (re)productive philosophy. By claiming his work resists gay theory as based on 'human experience' (1994: xvi) Edelman emphasises the problems with *both* terms, however he insists on gay identity, even if it is one of performance over registering. Seeking the dramas is a ruse for actualising the human, constituted by the affirmation of the possibility of the human which precludes the search. Edelman urges theoretical transgression within activist discussion and vice versa.

Queering, like all philosophical enquiries, is formed of a constellation of specific territories which intersect to create their own unique terrains. Butler's connection between the difficulties of rationality as it is responsible to actual corporeal human beings can be seen in her discussion of Levinas. She states that responsibility 'cannot be tied to a conceit of a self fully transparent to itself ... *reason's limit is the sign of our humanity*' (2005: 83, my emphasis). Art as a-human catalyst is experienced beyond systems of logic and so can be used to navigate Butler's recognition that reason makes us human and we are human because we claim that truth is found through reason. The Enlightenment thought she criticises herself for seeing as a necessary residue toward ethics is precisely what Rancière and other philosophers of the inhuman forsake. Butler's connection resonates with that of queer activism needing to be rational in order to be perceived at all. Continental philosophers were often writing as a response to remarkable, radical and historically significant real life events, such as May 1968, the Reale Law, the Gulf War and so forth. The original publication dates and the spirit of their writing are, sadly, beyond the scope of this essay. However it is an undeniably unfortunate sacrifice. While I suggest their concepts seek a-humanity as an ethical turn, they are very much part of their own concrete political moments. The proliferation of trajectories and the strange relations they create, rather than their commensurability or incommensurability with 'activism' and 'identity,' is a queer manoeuvre.

Rancière claims equality is not democracy and justice not the management of wrong (1999: 63). The traditional relation of politics to philosophy posits philosophy as an analysis which comes after the political sphere, and only when philosophy replaces politics can politics be achieved. The place of *demos*, before the performance of a philosophy, is retarded.

The *demos* is there, with its three features: The erecting of a sphere for the name of the people to appear; the unequal count of this people that is both whole and part at the same time; the paradoxical revelation of the dispute by a part of the community

that identifies with the whole in the very name of the wrong that makes it the other party. (1999: 62)

The place of the *demos* describes our condition of emergence and recognition as a human one, because only humans can populate a political democracy and only by being acknowledged in this place of *demos* can we count as human, by virtue of these three features. These three features themselves are what define humanity and thus humanity is simply a pre-formed space of occupation which occurs when the material actuality of certain flesh is occupied by these features. A queer politics is prevented from emerging as a philosophy of queer when the queer community comes into being only through the context by which it could emerge in the antecedent order of signification. The fight for recognition would then homogenise queer while ghettoising it as other. Queer would find its political position transgressed through the elements of the antecedent order and seek to identify with the dominant order so that it may count as part of that order. This justifies the conditions of oppression because it seeks those conditions to no longer oppress the now reified community of queer, what Rancière points out is the 'emergence of a part identical with the whole' (1999: 61). Many issues arise here which refer back to the very conditions of possibility by which queer theory emerged in the 1990s as a necessary and combative politics. The politics of homosexuality, beginning with the fight for equal recognition and rights of gay men, which then became an incremental inclusive politics of the 'add-on' – lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and so forth – did identify with the oppressor as the politics first incepted the peopling of the oppressive regime with recognition of new kinds of people who had been 'wronged.' To be righted was to be made a minority with an ambition to be subsumed, but still always as a minority, into the majority. Righting the wrong atrophied the other through the system of the same and subsumation vindicated the system itself by only offering inclusion, not paradigmatic shifts, in the mechanisms of emergence.

