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# Hatred of Democracy ... and of the Public Role of Education?

## Introduction to the Special Issue on Jacques Rancière

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### Abstract

*The article presents an introduction to the Special Issue on the French philosopher Jacques Rancière who raises a provocative voice in the current public debate on democracy, equality and education. Instead of merely criticizing current practices and discourses, the attractiveness of Rancière's work is that he does try to formulate in a positive way what democracy is about, how equality can be a pedagogic or educational (instead of policy) concern, and what the public and democratic role of education is. His work opens up a space to rethink and to study, as well as to 're-practice', what democracy and equality in education are about. He questions the current neutralisation of politics that is motivated by a hatred of democracy. This questioning is for Rancière also a struggle over words. Against the old philosophical dream of defining the meaning of words, Rancière underlines the need for the struggle over their meaning. The aim of the article is to clarify how and why education, equality, and democracy are a major concern throughout his work and to offer an introduction to the articles collected in the Special Issue.*

Keywords: Rancière, democracy, education, equality, school

### Introduction

Democracy and equality through (and in) education appears to be a major concern today: the organisation of democratic schools, the development of competencies for democratic citizenship and participation, policies on equal opportunities ... . Most of the current initiatives assume that the reduction of inequality and the development of democracy are essentially policy concerns and objectives, and a matter of organisational reform or curriculum reform. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière does not take this (policy, organisational, curricular) concern for democracy, inclusion and equality for granted. Indeed, he is somehow a provocative voice in the current public debate; he wants to challenge the insistence on current procedures of deliberative democracy, participation, consensus and agreement (e.g. *On the Shores of Politics* (2007a); *Hatred of Democracy* (2007b)), as well as the taken for granted (unequal) pedagogic relation between master

and pupils (e.g. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)). Instead of merely criticizing current practices and discourses, the attractiveness of Rancière's work is that he does try to formulate in a positive way what democracy is about, how equality can be a pedagogic or educational (instead of policy) concern, and what the public role of education is (since equality and democracy are for Rancière closely related to 'the public').

The aim of this Special Issue is twofold. First, it is an introduction to the political and educational ideas of an author who is not well known in the field of educational theory and philosophy—although he is one of the leading philosophers in and outside France. Second, the contributions not only present scholarly work 'on Rancière', but attempt to explore 'in line with Rancière' the current concern for democracy and equality in relation to education. Before we introduce the different contributions to this issue, we briefly indicate some of the main tenets of Rancière's work as well as some of his basic ideas that can help us to clarify the overall focus of this Issue.

### **Of Masters, Intellectuals and Inequality**

As a brilliant student of Louis Althusser at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris in the 1960s, Rancière immediately set the tone for his future work when he distanced himself radically from his 'master' in *La leçon d'Althusser* published in 1974.<sup>1</sup> This work indicated a general line of argument that has continued throughout his subsequent work. As one of the leading Marxist theorists at that time, Althusser had been very critical about the revolt of May 1968. He was, however, attacked by Rancière, not initially for his reading of Marx or his understanding of the May events, but for the fact that his theory was above all an educational theory that justified the eminent value and superiority of the masters (or the intellectuals) themselves over the workers (or the people). The masters, on this view, are those who 'think' and objectively 'know' how society operates and therefore are the owners of the truth about what happens and is the case. The workers are those who do not think but just act; they are ignorant about the laws of history and the logic of capitalism, which motivates and ultimately determines their actions; and they are captivated by illusions about their 'real' situation and are prisoners of ideologies or bearers of a false consciousness. According to Rancière, it was, therefore, a theory that legitimized the inequality and distance between those who know and the ignorant, those in need of the knowledge they lack in order to be emancipated and truly conscious, i.e. in need of the explanations of the master. Althusser's philosophical theory thereby confirmed and justified (as did most philosophy and educational theory according to Rancière) the labour division that gives it its place: the distinction between those who think and those who act, between those who know and the ignorant. Philosophy and educational theory assume the role of speaking for those whose supposed ignorance offers them their own reason for existence. Emancipation and (in)equality are thereby always related to knowledge and, hence, to the institution of a limit (or abyss/distance) between the ignorant and those who know. To a large extent Rancière's work is about the unsettlement, suspension or displacement of the connection/relation between emancipation and knowledge, and the implied border/limit-setting.

