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## DISAGGREGATING TERRITORIES: LITERATURE, EMANCIPATION, AND RESISTANCE

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This article focuses on the implementation of literature for the democratic opening of the human being-in-common in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière. Deleuze and Guattari advocate a quasi-traumatized, "animally" disfigured discourse that testifies to the impossibility of bearing witness to the unpredictable whirl of becoming, not only in philosophical but also in literary writing. Kafka exemplarily blurred the boundaries between his representing and represented subjects, drawing them into an unrestrained field of immanence. It is through such persistent revivifying of polyphony that his minor literature unleashed the suppressed creativity of major literature and language. It subverted literary language from within its identity, deterritorializing its monolingual molecules and pushing its subjects beyond the politically acknowledged threshold of representation. By invading the subject's speech, action, and behavior, minor literature revolutionizes its agency. In Rancière's work, political regulation of the subject from above is the main target of oppositional literary deregulation from below. For both Deleuze and Rancière, literary politics consists of the disarticulation of the politically authorized selection of sensations by an unpredictable revolutionary assemblage that escapes it. Now oriented inwards, toward the subject's perception apparatus, instead of outwards toward other political subjects as before, revolutionary politics in Deleuze's and Rancière's rendering deactivates the agency, and departs from an inarticulate molecular area excluded from the scope of its activity. Despite undeniable divergences between their thoughts, this paradoxical "action through non-action" connects their conceptualizations of literature. However, as the genealogy of the messianic tradition has shown, the deactivation of majoritarian agencies does not merely achieve emancipating effects; it simultaneously empowers the minoritarian assemblage introduced in the place of agencies. As a result, the initially democratic assemblage suddenly resurfaces as the major agency of revolutionary terror. I argue that placing literature at the service of the allegedly egalitarian force of negation entertains this risk in both philosophies.

**Key words:** literature, deterritorialization, animalization, emancipation, resistance

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Deterritorialization does not necessarily invoke associations with literature. According to two recent influential philosophical interpretations, it becomes literary only if it aims for emancipation, which is not always the case. Literary

deterritorializations appear to be genuinely democratically oriented. Does this mean that literature is democratic by definition?

## GILLES DELEUZE: EMANCIPATION THROUGH DEHUMANIZATION

278 In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define deterritorialization as movement by which an element escapes from a given territory, inducing the reconstitution of the latter (1987: 508). Elsewhere, they describe it as an operation by which a located agency becomes dislocated, undone or disarticulated (1983: 322; 1986: 86). Yet as deterritorialization inheres in all territorialized agencies as their transformative vector—a sort of “secret agent” of the hidden and all-determining power of becoming (*devenir*)—in fact it merely unleashes the fettered or slumbering creative potential of a given agency. It is a *virtual* operation, taking place at the invisible *molecular* level and is therefore ontologically prior to *actual* deterritorializations (or dislocations) performed at the visible *molar* level such as, for example, movements of populations away from rural areas toward urban environments. As opposed to these restricted evacuations that entail reterritorialization, virtual deterritorialization creates a new unrestrained earth and new unrestrained people, and is therefore clearly preferable (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 55–6). In the authors’ view, literature, art, philosophy and music aim at a nonlinear system of relations (rather than the new territory sought by restricted deterritorializations), and are *absolute* deterritorializations. Only the latter result in democratic emancipation.

How do these absolute deterritorializations come into being? Philosophy worthy of its name is instantiated, for example, by a *problem* rather than a *question*: the question seeks an answer, while the problem is something up to its arising unrecognizable or non-identifiable. Only by trying to solve a problem does philosophy extend the power of becoming inherent to its territory, which it then opens to reconfiguration by radical alterity. As a matter of fact, Deleuze had already proposed this conception of philosophy as time- and place-bound problem solving in his famous 1972 conversation with Foucault, *Intellectuals and Power* (Deleuze and Foucault). Solutions offered by philosophy, he says, are not eternal and universal but emerge from a particular practical problem, and bear validity only when this problem is referenced. Philosophical concepts cope with the permanently changing

field of practice whose constitutive part they make. Many years later, this idea is resumed in the first chapter of Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* It states that philosophical concepts arise within a determinate practical field in response to a challenge arriving from another, foreign and indeterminate field. The provocation reaches the philosopher from abroad, "the other shore", caused by an unfathomable "someone other" (*autrui*), whose identity is profoundly uncertain and indeterminate (the French word *autrui* is neither feminine nor masculine, neither singular nor plural). The task of philosophy is to meet this ulterior indeterminate, and respond to its challenge.