Beyond lesbian, gay and transgender theory, queer both challenges the subjectivisation of sexual alterity and the space of the *demos*. It demands encounters with desire which are not, as Rancière laments of politics, the result of policing – righting the wrong, participation without interference – but of expression and multiplicity. The expression of queer is a voice without commonality, a community of the uncommon, not because each queer participant is different but because the tenets of the category itself are neither forthcoming nor deferential to particular conditions of possibility that ensure the structure by which the future may emerge. When the *demos* demands a response by the oppressed to the question which does not yet exist, it performs the elliptical function of subjectivisation of which Rancière is so critical in his negotiation of Althusser. 'The field of knowledge is thus structured as a weaving of questions and answers that do not belong to each other but whose very disparity is an earnest of sufficiency: an enormous reserve of answers to bad questions waiting for good questions' (Rancière, 2004: 133) . Gays, lesbians and other

sexual minorities were allowed political inclusion when their questions fitted with the pre-formed answers awaiting them. Their structure was a question to which the answer existed and thus their political liberation was already its own new form of oppression. What, then, did queer do to this system? Rancière sees philosophy with politics as encompassing 'phrased chaos, linkages without syntax, whispering, music and other expressive voices' (2007: 58-9). A politics of queer is impossible within this logic of speech. A unified voice of the oppressed or non-included must be a different kind of voice, not one with a different content. It is the 'subject' of the speaking subject that must change, not the speech (the perversion of which will necessarily follow). The shift from speech to sonority, timbre, whispers and other vocal aberrations inclines toward a queer mode of expression as one of art not politics, or politics as art. This is what Rancière demands when he calls for a political philosophy as politics without politics, metapolitics, the politics of gaps and the beyond. 'Anti-representative art is constitutively an art without un-representable things. There are no longer any inherent limits to representation, to its possibilities. This boundlessness also means that there is no longer a language appropriate to a subject, whatever it might be' (Rancière, 2007: 137). The ethical turn occurs when the jubilation toward possibilities and impossibilities of art simultaneously addresses what Rancière, discussing Lyotard, calls 'an ethical logic of denunciation of the very phenomenon of representation' (Rancière, 2007: 131). Rancière sees the bearing down of structures upon the events through which they are incarnated as irreducibly singular, as planes of expression. For Rancière discourse is never extricable from events, which is where disagreement differs from Lyotard's differend (Rancière, 1999: xi).

By enhancing alternative modes of expression without privileging any one mode or one constitutive expressive form, Rancière circumvents, and offers a salient warning against, the risks of hyper-performativity or what he calls exaggeration of elements of alterity, which are transgressive or considered inherently more arty or unrepresentable than any other. The object of representation is there, irrefutably, undeniably, perhaps even devastatingly. It is not a shadowy simulacrum which revels in the perceived lack of its own presence. However, it is unrepresentable and the event of our experience of it unthinkable (Rancière, 2007: 130-31). Lyotard invokes the contradiction in the sublime where we must bear witness to what cannot be apprehended as testament to itself but which is indeterminate. Rancière's attention to the incommensurable notion in Lyotard's critique of a structuring of the sublime laments the impasse in creating a relation between unrepresentability and un-thinkability as itself establishing a dialectic of indeterminacy. What Rancière's redemption of Lyotard offers is the idea of a submission (Rancière, 2007: 136) – by the object and presumably the event itself, a painful experience of desire because we must bear witness to the impossible without renouncing the event. Here Rancière sees Lyotard offering a way out of Hegel's end of art, where the beyond insinuates 'bad infinity' (Rancière, 2007: 136). Rancière both extends and circumvents Lyotard's sublime beyond as a fidelity to an original debt.

Correspondence between representation and aesthetics is repudiated for correspondence as a paradoxical event that encounters the event of its own system of making the desiring aesthetic moment possible, not as nomenclature but indeterminacy with accountability. Such a configuration of the event resonates with queer desire which, while being indeterminate and outside traditional sexual dialectics, nonetheless accounts for its affects and shows fidelity to its own paradoxes. The conditions of presence are altered. Here is where the ethics of the shift from queer as political to queer as art occurs. Beyond a politics of inclusion with the risks of the three tenets of the *demos* queer is absolute, it is everything as object, not an aberrant object. As queer we are neither the same nor disparate, neither unified nor multiple. A-human beings seeking alternate revocations with perception and relation. Rather than, as Rancière critiques, vocalising a desire for representation which leads to the perils of performative exaggeration, we queers are *desiring*.