One of the most intriguing, disturbing and fascinating ways in which he did this was inspired by the ideas of the collective *Les révoltes logiques* (Collectif Révoltes Logiques,

1984),<sup>2</sup> which vividly documented the experiences and voices of workers/labourers of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century who transcended the limits imposed on them (e.g. *La Nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier* (1981); *Courts voyages au pays du peuple* (1990); *La parole ouvrière, 1830/1851* (Faure & Rancière 1976); *Louis-Gabriel Gauny. Le philosophe plebeian* (1985)). In his work Rancière approached these workers as equals and took seriously what they had to say about their conditions. More particularly, he revived more or less marginal figures whose emancipation consisted in claiming the time that the bourgeoisie claimed for itself: the time which is not the time of labour and necessity but free or dead time i.e. un-economic time. These were figures who claimed the right to think and thereby disrupted the definition of their social category as workers (who don't think but do/work). Although Rancière made sure these voices maintained their individual and historical specificity, he also decontextualised them by involving them in a diagnosis of the present and bringing them back in time, creating untimely voices that interfered in the timely debate on the issues of equality and democracy. It was also during his investigations in the archives of the labour movement, looking for the 'proper' voice of the 'people', that Rancière stumbled upon Joseph Jacotot, who at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century announced the equality of intelligence of all people and elaborated what he called 'universal teaching' including the possibility to teach what one does not know and the capacity of the illiterate to emancipate their children. This figure not only became the central character in Rancière's wonderful story of the '*Ignorant Schoolmaster*' but also continues to accompany him (closely) throughout all his work (there is indeed almost no text, where Jacotot does not in one way or another appear).<sup>3</sup> At the time of its publication in 1987 Rancière wanted to intervene through this story in the intellectual debate on the public role of education with regard to equality and democracy, which was a central debate in France at that time. The intervention took the form of an 'activation of the archives' (Badiou, 2006): a displacement, translation and repetition of the untimely discourse of Jacotot through a rephrasing and rewording of his story. A story that will also be recalled and retold extensively in various forms throughout this volume and that we, therefore, want to leave for now.

Rancière did not only revive the voices of emancipated people of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, but time and again criticized the intellectuals (sociologists, philosophers, historians, educationalists ...) who claimed to know the ignorance of the others, who thought that they had to explain this ignorance and to speak for those who don't know (as argued for example in his texts *The Philosopher and his Poor* (2004); *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1998); *Hatred of Democracy* (2007b)). According to Rancière, those intellectuals, including Althusser, Bourdieu, Milner among others, always teach us first and above all a lesson in inequality. While they always start from the assumption of inequality they continuously prove inequality, and by proving it they constantly rediscover it. For example, whether one conceives of the school as a machine that reproduces social inequality (Bourdieu) or as an instrument to reduce inequality (Milner), the effect remains the same: a distance is inaugurated and maintained between a future equality and a present inequality, between a future intellectual richness and an actual intellectual poverty. It is about a distance that is installed in the order of discourse and is reinstated and reconfirmed time and again. The effect is that the ignorant and the poor remain in their place (in the social order), the place which, according to the discourse, corresponds

to their 'nature' or their 'capacities'. Rancière is not looking for counter-arguments, however, but instead refuses the attitude or position that ascribes a body (also a social body) to a certain type of utterance and a certain place in the social order. In this context, Jacotot embodies the counter-position to Bourdieu, Althusser and Milner, in that he does not claim that inequality can or has to be undone gradually. Equality constitutes no criterion or goal that would define the time needed to transform today's society into what it should become in the future. Equality is for Jacotot the starting point, the axiom or hypothesis that fosters thought, experiment and invention. Equality is neither a promise nor an (empirical) fact, but a practical hypothesis to start with. Equality is a practice, not a reward in a distant future. Jacotot's 'lesson' in emancipation says that all people have at their disposal an equal intelligence and that emancipation means to actualise/realise this equal intelligence, i.e. the ability to speak, think and act.