The latter appears in the form of the Levinasian face (*visage*), regarding something beyond its field and stating "I am afraid" (*J'ai peur*) in view of such an utter exteriority.<sup>1</sup> Confrontation of the philosopher with this frightened face, continue the authors in the same modified Levinasian mode, disquiets his or her tranquil "there is" (*il y a*) because the face is on the one hand a *visible object* and on the other an *addressing (speaking) subject*. Yet in the final analysis, as it belongs to a *possible world* located beyond the philosopher's "there is", it is neither; rather it precedes such distinction.<sup>2</sup> By escaping determination in terms of the philosopher's practical field in this indeterminate fashion, the face introduces to it something foreign, exterior and unpredictable, initiating a restructuring that induces a new concept. In responding to this face, the induced concept amounts to an unstable combination (*chiffre*) of determinate relations within the philosopher's practical field and indeterminate chaos beyond its borders. In other words, it contains finite coordinates and infinite possibilities for their combining and ordering. Such intertwining blurs the boundaries that separate this concept from others by transforming them into a kind of neighborhood zone (*zone de voisinage*), or threshold of indiscernibility (*seuil d'indiscernabilité*) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 19; Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 24–5). The same holds for the boundaries between the concept's internal constituents, which remain permanently open along the lines of flight (*lignes de fuite*), to the exterior realm of the inaccessible. Thus the mutual relationship between

<sup>1</sup> The authors do not explicitly mention Levinas but, considering their vocabulary, the association is unavoidable.

<sup>2</sup> For a similarly ambiguous character of the Levinasian face whose "eye speaks", see Lévinas 1961: 38, 66, Lévinas 1976: 8, Lévinas 1991: 123–24, and Gürtler 2001: 106. According to Butler, Levinas introduces a face that announces its suffering in an inhuman voice (2004:135).

these internal constituents underlies an event-like reconfiguration. Using such unstable and fuzzy concepts, the philosopher subversively reintroduces the chaos of becoming into stabilized empirical horizons that rely on the engagement of transcendentals (such as God, man, subject, state, perception or communication) to defend human beings from this chaos. Philosophy thus places itself at the service of pre-philosophical *immanence*. The authors represent this crucial concept of Deleuze's philosophy, the very horizon of its authorization, in the figure of a sieve (1994: 42–3; *crible* 1991: 45) that persistently filters transcendentals, and eliminates them from the primordial chaos of becoming.

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In countering philosophical transcendentals by obliging philosophy to immanence, Deleuze and Guattari are at obvious pains to separate philosophy from religion, which is by definition characterized by a transcendental foundation. Nonetheless, as the history of philosophy provides a plethora of examples, they must admit that even the plane of immanence genuine to philosophy produces transcendental concepts, which in the history of philosophy subsequently contest and replace each other. Despite all its efforts to reach the "beyond", philosophy repeatedly substitutes transcendental concepts for immanence, obfuscating the truth of the latter by such illusions (1994: 49–50; 1991: 50–51). This incapacity (*impouvoir*) (1994: 55; 1991: 55) of philosophy to think that which perseveres in its very interior, escaping reflection, is the very cause of its turns, folds and roundabouts, its stumbling, stuttering, stammering, screaming and moaning, and its traumatized pre-linguistic manifestations amidst the language. The authors therefore infer that in its stubborn search for immanence, philosophy surrenders its human sovereignty, and behaves like a dog making uncoordinated leaps (1994: 55). Such "animalization" of its speech—and this is what absolute deterritorialization of a located human agency amounts to—is the only way for philosophy to retain the memory of escaping immanence. The latter is obviously considered its essential task.

Interestingly enough, these "uncoordinated leaps" of Deleuze and Guattari's "animalized philosopher" recall Benjamin's concept of the *Ursprung* in the meaning of both origin and primordial leap (Benjamin 1980: 226). In Benjamin's interpretation, if we treat historical origin as a primordial leap, it can by its resurgence unpredictably rearrange the smooth stream of historical becoming by breaking the latter's continuity and engulfing its constituents in its chaotic whirl. In this manner, both Benjamin's messianic time and Deleuze and Guattari's "whimsical" becoming—two absolute deterritorializations of human history in the form of unpredictable and

uncoordinated leaps—ultimately *warrant the state of exception* (or the state of emergency), *the upper hand over the historical norm*. The former permanently destabilizes the latter, subverts its order, and obliterates its agencies and distinctions. These are effects that, rather than simply being emancipatory as the authors desire, simultaneously associate the devastating consequences of, for example, capitalist expansion or totalitarian regimes. We will return to this critical point later.

Beyond this unexpected concordance with Benjamin's anarchic idea of historical time, the French philosophers' consistent dehumanization of the human reminds us of Benjamin's systematic extension of the human, to embrace all earthly creatures including the inhuman ones (Hanssen 1998: 108–63). Along this line, Deleuze and Guattari's "animalized philosopher" is suddenly in accord with Benjamin's contemporaneous interpreter Giorgio Agamben, who explicitly obliges the human to bear responsibility for the inhuman:

Human power borders on the inhuman; the human also endures the non-human. [...] This means that humans bear within themselves the mark of the inhuman, that their spirit contains at its very center the wound of the non-spirit, non-human chaos atrociously consigned to its own being capable of everything. (1999: 77)

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Several years before these lines were written, Deleuze and Guattari call upon the philosopher, by making him or her responsible to the "ultimate exterior", to adhere to the "lines of flight" from the human. Charting a similarly deterritorializing trajectory of dehumanization, they make the human—to deploy Agamben's vocabulary—"pass into populations and populations pass into *Muselmänner*" (85), i.e., thoroughly desubjectified creatures robbed of human language. Deleuze and Guattari's philosopher appears to be acting as a representative of these silent and amorphous masses; s/he becomes an agent summoned to evoke their enforced "animalization" by strategically miming it. Astonishingly, s/he therefore bears witness precisely in Agamben's sense of this concept:

[I]t means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness. The language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a different insignificance—that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness. To bear witness, it is therefore not enough to bring language to its own non-sense... [...] It is necessary that this senseless sound

be, in turn, the voice of something or someone that, for entirely other reasons, cannot bear witness. (39)

In both these renderings of philosophy's mission, a substantial gap seems to open between those forced to *live* animalization and those authorized to *bear witness* to it. They occupy very different positions within the same traumatic constellation, which does not seem to concern philosophers. It is because they obliterate this crucial difference, however, they unilaterally celebrate dehumanization as the instrument of emancipation.

Agamben's conception of bearing witness to the trauma of the other, proposed in 1998, is not isolated. It corroborates Cathy Caruth's obliging of theory, two years earlier, to deploy "the very possibility of speaking from within a crisis that cannot simply be known or assimilated" (1996: 117). In theoretical writing, the impact of reference to trauma "is felt, not in the search for an external referent, but in the necessity, and failure, of theory. [...] What theory does [...] is fall; and in falling, it refers" (90). It is only through such "deterritorializing" disruptions and interruptions of the smooth narrative flow and persistent disfiguring of language, that trauma can be adequately expressed not only in theoretical but also autobiographic, historic and literary writing.

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In the same vein, Deleuze and Guattari interpret this quasi-traumatized "animally" disfigured discourse as the only authentic philosophical as well as literary writing. In their conception, literature constitutes another prominent form of absolute deterritorialization. Only if it is absolute does deterritorialization aim at the indeterminate "outside", which is presented in more detail above. The authors illustrate the blurring effects of such orientation in their famous book on Kafka and minor literature, in which they point out that Kafka goes to great lengths to obliterate all traces of the speaking subject, thus hindering the reader from distinguishing between the speech of the narrator and the figure. His "collective assemblages of enunciation", which indicate the potential of language to become an anonymous machine through the systematic deterritorialization of interlocutors, refuse to be pinned down to any recognizable subject. To achieve such de-identification, speaking subjects subversively mime their antagonist's behavior. "A little bit like the animal that can only accord with the movement that strikes him, push it farther still, in order to make it return to you, against you, and find a way out" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 59), Kafka blurs the boundaries between his representing and represented subjects, drawing them into an unrestrained field of immanence. Deleuze and

Guattari state that it is through such persistent revivifying of indeterminate polyphony that underlies all established agencies that minor literature and language unleashes the suppressed creativity of its major counterparts. It subverts this language from within its identity, i.e., it deterritorializes its monolingual molecules and pushes its subjects beyond the politically acknowledged threshold of representation (1986: 17–8; 1987: 106).

Searching for a completely other kind of consciousness from that established by major literature, minor literature is, the authors argue, a de-identifying medium of a people yet to come. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize it as the single possible mode of self-identification for minority populations deprived of the acknowledged political modes enjoyed by majority peoples (1986: 16; Deleuze 1998: 4). In a word, minor literature operates as an instrument of redemption of the “mutes”, or those “without right to bear rights”. This legitimizing basis of minor literature is structurally analogous to Agamben’s later category of the inhuman or animal. This “eternally minor [...] bastard people, inferior, dominated, always in becoming, always incomplete” (Deleuze 1998: 4) cannot accept the identity brought upon it by the majority: “I am a beast, a Negro of an inferior race for all eternity. This is the *becoming* of the writer” (4). In this respect it is worth noting that Agamben required the author’s capacity to speak “in the name of an incapacity to speak” (1999: 158):

[W]e may say that to bear witness is to place oneself in one’s own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living [...]. (161)

In this quotation, the distance between the suffering “mutes” and their eloquent representatives is expressed in an exemplary way. It is not only the case that the former desperately need the latter, but also vice versa.

In Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of absolute deterritorialization, the writer’s becoming is associated with the “molecular detours” (Deleuze 1998: 2) of “a people who are missing”, and must therefore invent themselves by way of literature. It is the “measure of health” of the “oppressed bastard race that ceaselessly stirs beneath dominations” (4). Therefore, “[t]o become is not to attain a form [...] but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernability, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, a molecule [...]” (1). In this task of deterritorializing determinate identities through multiplying their “neighborhood zones” and “thresholds of indiscernability” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 19), or of making indistinguishable all that is distinguished, literature is taken to be

meeting philosophy. Conceived as oppositional forces of the democratic liberation of established agencies, both are expected to be at the service of becoming, testifying by such representation to that which is missing in the codified form of agencies.

However, as Deleuze admits fifteen years later, there is something that disturbs the idea of literature and philosophy as forces of emancipating deterritorialization: the *fundamental equivocation* of their undertaking. On the one hand, they democratically expropriate dominating agencies, but on the other, in introducing through their devastating "delirium" a worldwide "displacement of races and continents", they simultaneously "erect a race" which is "pure and dominant" (Deleuze 1998: 4). "[T]here is always the risk that a diseased state will interrupt the process of becoming [...] the constant risk that the delirium of domination will be mixed with a bastard delirium, pushing literature toward a larval fascism, the disease against which it fights [...]" (4).