In a political philosophy of queer, desire is voluminously present but without the possibility of re-presentation because it is never the same as itself. It is better then to understand desiring as a-desire, permanently present, beyond object, limit or consciousness. Certain terms arise which seem antithetical to post-structuralism's repudiation of essence, but it is precisely where these emerge that Rancière redeems the vacuity of much post-modern thought and art and reminds us of the material ethics post-structuralism seeks. Political collectivity *is* apolitical, but only insofar as it is a living paradox, with the emphasis on life – neither metaphor nor analogy. The grave question of how to activate politics as a living paradox beyond these two temptations is also the question without answer, or, as discussed above, the answer which cannot find a suitable question. Art is politics without syntax, activism paradox through ecstasy, the constant state of queer as desiring. Extricating itself from the syntaxes of desire – for the object, its mode of subjectivisation or voice, emergence through recognition-representation and most crucially for the appropriate question to which the self-object is the 'good' or 'bad' answer – queer desiring is ecstasy. Ecstasy, like art, like the event, is immanent. It is beyond causality and pre-formed futurity. It is what the subject is, not what the subject is in, like queer desiring, the noun itself becomes verb. But it has very definite, concrete affective qualities and brings into being, through the unique qualities of its ecstasies, new patterns of possibility, perception and expression. It is adamant in the relations it creates but queer as a state of desiring cannot represent or describe, only acknowledge and reflect on, the specificity of new conditions produced. Ethical address comes from the distancing of self from self to momentarily slow the space-state of ecstasy to allow the self to recede. The interval is the point of reflection but because events of ecstasy are un-representable ethical reflection can only ever be a fleeting relation of proximity and affectivity. It cannot be reflected upon as an externalised and reified strategy of address – a desiring relation between two. It presents, as the necessary impossible of observing, the effects and dissipations of objects through desire without ever being able to be an observer.

Like ecstasy itself, art as politics hurts as much as it pleasures, and, like politics, is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong, but 'the double specificity of political dialogue' (Rancière, 1999: 43). Political rationality comes from a freeing from choice – good/bad, pleasure/pain, right/wrong – thus the in-between and the beyond takes as its first moment the forsaking of duality, which Rancière states serves subjectivity. Subjectivity serves also the division between logic and alogia, the division of 'man' as machine with rationality. To adhere to this division, remaining faithful to the perceived extrication of *logos* from the mechanical animal of Aristotle, stays with the arithmetic of the animal as plane of exchange and allocation. Queer can neither be allocated nor exchanged. It also cannot serve its own subjectivity as the subject is mobilised. So the speech of queer politics is simultaneously animal and logical, thus it must be a-human. Rancière sees political speech as 'at once argumentative and poetical' because we are no longer the "we" nor the identity assigned to it' (Rancière, 1999: 59). Queer manifests as politically real, as actual flesh which virtualises new possibilities of further actualisations of constantly new flesh, but there is no 'we' and no identity. Logic comes from the a-human non-we but is logical as it uses language to elaborate and think, actualise and incant. The relations this logic makes are tangible and its effects are irrefutable. A-human logic sees no animal-human division of sense-thought; a-representation does not follow an art/subject divide; and a-reality accepts material reality without signification or reification. Desiring as and through these is how queer desire emerges, as art, against the politics of inclusion, allocation, measurement and policing.

Rancière suggests 'the power of art [equates with] the obliteration of the boundaries between the human and the inhuman, the living and the dead, the animal and the mineral, all alike merged in the density of the sentence or the thickness of the pictorial paste' (Rancière, 2007: 27). What much Continental philosophy has offered in its own negotiation of subjectivity is precisely why none have dealt with sexuality as object. Queer as a self, even if it is an expressive power of self, while encompassing the kind of activist philosophy often necessary for pragmatic alterations in, for example, law and rights, is incommensurable with residual subjectivity as a desiring subject. More correctly, Continental philosophy's queer subject is neither subject nor queer-subject, as we find in Rancière's work the shift from noun object to adjectival element (Rancière, 1999: 72). The shift is not simply for the minority because as stated above, the grouping of the oppressed is unsatisfactory for a turn toward the evanescent *demos*. The extrication, however, between alterity itself and the dominant takes risks if the dominant is also not acknowledged as an expression of force – a kind of *style*, whose adaptability to offer the answer which demands the oppressed choose the correct question in order to be included, knows no limits. Thus by not privileging queer as expressive force against the dominant as atrophied group, Rancière makes clear the in-between space as decentering both elements, and thus the opposition itself dissipates, forcing all engagement to alter their tactics and thus the nature of their grouping.