### **On Lessons, Equality, Democracy**

Indeed, Rancière subtitled his story on Jacotot 'Five lessons in intellectual emancipation'. It is worthwhile to give this a moment's thought since it seems paradoxical to speak about lessons when one wants to question precisely the idea of education as the teaching of students by a master. In fact, Rancière's lessons in emancipation do not teach anything, they do not explain. They tell the story, recite the utterances and recall the actions of Jacotot in such a way that the experiences of Jacotot 'are blown out of the past into the present' in such a way that they can cut into the present (see Ross, 1991). These lessons do not explain, but tell a story. Telling stories is one of the two basic operations of any intelligence, according to Rancière/Jacotot, the other being 'to guess'. Both are operations to verify the equality of intelligence. Both start from equality. But can they then still be called lessons? A question even more pressing since it is difficult to define the genre of the text and the discipline to which it belongs (is it a philosopher, an educationalist/pedagogue, an historian who is the author?). The book seems to escape any clear classification. It disturbs the borders between genres and disciplines and the limits they define regarding what legitimately can be said (within the discipline) and what can't, what can be done (within a genre) and what can't. Moreover, this difficulty and uncertainty is increased by the fact that it is difficult to know who actually is speaking: Jacotot or Rancière? It is unclear who might be the author of the lessons, but it is equally unclear to whom the lessons might be addressed. There is no public that could be defined and positioned in relation to a science/knowledge that it would lack and need. The lessons have no real pupil/student. The book is not addressed to anyone in particular. It addresses individuals, not institutionalised actors (that is, actors defined by institutions as the school, scientific disciplines and departments, etc.). The lessons, thus, disturb the position of the author and of the reader, as well as the positions of the knowing and the ignorant. The question 'who teaches who?' loses its pertinence. The lessons are not teaching or explaining something, but are making something public, making it present so that we can relate to it, or not: 'It sufficed only to announce it' (Rancière, 1991, p. 18).

The lessons, then, are untimely and improper lessons in intellectual emancipation. But what is emancipation? Emancipation is not about becoming conscious of an exploitation, alienation or disregard of which one would not otherwise be aware. According to

Rancière, those who emancipate themselves did, and do, so by claiming and practicing a way of thinking, of speaking, and of living, which was not or is not ‘theirs’, which was not or is not appropriated and does not correspond to their birth, their destination, their proper nature. The act of emancipation is the decision to speak and think starting from the assumption of the equality of intelligences, the decision that one has the capacity and the time that one does not have properly, according to the reigning order and the partition of the sensible. The act of emancipation is the act of departure from the way in which one is assigned to a place in the social order, the act through which one disrupts the configuration in which one has a certain position and can see, say and do something (this configuration relates to the aesthetic dimension of politics), and therefore an act in which one distances one from oneself. Emancipation is not a change in terms of knowledge, but in terms of the positioning of bodies. In and through that act one confirms the power of equality, of non-partition. Confirming equality is therefore also always a way of dissolving a connection or a disentanglement and unravelling: words are being separated from the things that they define, the text is separated from what it says or from the reader for which it was meant, a body is withdrawn from the place it was assigned to, the language and capacities that were ‘proper’ to it. The act of emancipation is therefore, according to Rancière, also political, as it changes the aesthetic dimension of the social order; it reconfigures the territory of the sayable, seeable, thinkable, and possible.<sup>4</sup> It disrupts the consensus regarding the givens of the situation and simultaneously confirms and demonstrates the equality of a capacity: the intelligence as capacity to speak and to think.<sup>5</sup> In so far as the act of emancipation is at the heart of ‘universal teaching’, this teaching is therefore itself indeed a fragment or moment of politics. Its political significance is not related to the fact that it would prepare for future citizenship (the acquisition of the necessary competencies and knowledge to participate in democratic deliberation). Education is not a condition for politics and does not prepare for it, but it contains a particular experience of ‘being able to’ or ‘potentiality’ (a pedagogic subjectivation—see Simons & Masschelein in this Issue) that demonstrates equality. This pedagogic experience is itself also part of political moments as Rancière understands them, but does not coincide with them.