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Taking into consideration the hitherto neglected gap between agencies and enablers, this important and far-reaching inference from "Literature and Life" echoes the dilemma from Deleuze and Guattari's earlier book on Kafka, concerning the final effect of his deterritorializing assemblages: Are they liberating or enslaving, revolutionary or fascist, socialist or capitalist? How can these two inextricable aspects of Kafka's profound destabilization of the German language be reliably disentangled? Such are the dangers inherent in the all-equalizing polyphony instituted by minor literature. In it, liberation from the "evil powers" of the past runs parallel to the enslavement by the "diabolic powers" of the future exemplified in capitalism, Stalinism or fascism (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 57). It is impossible to prevent the overturning of emancipation into mastery, which makes becoming a double-edged process, and its advocacy a risky enterprise.

Perhaps to avoid such an undesired malformation of emancipation, Deleuze and Guattari do not restrict their argument to the initially delineated binary oppositions between virtual and actual, indeterminate and determinate, molecular and molar or absolute and restricted deterritorializations (the latter being dislocations rather than proper deterritorializations). In order to prevent the re-emergent equivocation of the concepts dominating these oppositions, they introduce the final overarching opposition between *majoritarian* and *minoritarian* deterritorializations. Its aim is to draw the final distinction between "good" (ethical/democratic) and "bad" (political/oppressive) agencies of deterritorialization. Whenever a deterritorialization spawns reterritorialization, as in the capitalist mobilization of the labor-

power that serves established axioms and agencies, Deleuze and Guattari call it majoritarian, renouncing its democratic and underlining its oppressive potential. Capitalist axioms sort social meaning and individual subjects into binary categories, establishing their asymmetric distinction on the majority model. This is why capitalism makes the white, male, adult, and rational individual the central point, in reference to which all binary distributions are organized (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 293). Conversely, minorities open the gaps within these axioms by constituting fuzzy, nonaxiomable sets that are pure "multiplicities of escape and flux" (470). Following various lines of flight, their collective assemblages (*agencements*) produce *creative* or inventive terms, in opposition to the mere *expressive* or assertive terms of existing majority agencies.

Yet what is the real benefit in questioning this whole set of subordinated oppositions if Deleuze and Guattari merely replace it with an equally problematic all-commanding binary opposition? Have the authors not raised binary opposition to the main instrument of capitalist axiomatic? Does a power asymmetry that favors "exuberant abundance of life" really endorse the democratic character of becoming, as, for example, Hardt and Negri trust with their unreserved advocacy of biopolitical circulation and global nomadism (Hardt and Negri 2000: 361–64)? Will all parties benefit equally from the obliterating whirl of deterritorialization, i.e., curious tourists and travelling intellectuals parallel to the exiles, expatriates and refugees? Does this not reaffirm the dangerous equivocation of becoming, in lieu of overcoming it? If the proper human emerges only when its most intimate property, the agency, is displaced into the inhuman, what about those who, in the same movement of "animalization", undergo territorial dispossession? What about those confronting the imperative to either leave their proper place or become riveted to the land they have been dispossessed of, who are delivered to an utter deprivation of belonging (Butler 2013: 21–4)? The desire they have to belong is by such deterritorializations forced to acknowledge the impossibility of ever truly belonging (Probyn 1996: 8). For better or for worse, becoming is an agent of globalization which has, for its part, "created at least as much trouble as possibility" and "contributed as much to exploitation and poverty as to wealth creation and economic participation" (Alexander 2012: 159). Its inclusiveness rests on exclusion, its tolerance on the long history of imperialism and colonialism accompanied by atrocities (Brown 2006: 37–8). Derrida was very explicit with regard to the "monstrous effective inequality" inherent in today's allegedly all-equalizing mobility:

[N]ever have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. [...] no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, never have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth. (1994: 85)

286 The unilaterality of Deleuze’s praise of philosophical and literary deterritorializations becomes especially clear if we compare it with Foucault’s concept of governmentality (Foucault 1991; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2010). In an oppositional gesture analogous to Deleuze’s treatment of revolutionary becoming, Foucault equally celebrates governmentality’s historical emergence. He argues that it dethrones the oppressive political regime of sovereignty by exposing it as a mobile set of tactics, without recourse to a set of prior principles. With the regime of governmentality, in a political field unmoored from its traditional anchors, a diffuse set of tactics arises which draws its meaning from no single source, no unified sovereign subject, and thus suspends law. Yet in a blind spot reminiscent of Deleuze’s, Foucault disregards that the new regime of governmentality becomes the site for the dangerous reanimation, reconstellation, and recirculation of the supposedly suspended sovereignty. Governmentality does not eliminate but rather reproduce, enlarge, strengthen and expand the state’s power in its legitimacy (Brown 2006: 82). It is precisely the suspension of law it executes that makes room for the reemergence of sovereignty in an illegitimate, extra-legal form, characterized by violence. In the regime of governmentality, sovereignty acquires the grotesque form of the whimsical, unpredictable, and tyrannical operations of “petty sovereigns”. Since their actions are no longer subject to review by any higher judicial authority, their managerial power is invigorated (Butler 2004: 61). In the new form of political legitimacy with no built-in structures of accountability, “petty sovereigns” usurp the right to suspend rights, which makes their relation to law exploitative, instrumental, and arbitrary (83).