The phantasy of the collective insinuates a relatively straightforward wiping out of that group. The dance of the transgressive (but never for their own sake) with the dominant is precisely that: a gestural dance where the making evanescent of the spaces of the dance – the territory or *demos* and the puissance of the conjugal relations of bodies as political matter – is the focus. Where all are queer none are queer-ed but all desire becomes accountable as its own affective specificity and power. Thus Rancière in his collapse of binaries names them boundaries, spaces and tempos rather than demarcated entities. The binaries which collapse do not privilege the space between but the consistency of the qualities of relations when their categorisation disappears, so even the notion of both and neither becomes unsatisfactory. The matter of elements is a question. The political ethic tries to address (but not answer) the question of the specificity of relation without breaking it into one of two, or two plus the space between as a privileged third site. So the question asks how do we shift politics from oppositional activism to dance? As dance is gestural art, it is part of two art forms Rancière focuses on – poetry and the image. Art is not different to politics but understanding politics through and as art may allow differing modes of expression of alterity imperative to all. As my interpretation of Rancière argues, the inhuman will be not opposed to the human, but will be all. This creates a resonance with the aims of queer as de-fetishising sexual alterity to demand an acknowledgement of the constant state of desire present within all subjects and relations that simultaneously demands accountability. The density and consistency matter (and materialise the matter). The question is not what but how? How, when queer is art, does politics shift the *demos*?

Two elements are emphasised in the work of Rancière, neither of which are extricated from nor de-politicised: the image, which encompassed anything that is visually apprehended (or a-apprehended), and the word. Rancière demarcates three orders of the image. The naked image refuses any possibility of resemblance as it testifies to an absolute reality thus does not define itself as art. The ostensive image, while acknowledging itself as art, claims a pure presence without need for a signified. If the naked image testifies to absolute reality then the ostensive does so to pure art. The metaphorical image is defined by dissemblance and delimitation, creating localised singular consistency. The metaphorical is always a relation. But it does not oppose the norm with the not-norm, the traditional with the subversive; it is a plane of disfiguration or 'shared surface' (Rancière, 2007: 105). Pure art and impure art are not two principles but differing organisations on the same plane (Rancière, 2007: 105-6). The question is how can we queer the organisation? By way of a tactical explication of resonances, but in no way one which seeks to make commensurable the elements of the image with that of queer, how can these three organisations show the possible emergences of a queering?

The first organising principle addresses the human most directly. For this reason I will survey the naked image in that it may help negotiate

the crucial, problematic and ultimately indecidable issue of 'real life' politics and queer as 'theory.' As queer (as opposed to, say, the use of a politics of desire in most Continental philosophy) came from specific issues of the rights of certain bodies and the irrefutable violence perpetrated upon the bodies of these minorities, I think it essential to raise the issue of 'real life violence,' to which most naked images testify. This offers a way in which Rancière's work on art can help queer theory as political philosophy to go beyond the real-life/theory split, while still acknowledging the suffering of bodies. Testimony to naked reality is a difficult but perhaps necessary phantasy of relation. Witnessing an image of the absolute reality of an event requires a belief in that event without our presence. Our presence thus must be imagined as real in front of the image whose event-reality lacks in us, while the reality of the event, poverty stricken in its lack of us at the moment of its reality, demands our belief in that reality. The subject and authenticity need to be retained to an extent. Frequently these kinds of images are testifying not to a reality – they are rarely ordinary – but a horrific event and lamentation of 'inhumanity,' the suggestion that for something to be inhuman means it is nothing more than a brutish devaluation of the human. This insipidly insinuates that both everything that is not human is inhuman, thus brutal, and that the human should be valued more than anything. Most often these events are never about the image or even testament to its reality. The real is neither the event of the image nor the authenticity of the spectatorial relation. It refers to one of the few ideas which are irrefutable, namely death. It is a rare case when 'death of what' as a post-structural negotiation of subjectivity loses its force. The political territory is not one of reality/phantasy, falsity/truth or presence/lack but of the effects by which a turn to this kind of image taken as real can show the horror of the powers of a certain treatment of other emergences of 'life' upon a specific territory of relation. It is precisely because the territory is seen to be 'human' only in so far as certain persons are understood as counting or not counting as human that these events of violence happen.