According to Rancière (1998), democracy should not be conceptualized as a political or governmental regime (of equal participation or representation) among other less democratic ones, but as the constitution of a political subject through a manifestation and demonstration of injustice or ‘a wrong’. For him, democracy is about the power of those who have no power, those who have no qualification in a particular social or governmental order and those who do not share what should be shared in order to partake in a society, community or social order. When these ‘unqualified’ or ‘incompetent’ people nevertheless do intervene they install a dissensus, that is, they demonstrate and verify that they are intellectually equal in the very act of intervention and that they are competent in view of the common from which they are nevertheless excluded.

Because the *vita democratica* refers to the power of the unqualified people or the capacity of those who are incapable (in view of the social order at stake) it is a life difficult to tame (Rancière, 2007b). Moreover, that is precisely the reason, according to Rancière, for there being a deep hatred or fear of democracy. From the viewpoint of the given social order, the ‘unqualified’ and ‘incompetent’ demonstrating their equality is perceived as

dangerous, abusive or scandalous. Hence, the common reaction is to reinforce the link between ‘having power’ and ‘having particular qualifications or competencies’. These reactions, according to Rancière, seem to neutralise democracy, translate conflicts into policy problems (of conflicting interests for example) waiting for policy solutions (an agreement, for instance). It is this neutralisation that Rancière notices in today’s society and that he wants to question. This questioning is also a struggle over words. Against the old philosophical dream (which today is dreamt by analytical philosophy) of defining the meaning of words, Rancière underlines the need for the struggle for their meaning. In this sense democracy can mean many things and many different things (in Europe or Asia, for example) (Rancière, 2009a, 2009c). And the struggle for the meaning of democracy is particularly important for it is about the capacity of whoever speaks or acts (*‘la capacité de n’importe qui de parler ou d’agir’*). It is exactly the possibility of such a manifestation and demonstration of the capacity to speak and act (which interrupts the chain of reasons and consequences, causes and effects), which is eliminated through structural explanations of (new and old) sociologists, by the extreme contextualisations and ‘thick’ descriptions of culturalists and historians, and by the thinking in terms of catastrophes of some postmodern philosophers. Rancière states that he is no thinker of the event, but of emancipation. And emancipation has a tradition that is not made of spectacular acts, but is shaped by a search to create new forms of the common, which are not those of the state or of consensus. ‘I have never stopped fighting against the idea of historical necessity’, he writes (Rancière 2009a, p. 100, translation by authors). And Kristin Ross rightly underlines that Rancière’s idea of democracy relates to a notion of power that is neither quantitative nor oriented towards control, but refers to:

... a potentiality: the capacity of ordinary people to discover modes of action to act upon common affairs. The encounter of Rancière with Joseph Jacotot and his continuous return to this encounter have brought us again to what was in fact the original meaning of the word ‘democracy’, a broader and more evocative meaning: the capacity to make things happen, to do things (Ross, 2009, p. 109, translation by authors)

The capacity/power of the *demos*, which is not the power of the people or its majority, but the power or capacity of no matter who (of whoever). It is the hypothesis and confirmation of this potentiality/capacity/power, the rejection of the reign of necessity, this Jacotist hypothesis that makes the thought of Rancière so fruitful, provocative and promising for any philosophy of education today.

### **Focus and Contributions to the Issue**

In view of Rancière’s concerns, the Special Issue has a particular focus. First, and at a general level, one concern is with whether the current attempts to enhance or develop democracy through procedures of negotiation and agreement and especially to bring about equality in/through education doesn’t turn into the exact opposite. Are the initiatives to promote and enhance democracy motivated by a hatred of democracy and a desire to get rid of politics? In this context, our hypothesis is that Rancière’s ideas help us to understand not only the hatred of democracy, but also what we want to call a deep

fear of the school becoming a site of democracy or a 'public place'. Hence, to rephrase this as question, we want to ask: could different initiatives in schools, related to organisation, curriculum or pedagogy, be explained by a deep fear towards 'democracy' in schools or, even more strongly, a deep fear towards the school as essentially and primordially a democratic or public place? In this context it is perhaps interesting to note that shortly after *Le maître ignorant* [The Ignorant Schoolmaster] appeared in French (1987), Rancière published another text *École, production, égalité* [School, Production, Equality] (1988) in which he sketched the school as being pre-eminently the place of equality. It appears, therefore, that in order to address our general question about the enhancement of democracy in/through education, we will have to deal with the issue of equality. This is the second main concern in this collection. Indeed, and in line with his earlier work on the ignorant schoolmaster, Rancière opens up a perspective to rethink manifestations of equality in education. Equality, according to him, should not be a policy concern or an issue of school reform, but something between master and pupils. What does this relation (and 'opinion') of equality look like? What are the conditions and consequences? Can we (empirically) observe and describe this? What could practices holding to the assumption of equality look like?