As a result, population is managed through a deconstitution or “spectralization” of its humanity, a technique that removes responsibility toward the governed “items” by increasing both their profitability and disposability, ultimately rendering them “consumable” (Bales 1999: 25). In the final analysis, far from eliminating the weakening nation-state, governmentality’s rise protects it from erupting fundamentalisms on the one hand, and globalization on the other. It turns out to be a civic disciplinary technique for consolidating, re-legitimizing and rejuvenating the endangered nation-state sovereignty (Brown 2006: 96). This conclusion

is corroborated by the implementation of governmentality in the British and French colonies from the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when the colonial state was exposed to crisis (Mamdani 2012). After the politics of integrating the native population into the national body failed, regenerative measures were taken to legitimate the distinctive character of this population. The result of this "affirmative action" was an "affirmative exclusion". Two major institutions were "set in place, the French nation on the one hand, composed of those 'of French stock', [...] and on the other, the different ethnic minorities or communities, which serve as a foil to French identity" (Amselle 2003: xii–xiii). It appears that racist attitudes can safely persevere under this generous paternal cloak, resulting in a peculiar sort of "inclusive exclusion" (Ophir *et al.* 2009).

In sum, sovereignty and governmentality reactivate and regenerate rather than exclude or replace each other, which, if we follow the analogy drawn above, implies the same kind of mutually contaminating relationship between Deleuze and Guattari's majoritarian/oppressive and minoritarian/democratic deterritorializations. We can therefore postulate a complex relationship of *mutual implication*, rather than simple *resolute opposition*. Neglecting in the main line of their argument this deeply disquieting equivocation of their central concept of becoming (to which they, admittedly, occasionally take recourse), Deleuze and Guattari interpret "proper" literature as a clearly emancipating operation. By this operation, they say, the liberating forces of becoming that are suppressed in language are activated, while established forces of oppression are deactivated. Ronald Bogue helpfully interprets this point:

Every language imposes power relations through its grammatical and syntactical regularities, its lexical and semantic codes, yet those relations are implicitly unstable, for linguistic constants and invariants are merely enforced restrictions of speech-acts that in fact are in perpetual variation. A major usage of language limits, organizes, controls and regulates linguistic materials in support of a dominant social order, whereas a minor usage of a language induces disequilibrium in its components, taking advantage of the potential for diverse and divergent discursive practices already present within the language. (2005: 168)

Minor literature therefore refers to the deactivating *usage* of majoritarian language rather than pointing to any particular *minority* that produces it; minority is a practice of resistance rather than a stable identity, which means that any individual or collective agency can take it up under

certain circumstances. By its disengaging operations, it blurs majoritarian oppositions like western/non-western, white/non-white, male/female, etc., destabilizes the political agency, and introduces collective assemblages of enunciation in place of identifiable speaking subjects (Deleuze 1998: 18). Beneath the official molar (commonly available) constituents of language, such as words or meanings, it brings to the fore the molecular (commonly unavailable) component of *affects*. "What is realized in literary affect is not this or that message, not this or that speaker, but the power that allows for speaking and saying—freed from any subject of enunciation" (Colebrook 2002: 106).

It follows that the agencies of speakers, messages and audiences emerge from the reader's habitual preconscious investments in such singular affects. They are not natural givens but social derivatives, molar after-effects of the molecular affective investments already taking place in everyday linguistic practice. Language, at its invisible molecular level, is always deterritorialized, i.e., detached from the speaker's body. We read in *A Thousand Plateaus* that "/m/ovements, becomings, [...] pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception" (1987: 281). In opening the realm of the sensible underneath the threshold of the habitual perception of language, minor literature actualizes its subversive virtual state in the same way that proper philosophy actualizes the immanence of life beyond its transcendentals.

It is argued that solely this operation of the *internal evacuation* of the sovereign collective and/or individual agency (as opposed to the *external dislocation* of populations such as expulsions or migrations) has a truly subversive political character. By introducing impersonal in place of personal discourse, it opens room for maneuver for all those who, according to the majoritarian rules, cannot qualify for the status of a person. As we have seen, minor literature is engaged in the creation of a "missing people still to come", consisting of various misfits of majoritarian peoples (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 15). Since it is deprived of any acknowledged political territory, language and identity, it achieves political effects through the molecular decomposition and reconfiguration of established personal agencies into impersonal collective assemblages. In the wake of such dissolution taking place at the preconscious level of the sensible (or affects), speaking subjects lose their preeminence in language and literature. They undergo assimilation into becoming. Created by this impersonal force via affective investments in language's molecular movements, minor literature replaces established agencies such as authors, characters and readers

with anonymous assemblages. It substitutes multitude for the One. This systematic deterritorialization, according to Deleuze and Guattari, bears out the literature's crucial political effect. Literature deserves its name only if it displays this revolutionary cutting edge.