These images are testament to a particular configuration of the organisation of elements, and this organisation is precisely that which is most traditionally understood as human. The human organises the territory and the witnessing of that image. But, as Rancière points out, 'one must annihilate oneself and also annihilate one's claim to be an interpreter' (Rancière, 2004: 85). Indeed, Rancière sees the imperative to take the word as real in its affects as both absurd and annihilating the very flesh of the reader, as a wound. (This argument raises many complex and impossible issues addressed by Lyotard (1988), Derrida (1992) and Nancy (2000) among others). What I am concerned with here is not the issue of testaments of violence *per se* but of territories which result in it. Knowledge of an event does little. Thought incited through the encounter with an image demands a response to the conditions of the territory by which an event occurred. Some issues which could express a naked relation of queer are most obviously the acts and results of the refusal of rights for sexual others.

The focus on rights creates an unsatisfactory *demos* of subsumation and simultaneous expulsion. Just as we may ask 'what do queers have in common' which demands a homogenisation of an oppressed group, we also ask what benefits are gained by bearing witness to the oppression of 'queers'? A relation of art with the naked image insinuates naked qualities of the oppressed. Queer emerged as a direct and radical repudiation of any grouping of persons based on shared sexual standpoint politics. Like the image which doesn't necessarily name the victim of violence, queer doesn't name its inherent qualities – not what we are but *that* we are. As it is difficult to understand queer extricated from a binary of being opposed to another term, queer offers an escape route from the problems of categorisation Rancière sees as working against a political philosophy, no matter how adamant and eventually 'recognised' we are. Queer was both a term which includes all and fights against the increasing taxonomy which came about through gay (and lesbian and transgender *and... and... and*). If the human is the ubiquitous category for every subject then counting as human necessitates a categorisation (always within a hierarchy, always essentialized in order to find the appropriate space). Covertly sexual rights came from the demarcation of certain desire and queer saw the problems with shifting from counting to not counting. Queer then was an escape, from binary to boundary.

A queer art, which in this essay posits queer as an art politics, can be testimony to an event in that it neither accepts nor refuses. Rancière claims of art that it is always a slippage, and when it is given an impermeable genre or 'institutionalised' as unreal, the slippages of art-reality are denied. He says books are:

attestations to the existence of what they discuss ... Fiction forms part of reality as a particular space-time in which socially acceptable laws (passion drives one mad) produce fantastic consequences with which one can amuse oneself without trouble, since they do not go beyond the imaginary situation. (Rancière, 2004: 88-9)

We must believe in fiction as testament to its effects rather than as describing it as reality. Fiction which alters terrains queers desire for conservative economies of knowledge toward passions of thought. If the naked image demands testament without imagination it is because the events are unimaginable. Only thinking – imagining – the conditions of potentialities which made them emerge can apprehend the territory in order to acknowledge the gravity of the event. Irreducibly separating fiction and reality institutionalises the image as real but without any inflammation that demands we act. Fantastic consequences – ethical revolutions – can come only through realising the image as unimaginable but no less real for being so. Queering our relation with the naked image as one of art over raw testament is the only way ethical consequences can emerge. Rancière emphasises liberty comes only from incommensurables (Rancière, 1999: 42). The naked image sees art and reality as incommensurable and thus risks

turning from liberty, while the experience of the metaphorical image demands incommensurables as the very principle of opening new futures, 'a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations' (Rancière, 1999: 42).

The ostensive image may seem more appealing in 'confessing' itself as art. However, here I wish to take Rancière's use of art to its limit. Art is a practice of thought or, for Rancière, a labour (but without capital). The metaphorical image refuses art as extricated from other spheres as it functions as a playing on 'the ambiguity of resemblances and the instability of dissemblances' (Rancière, 2007: 24). If queer is the infinite in-between which knows not the binaries it is between, nor the nature of its own between-ness, then it can offer a form of art in that it is made of 'an articulation of two contradictory operations' (Rancière, 2007: 71). The collapses which invoke art as slippage perform for Rancière a perversion. While painting and words express, extend and occupy different spheres, they share the nature of art as 'the abolition of allocation' (Rancière, 2007: 105). Here we are reminded of the pitfalls of allocation and exchange discussed in *Disagreement*. The power of literature is the power 'of indeterminacy or metamorphosis ... [transformation] is indeed literal and at the same time it is not so' (Rancière, 2004: 153). Queer as desiring, rather than exemplifying a mode, expresses a labour which indeed plays on the ambiguity of resemblances in that it obstinately challenges its fellow desiring schemas to insert it. If queer desire exploits 'incorrect' object choices then queer desiring shows a space of incorrect desire as ubiquitous, as rudely subsuming, yet failing to be and being beyond, all other desires.