In line with this focus, the articles collected in this Special Issue discuss, from different angles, Rancière's work on education, politics and democracy. Several acts of translation and counter-translation, to use the words of Rancière himself, are adopted: a close *rereading* of Rancière in order to raise a voice in current debates on education, equality and democracy, *rethinking* specific issues and concerns in the field of education and educational philosophy and theory and in relation to other authors (Foucault, Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Mouffe ...), and *reformulating* the meaning and practice of (school) education elaborating on Rancière's ideas. The order of the contributions is as follows: the first set of contributions discusses issues related to education, pedagogy and teaching, the second set focuses on issues of policy, planning and democracy in education, followed by contributions that address specific concerns at the intersection of education and politics (immigrants, queer politics, laughter, truth), and finally contributions that seek to rethink the specific form of the school and the university.

In a close rereading of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Goele Cornelissen clarifies how Rancière's story of Jacotot is still able to intervene in current discourses on equal opportunities and on the teacher as facilitator. Her analysis shows how the figure of Jacotot, the ignorant master, differs from the progressive teacher and from the (current) figure of the teacher as facilitator. The ignorant master assumes equal intelligence and draws attention to a thing in common; she keeps the door closed and puts her students in the presence of a thing in common. In line with this, Cornelissen stresses that the teaching of the ignorant master is a public activity, and she discusses what can be done towards becoming a public teacher.

While the first contribution focuses on the teacher, Gert Biesta in his article rethinks emancipatory education by focusing on the different ways in which we refer to those we teach, that is, the subjects of education. Drawing on Rancière, Biesta argues that to call someone a learner suggests an inequality between those who have learned and now know, can, or are, and those who still need to learn in order to know, be able, or be. In order to interrupt this 'explicative order', he suggests that we call students 'speakers', and



that we think of emancipatory education as education that starts from the assumption that all students can already speak. Hence, equality is not positioned at the end of education, but at the beginning. In line with Rancière, Biesta stresses that there is no emancipatory school, but an interruption of the ‘explicative order’ by seeing what can be done under the assumption of equality.

In his contribution, *Marc Derycke* also discusses the ‘explicative order’ and ‘passion with inequality’ and how the situation of apprenticeship can contain events of emancipation. In line with Rancière, Derycke argues that the master must articulate two complementary aspects in his relation with his apprentice: first, occupying a position of ignorance, and second, ascribing priority to the object to be known or to be listened to (the text, the words ...). This is elaborated in a discussion of the acts of translation and counter-translation, and the importance of context. In line with both aspects, and in discussing courses of which he is master, Derycke explores how a double supposition of equalities is put to work (the equality of intelligences and the equality of the speaking beings) and how his students became involved (or not) in these courses.

The next contributions focus in detail on the relation between education, democracy and policy/planning. *Daniel Friedrich, Bryn Jaastad and Thomas S. Popkewitz* rethink the relationship between education and democracy by addressing current efforts to develop democratic schools. These efforts share both a mode of reasoning that ultimately wants to design society by designing the child, and the assumption of inequality in setting equality as a goal. Drawing on Rancière’s idea of democracy as repartitioning the consensual partition of the world under the assumption of equality, the authors challenge the dogma of planning, the comparative mode of thought in education, and the related negation of democracy. By introducing Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome and Derrida’s justice, Rancière’s idea of democracy is extended in order to formulate the idea of democratic education as an (im)possible promise.

Starting from a Foucaultian perspective, *Maarten Simons and Jan Masschelein* draw attention to current developments that neutralise democracy through the ‘governmentalisation of democracy’ and processes of ‘governmental subjectivation’. Here, Rancière’s political work is closely reread in order to clarify how democracy takes place through the paradoxical process of ‘political subjectivation’, that is, a disengagement with a governmental regime through the verification of one’s equality in demonstrating a wrong. Furthermore, a thesis on ‘pedagogic subjectivation’—to be understood as the experience of potentiality or the ability to speak, think and act—is formulated. It is argued that there is a fear for both political and pedagogic subjectivation that leads to a neutralisation of democracy and a taming of the public role of schools. The article closes with a short note on reading Foucault’s work from the viewpoint of Rancière.