What renders this interpretation of silent literary revolution paradoxical is that it undoes the habitual association of revolution with public action. The public Subject is instead disempowered, deactivated, and turned into a destination of subterranean affections that invade and reconfigure his or her actions, and revolutionize his or her agency. A usually sovereign revolutionary agency is thus replaced with an impersonal sensory assemblage or indeterminate multitude that cannot freely account for itself; moreover, by befalling and invading the subject's speech, action and behavior, amorphous becoming hinders it from operating in a responsible way. S/he is thus transformed into a vulnerable surface exposed to traumatic engravings. Yet the subject's senses can never become an absolutely passive surface of inscription deprived of all sovereignty, since they are socially structured, categorized, and identified from the outset. This social regulation of identity inscribed into the human subject from the very moment of its birth—the process known as subjectivization—reintroduces the sovereign agency into the allegedly unaccountable impersonal sensory assemblage. Concomitantly, the subject's sensory apparatus operates as the field of a permanent confrontation between the majoritarian forces of regulation and the minoritarian forces of emancipation. This is where revolution, in Deleuze and Guattari's view, finds the prominent field of its micro-political operations, and disappears from the macro-political public scene. The shift of the idea of revolution from "liberation of whole classes in economic and political terms" to "liberation on the level of the individual" (Ross 2008: 101) suddenly attributes literature, alongside philosophy, a democratic political role. Politics that had up to then been "proper", i.e. mobilizing collectivities, is allocated to oppressive policies.

## JACQUES RANCIÈRE: EMANCIPATION THROUGH DEREGULATION

Jacques Rancière is another contemporary French philosopher who places the emancipating operation of literature amidst the clashing forces of the subject's divided interior. This connects his democratically intended

re-description of the concept of literature with the delineated project of Deleuze, despite the clearly different backgrounds of their philosophical conceptions. According to these authors, literature, if it does not reshape the subject's interior and take the side of suppressed emancipating forces, is considered unworthy of its name. Political regulation from above, in the form of so-called identity politics, becomes the main target of oppositional literary deregulation from below. For both Deleuze and Rancière, literary politics consists of the disarticulation of a politically authorized selection of sensations by an unpredictable revolutionary assemblage that escapes it. Being now oriented inwards toward the subject's perception apparatus, instead of outwards toward the dethroning of other political subjects as before, revolutionary politics deactivates the acting agency, departing from an inarticulate molecular area excluded from the scope of its activity. Despite Deleuze and Rancière's undeniable divergences, this paradoxical "action through non-action" or *sabbatical of action*—the key operation of so-called messianic thought claiming to be representing the disregarded *sans-part*—associates two autonomous conceptualizations of literature-as-resistance by driving their authors into the spell of messianic politics. Oriented toward the "radical passivity" supposedly caused by trauma, messianic thought systematically denies its own participation in this representation of the latter. It pretends to merge with the traumatized, obliterating the gap that separates their agency from these enablers. While it thus *creates* that which it claims to be only *speaking for*, it performs what is known as "politics of trauma", conducted by means of trauma narratives (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 8).

As far as Rancière is concerned, this covert affiliation with messianic thought, according to some recent commentators, ultimately induced his "quixotic founding of the political" (Valentine 2005: 58), performed in the typically melancholic manner of the contemporary Left that is passionately attached to non-action (Gibson 2005). Having allegedly put the politics so unconditionally at the service of the "excluded enabling domain", Rancière doomed public action to operate within the restrictive frame of the police, thus unwittingly resuming Althusser's asymmetric oppositions (Žižek 2000: 237–38; Biesta 2008: 8; Hewlett 2007: 105). As far as Deleuze is concerned, the affinity of his self-dispossessing orientation with Eastern philosophy (especially Chinese *wu-wei*, in which the human "I" appears as only one of the myriad interconnected manifestations of natural substance) is hardly accidental, as it belongs to the European philosophical tradition that inspires Deleuze's neo-vitalist thought.

While Leibniz was explicitly interested in Eastern philosophy, the ‘fatalism’ of Spinoza was frequently denounced as converging with ‘Chinese atheism’. [...] Isn’t it what Spinoza suggests when he describes human beings along with all other natural ‘things’, as mere ‘modes’, determined ‘modifications’ of a substance which is the only reality endowed with the full privilege of agency? (Citton 2009: 124)

The influence of Spinoza and his legacy on the permanent self-deactivation of the Deleuzian subject is indisputable. However, with regard to “action through non-action” as the delineated paradoxical mode of literary revolution, the messianic tradition of European thought appears to be another, much less discussed background of Deleuze’s philosophy. If Chinese philosophy was taken up via Spinoza, then the messianic tradition, as epitomized in the early German Romanticist replacement of the sovereign *philosophical* self by an endlessly deferred *literary* self, was probably imported via Maurice Blanchot.