Modes of resemblance are challenges which may assist deconstructing traditional dialectics of desire. Queer doesn't resemble anything except its place within the broad category of desire, so its resemblance is always a dissemblance. For political philosophy, without genesis or destination, transformation still needs to come from some 'where' or some 'thing.' The speaking queer subject, even when understood as an expressive art manifestation, the space where queer fights its contestations, and the point of desire which incepts a need for queer political philosophy, are all necessary residues if we are to think the difficult task of queer as both grave and limitless, queer as art and no less activist for being so. Through the metaphorical image, art 'is no longer framed by an autonomous history of forms or a history of deeds changing the world. Thus art is led to query the radicalism of its powers, to devote its operations to more modest tasks' (Rancière, 2007: 24-5). The metaphorical image performs a double function – to cause rupture and to de-nullify the image's reduction to one of exchange, circulation and the absence of being a metaphor for anything else, which is, having no relations. After Rancière art could be the queery that is a response which comes from desiring radicalisation without simply becoming a radical. Queer desire is always and nothing more than the devastating rupture of concepts of desiring subjectivity and dialectics.

To return to the crucial element of Rancière's understanding of art however, images are metaphorical in that they perform actual operations but without being inherently present to themselves as art or to us as naked. They show art itself as performing resemblances and dissemblances, both with strange bedfellows (non-art, real-life – the naked) and with themselves (without metaphor – ostensive). In capitalism, after Lacan, access to any concept of desire beyond lack is compelled to negotiate with desire as everything, a shift back from want to archaic need. Queer need isn't a return to an infantile or atrophied state. It is a new need, an a-semiotic need, because it is an irresistible *must*. Desire that lacks wants a thing, a goal, an object and to be an object. It seeks its own allocation through the functioning of desiring operations which place the object of desire in its own correct place. Desire for equality, for reparation, for 'counting' is the double task of being enough like and enough unlike the dominant. At best the desiring other can become a fetishised transgressive who gets a place only because they are coveted for their powers which can at anytime be either replaced or slaughtered. At worst the desiring other is ghettoised. Slaughter and ghettoisation when we finally come to count are real issues with corporeally devastating actual effects resistant to signification, yet ironically they can be lamented and resisted only when the sexual other is signified.

This space of apparent real life politics is anti-politics for Rancière. But, as this so called real life political desire to count comes only via being signified, the desire and the self both belong to the space of the desire=lack, want=object systems. Queer will, and can never, count because it can't be counted, allocated, made equivalent. It has no opposite and thus its desiring project also has no other to covet. Queer is neither in opposition with nor equivalent to. This is true of both its self and its want. But it is nonetheless a deeply political philosophy; it comes about because we must still fight for a political philosophy; Yet, as we are compelled by Rancière to fight beyond the established system, we are fighting for and toward nothing we can apprehend or think. Like children – not pre-adult but pre-signifying – we have to have, we are sustained by... what? The 'what' is the trickiest point of political philosophy. It must be material enough to mobilise but amorphous, adaptive, and most importantly inconclusive; an expressive, gestural political philosophy or, as already suggested, a dance between rather than within spheres. Rancière's modest tasks of art are modest political spheres. Queer can't, and doesn't seek to, shift the territory of the world because this is an operation of replacement. Only modest little tasks can open spaces for new political philosophies, dissipating the territory without creating new allocations, like the oft cited example of a drop of water in a pond. Queer queries its radicalism, it is accountable, yet it is also necessary. Its powers of transformation are inevitable, like our inevitable need for certain things – food, water. Indeed, the shift from need to want is the crucial moment of being incepted as human. The need for desire means we no longer count as human. So it goes beyond and cannot be allocated to a certain system. Like art, queer is a creative expression of what is possible in that it expresses possibility itself –

potentiality. Art makes the ordinary extraordinary, it seduces us with elements as minute as they are grand, topics, frames, movement, particles which take our breath away. We don't know why or how, and rarely what, but the seductions of art create the openings that show us, not what is there to be seen, but that the possibilities of seeing and modes of desiring are infinite. The tasks occur within all space as the same, not a special artistic space. To love art is to love as art, and queer as political philosophy, but always coming from and associated with a politics of desire, can here be seen as a politics of art. Rancière's project of thinking a political philosophy could, without homogenising the specificities of each also include his work on art. When politics becomes art:

The art of politics is the art of putting the democratic contradiction to positive use; the *demos* is the union of a centripetal force and a centrifugal force, the living paradox of a political collectivity formed from apolitical individuals. The *demos* is forever drawing away from itself, dispersing itself in the multiplicity of ecstatic and sporadic pleasures. The art of politics must regulate the intermittency of the *demos* by imposing intervals which place its strength at a distance from its turbulence, at a distance from itself. (Rancière, 1995: 15)

Queer is a contradiction. Not between the binaries of desire which occur in reference to acts or objects, nor even between dominance and alterity. Queer elucidates the inevitable contradiction between being human and being overwhelmed at all moments, differing only in speeds and consistencies, by being not noun but verb, not a desiring subject but nothing more than 'a' *desiring* and a-desiring. Quiet moments of political tasks are tactical intervals.

Rancière discusses the lyrical mode of expressive speech as having a potentially democratic function as it speaks through the 'I' and mimetically, like the metaphorical image, without recourse to notions of authenticity, art as falsity and transparency. He raises the beautiful concept of meaning without sense but as sensory. Politics occupies 'the non-signifying, the non-representative' (Rancière, 1995: 13). The aesthetic revolution abolishes 'the distance between the *eidos* of the beautiful and the spectacle of the perceptible; the ability of the beautiful to make itself be appreciated without concept' (Rancière, 1995: 18). Poetry is the free play of imagination. The reconciliation between nature and liberty is the moment of politics. Rancière calls the poet the 'wanderer' (Rancière, 2004: 14) because freedom comes as a result of the freeing up of the allocation of concepts to perception. Accessing nature through imagination affords liberty. Nature is not its own sphere but simply that which must be perceived as it is in relation to us. This does not preclude or exclude self as part of nature. Crafting a queer self takes the self as the first point of nature which makes self an inextricable part of all territories and queer perception as an artistic plane. If nothing else, nature is the a-human. Art, requiring imagination, emphasises that the freedom to perceive comes with ethical accountability. Mimesis does not copy in relation to the perceived self but neither does it fail to acknowledge the external

element as compelling a form of perception. It wanders. It encounters as 'communication of feelings and of natural associations of ideas in a state of excitement' (Rancière, 1995: 19). These words, associated inevitably with desiring – the beautiful, excitement, sensation and sensuality – are not objects eliciting results. They describe the experience of philosophy, not of things. Like desiring, they are states because the beautiful causes excitement without conversion, indeed *because* there is no conversion. Here liberty could be found both in political philosophy and because of the difficulty of the task of political philosophy. Rancière calls sublime art the unthinkable:

Between what is visible and what is intelligible there is a missing link, a specific type of interest capable of ensuring a suitable relationship between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the expected and the unexpected ... Genius is an active power of nature, opposed to any norm, which is its own norm. But a genius is also someone who does not know what he is doing or how he does it ... the aesthetic revolution establishes this identity of ignorance and knowledge, acting and suffering, as the very definition of art. In it the artistic phenomenon is identified as the identity, in a physical form, of thought and non-thought, of the activity of a will that wishes to realise its idea and a non-intentionality, a radical passivity of being there (Rancière, 2007: 112-13, 119)

Queer desiring is often maligned for not knowing what it wants. It cannot because it doesn't know itself, only that it is a wanting self, voluminously so. There is no object to know, no concept to subsume. There is all of the world and what can materialise in it through the infinite tools available, primarily thought, that is wanted and to be wanted by. The a-human risks the self it does not know and this is why it is jubilant rather than sacrificial. It gifts itself nonetheless without debt or demand, because connections occur that no longer expose meaning through the abyss between self and other, observer and art, desiring subject and object. To lose oneself in this way is a form of grace. Grace may be encountered as the loss which is not felt as loss but as production of ecstasy. Queer thought not only incarnates in a physical form but its radical passivity shows an insurgent grace, seeking liberation and political ethos as much as the ecstasy of self as art.

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