The work of Rancière offers valuable perspectives to discuss critical issues at the intersection of education and politics as the next contributions show in great detail. In his contribution, *Carl Anders Säfström* rethinks the status of immigrants in Swedish society, and the role of education in their exclusion, discrimination or assimilation. He clarifies how the myth of schooling as the normalization of an arbitrary distribution of wealth and power, and the idea of a consensual democracy, result in a particular idea of what it is to be Swedish—that which the immigrant is not. But Säfström also argues that the immigrant—as someone who has no proper name—can intervene in such a way in

the existing consensual order of society that a dissensus is introduced. Furthermore, the article elaborates the idea of a 'pedagogy of dissensus' that works by undoing the supposed naturalness of any social order and strives to create the conditions for the equality of relationships.

Focusing on queer politics in education, *Claudia Ruitenberg* draws in a similar way on Rancière to analyse critically the demanded perceptibility and intelligibility of queer students and teachers in education. Discussing specific initiatives, she explores the extent to which queer visibility and intelligibility is actually political in Rancière's sense of the term, that is, whether it is a 'disruption of the sensible'. At this point, the distinction between 'identification' (and inclusion in the social order) and 'subjectivation' (political disruption) is introduced to explore the politics in queer politics. Finally, Ruitenberg elaborates the ideas of Judith Butler in order to grasp the promise of 'insurrectionary speech' in queer politics and explores the role of allies in political interventions (related to Gay-Straight Alliances in schools) that shift the distribution of the sensible.

*Tyson Edward Lewis* draws on Rancière to explore an enigmatic reflection of Paolo Freire on the necessary role of laughing in the pedagogy of the oppressed. In his examination of the structural relationships between jokes and critical thinking, Lewis argues that critical laughter is transformative because it embodies the r(u/a)pture of joy accompanying any verification of equality. The laugh, according to Lewis, is not so much the proclamation of a wrong (spoken through argumentative reason, which gives the noise of pain a *logos*) but rather the affective verification of a surplus equality—it is the sensual pleasure of democracy. Thus joke-telling and laughing emerge as integral parts of the aesthetics of critical pedagogy, redistributing the sensible that underlies educational relations between 'masters' and 'pupils' in the classroom.

Another critical issue is discussed in the contribution of *Charles Bingham*. He draws on Rancière's language theory to rethink the role of truth in education as well as the perspective on truth taken by the educational researcher writing about Rancière. According to Bingham, in the traditional, progressive and critical accounts of truth, education is regarded as a way to approach pre-existing truths (or lack of pre-existing truths). The work of Rancière is used, then, to offer an educational understanding of truth that comes from *within* education. The point of departure for Bingham is the arbitrary nature of language. The school often does not allow that language's arbitrariness be exposed, however, because such exposure would undermine its explanatory teachings on truth. Bingham argues, therefore, that the (educational) researcher must, like the work of a political actor or a poet, break with language's privileged status in order to embrace the arbitrariness of language.

The final contributions explore, in line with Rancière, what a school and what a university could be (today), and what education and philosophy could mean. *Jan Masschelein* and *Maarten Simons* take up a text that Rancière published shortly after *The Ignorant School Master* appeared in French, *École, production, égalité* [School, Production, Equality] (1988), in which he sketched the school as being pre-eminently the place of equality. In this vein, and opposed to the story of the school as the place where inequality is reproduced and therefore in need of reform, they recount the story of the school as the invention of a site of equality and as primordially a public space, which therefore has to be defended as a democratic infrastructure in itself. Inspired by Rancière, they indicate

first how the actual (international and national) policy story about the school and the organizational technologies that accompany it install and legitimate profound inequalities, which consequently can no longer be questioned (and become ‘invisible’). Second, they recast and rethink different manifestations of equality and of ‘public-ness’ in school education and, finally, indicate various ways in which these manifestations are neutralized or immunized in actual discourses and educational technologies.