At this point, a small detour might help us understand the problem. Let us first take a closer look at the Early German Romanticists’ intervention in the idea of literature. They made their subject “literary” in order to draw it into a permanent internal revolution and in such a way distinguish from subjects encapsulated into prejudices. As the latter were at the time spontaneously associated with numerous internal (social and intellectual) as well as external (geographic and cultural) “benighted souls”, in their final analysis the early German Romanticists tacitly transferred the messianic operation of self-exemption from religious to political terms. This thinking was taken up by citizens and/or civilizers, who used it to systematically distinguish themselves from “barbarians”, “natives” or “primitives” and was then implemented in the governmental frame. Within the latter, the narrow-minded subjects, as opposed to the intellectually mobile “literary” subject, obtained their clearly marked place in space, time, and life. The “literary” subject for his part<sup>3</sup> continually producing such “abject” domestic and “barbarous” foreign subjects, operated from a conceit of neutrality through escaping recognizable identity (Brown 2006: 6). Thanks to such properties, he soon became the chief representative of the rising liberal governance. A consistent negation of anything not himself, thereby marked as inferior, deviant or marginal, turned out to be the key operation of this protean self’s assertion and maintenance. This resulted in a proliferation

<sup>3</sup> The use of *his* is done here on purpose to indicate the German Romanticist perspective.

of elementary, primitive, unfinished, or mutilated identities in need of tolerance, shelter, and protection (Mbembe 2001: 1–2).

When Herder cautions the European slaveholder not to mistreat the Negro—"you should not oppress, kill or rob him because he is human like you yourself" (*Ideen* 255)—he is actually pioneering the forthcoming paternal imperial attitude. "The barbarian subjects, the educated overcomer cultivates" (*Der Barbar beherrscht, der gebildete Überwinder bildet*) (*Ideen*, 706) therefore means that the superior human is expected to protect the inferior. Behind this "enlightened" expectation, one can discern the long tradition of Roman governance over colonies, which is expressed, for example, in Cicero's letter to his brother (*ad Quintum fratrem* I.1.27): "If fate had given you authority over Africans or Spaniards or Gauls, wild and barbarous nations, you would still owe it to your *humanitas* to be concerned about their comforts, their needs, and their safety" (Wolf 1998: 68). Romans trusted that their gods destined them to rule and civilize the world, providing a "human" unity to its ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Yet this colonial uniting into an allegedly common *humanitas* implied the introduction of a complex network of distances, or a carefully elaborated hierarchy, by which natives were recruited "to various roles and positions in the social order" (Wolf 1998: 105). An insidious social apparatus endowed each person with a specific weight, depending on his or her place in a real or virtual group; those classified as being in need of assistance became distinctly stigmatized.

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This Roman colonial protection of the other's distinction, taken up by Herder's fatherly care of remote others and elaborated by the early German Romanticists' generous advocacy of human diversity, was politically re-implemented in the nineteenth century, first by British and then French imperial governance (Mamdani 2012; Amselle 2003). Giving up the failed assimilation of the other into the self, the new focus on the "affirmative action" of the self toward the other—which substituted shaping for eradicating of differences—turned the German Romanticist *intellectual* "invention of the native" into a compensatory *political* strategy. Pinned down by his/her locality and confined to his/her custom, the native was the creation of the colonial state in crisis (Mamdani 2012: 3). Similarly, the whole regime of governmentality emerged to rescue the nation-state in crisis (Brown 2006: 96). As Amselle (2003: xii) puts it, "[a]t the root of this policy is the idea that universalistic principles have failed. [...] Special opportunities must therefore be given to the disabled of every sort, but without any possibility for society's losers to leave their exclusionary zone. In that way, a ghetto is created by regenerating pockets of poverty and disability."

In terms of the “soft racism of multicultural difference”, which came into being as a remedy for the failure of the “hard racism of ethnic purity”, minority individuals were permitted integration to humanity, yet only as members of marked or stigmatized groups (Amselle 2003: 7). Such “dissimilar items” constitute the basis of contemporary French society as well. If this society refuses to confront its postcolonial condition, this is due to its reluctance to transform a supposedly “common human past” into an uneasy history, shared with masses of absolutely heteronomous yet radically proximate “creatures”. Since a “French citizen” was never equal to the “French proper”—not to mention the *sans-part* deprived of all symbolic profits of the citizen status—the question is whether the Empire’s past was ever really common. Its very foundations, the plantation and the colony, radically disclaim the possibility of belonging to a common humanity, even if it reclaims itself as the cornerstone of the French Republican idea (Mbembe 2010: 112). This state of affairs has not really changed with decolonization: after having travelled back into the centers of the former Empire, the overseas “dissimilar items” densely populated their suburban zones, giving rise to a new “regime of confinement” amidst governmentality (151). Since this division still holds power in French society today, the French narcissist self continues to maintain its superiority through the dissemination of various “classified” and “unclassified items” across its political and cultural space (94–6).