In his essay *Jorge Larrosa* offers his conversation with the ghost of the madman ‘Jacotot/Rancière’: one of the possible dialogues between the ignorant schoolmaster and his own perplexities in what he feels to be an endgame. Is there any point at the present time, in the declining mercantilist university, in pondering once again the issue of the place of philosophy in institutions responsible for training people who will work in the sphere of education? He formulates his question in the first person plural, which is intended to do nothing other than build a ‘we’ with that odd and small collective without which it would be impossible even to begin. ‘We’ knew the old words, so he says, but now we are no longer sure they mean anything. And we are not keen to learn the new ones: we do not trust them, they are irrelevant to us. Moreover, we are sad and tired. All we feel is rage and impotence. Will we be capable of trying all the words once again: university, philosophy, education? Will we be capable of trying all the verbs once again: reading, writing, conversing, perhaps thinking?

## Notes

1. We do not intend to review and situate Rancière’s work and comment on his biography extensively. For an excellent introduction and contextualisation taking into account the French intellectual and political scene, and especially the importance of revolutionary times such as the French Commune and May 68, see: Ross 1991, 2002, 2006; see also Mouriaux *et al.*, 1992; Bosteels, 2006.
2. The name, *Les révoltes logiques*, was borrowed from a poem by Rimbaud written shortly after the end of the Paris Commune and entitled ‘Democracy’. The text was edited by a collective that, inspired by Rimbaud, wanted to be a continuation of the intellectual scene of the May revolt of 1968, which it conceived as a popular resurrection in which the very notion of ‘people/popular’ itself was brought into play. It consisted, besides Rancière as the director, of Jean Borreil, Geneviève Fraisse, Pierre Saint-Germain, Michel Souletie, Patrick Vauday and Patrice Vermereen. These were mainly philosophers and historians connected to the famous *Université Paris VIII* in Vincennes. One could more generally state that the May revolt of 1968 constituted a major event for Rancière and that its revolutionary and democratic energy is still fuelling his work today. For a more extensive analysis of the role of this event for Rancière, but also for many other French intellectuals such as Nancy, Blanchot, Sartre, etc. see Ross, 2002; and most recently, Crowley, 2009.
3. In one of the most recent texts regarding democracy and equality he once more confirms being an heir of Jacotot: ‘No, it is not an ideal, because I always work under the Jacotist assumption that equality is an assumption and not an aim to be reached’ (Rancière, 2009a, p. 98, our translation).
4. Rancière’s work, and certainly his later work, testifies to his central interest in this crucial aesthetic dimension of politics. In fact his thesis here is that art, and more generally aesthetic practices, play an eminent role in the way the partition of the sensible is shaped. Art practices are modes of action that interfere in the general partition of modes of action and in their relationships with modes of being and forms of visibility and sayability. They contribute to the shaping of the forms that define what we can experience (what we can see, hear and say).

Politics refers to what we see and what we can say about it, to who has the capacity to see and the talent to speak, and to the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time (e.g. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible* (2006a); *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (2009b)).

5. Rancière's own work could be seen as such a permanent unsettling of borders between disciplines and genres: he constantly breaks through the fences and barriers that protect disciplines and institutions (philosophy, sociology, history, politics, education, art ...). As a researcher he decides that he has the competencies that he does not have (e.g. according to his 'education' or 'institutional affiliation'); he decides that he can transgress the borders because they do not exist. And he verifies their non-existence by moving freely over their territories and by thinking for himself, i.e. by practising the activity that is nobody's property, which he calls a 'treasure which we have to conserve' (Rancière, 2006b, p. 514). The work of thinking, thereby, is not to abstract, but to tie and untie, to connect and disconnect (words to/from bodies, bodies to/from places ...). One could say that it dissolves the assignation and appropriation (i.e. the privatisation) of words, bodies, places and makes them public, or at least reconfigures the territories. Thinking itself has no 'proper' place and is no privilege: everybody thinks or can think.

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[We do not aim at a complete bibliography but offer an overview of important texts in French and English. There remain other texts (interviews, essays) which are not mentioned here and, moreover, a lot of work has been translated or is only published in other languages. We thank Goele Cornelissen for her help in putting together this bibliography.]

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