To prevent enthusiastic celebration of the early German Romanticist invention of the *mobile* “literary” *subject*, the latter has to be understood within the delineated (post)imperial and (post)colonial setting. Far from being unconditionally liberating, in the framework of European modernity, messianic politics firmly relies on the invention of the *immobile native*, “animally” riveted to his/her soil. Within the regime of protection as a technology of governance, the settler and the native make an indivisible couple. They enable, support and corrupt each other. “Claiming to protect authenticity against the threat of progress, the settler defined and pinned the native” (Mamdani 2012: 30), thus making room for his own unconstrained liberty. Accordingly, Novalis’s famous postulate that the self is nothing but an after-effect of the retroactive “art of invention” must be viewed in this context. His literary self is a result of free artistic construction — and this is unimaginable without the enabler.

“The beginning of the self emerges later than the self; this is why the self cannot have begun. We see therefrom that we are here in the realm of *art...*” (Novalis 1983: 253, trans. mine). What causes the self’s essentially

literary nature is the self-imposed obligation to its perpetual reinvention. "We should not take life to be a novel given to us, but one made by us" (Novalis 1981: 563, trans. mine). By a consistent deactivation of the given past, life is directed toward an open future. Friedrich Hölderlin states that it is "extraordinarily important" for a poet "to take nothing as given [...] or positive" (1961: 264). The early German Romanticists conceptualize literature as *ein immerwährendes Durchbrechen von festen Gebäuden* (Behler 1997: 112), i.e., a consistent tearing apart of firm abodes. In their vision, literature is an eternally repeated self-dissolution for the sake of continuous self-recommencement. It imposes upon the self a strict revolutionary imperative. In following this thread, the self's internal revolution becomes a re-evolution, i.e., a persistent dispossession of the former self.

Returning to Blanchot's advocacy of the endlessly deferred self as the distinctive feature of literature, we must keep in mind this deeply equivocal tradition of European modernity. Blanchot claims that Stéphane Mallarmé was the first writer to launch modern literature's search for an absent Outside "in its very realization always yet to come" (1993: 259; 1992: 42ff.; 2003: 224ff.). However, we can now see that Mallarmé merely continued the search for absolute freedom from the constraining others introduced by early German Romanticism at the outset of European imperial and colonial modernity. With modernity, the elite European self has instituted a governmental regime of persistent self-exemption from constraints allocated to social, cultural and geographic others. Turned into the pure negative foil of this self's assertion, innumerable others became exploitable, consumable, and disposable. It was at the peak of this controversial imperial development, which was fully disregarded by Blanchot, that Mallarmé undertook the dissolution of the completed literary *work* for the benefit of perpetual literary *writing*. As opposed to self-enclosed literary work, Mallarmé's writing, states Blanchot, constitutes itself "as always going beyond what it seems to contain and affirming nothing but its own outside" (1993: 259). From this persistent self-decomposing orientation of *écriture* toward the absent outside, Blanchot draws the conclusion that the literature deserving of this name "contests itself as power", stubbornly adhering to what it must always exclude anew (1997: 67): "Literature denies the substance of what it represents. This is its law and its truth" (1995: 310). However, by emphasizing literature's consistent self-exemption, Blanchot suppresses its discriminating character, as discussed above. While this literature claims to be acting in the name of absolute freedom, it only frees the exploiting self from any responsibility toward exploited others. That is to say, it usurps freedom exclusively for

itself, while delivering others to non-freedom. This is the neglected side of its emancipating undertaking.

Since Blanchot was introduced to this argument only as a relay between early German Romanticist thought and Deleuze's philosophy, we must now return to the latter. What makes Blanchot's elitist idea of writing as an imperial dissolution of all identity abodes relevant to Deleuze's idea of minor literature, is that it regards the consistent evacuation of established literary agencies as the most genuine literary operation. As Deleuze (1998: 13) clarifies, explicitly referring to Blanchot's early concept of *le neutre*, minor literature neutralizes the first and second person of literary agencies in favor of the third person of an impersonal assemblage. In both Blanchot's and Deleuze's unilateral interpretations of literature's mission carried out in the delineated imperial and colonial spirit of European modernity, literature performs its self-revolution by successively deactivating all identity marks in order to reopen the space for multiplicities excluded by them. However, as we have seen, these multiplicities are being affirmed exclusively through a subtle network of marked, restricted, stigmatized or disposable positions; they undergo an internal discrimination in the form of a continuously changing "management of differences". Multiplicities are thus put at the service of the majoritarian agency that rules them, by a perpetual redistribution of their roles. This is how sovereignty is reintroduced into their plural assemblage and Deleuze's "emancipating apriorism" is subverted. The unleashing of a multitude of the "disregarded", accompanied by the obliteration of distinctions and boundaries, does not always result in political emancipation. Various radically populist regimes can testify to this. Paolo Virno, also an adherent of Spinoza's multitude, therefore prefers the less revolutionary formulation "that the multitude does not clash with the One; rather, it redefines it" (2004: 25). In accordance with the argument developed above, he sees dispersion and unity as mutually implied rather than opposed regimes.

This insight into the equivocal interconnectedness of multitude and the One also underlies Rancière's critique of Deleuze, and it does so most explicitly when he observes that Deleuze's multitude ultimately draws back "to the need for a political subject that would be real" (an unpublished interview given for the journal *Dissonance* in 2004, qtd. in Citton 2009: 130). It is exactly this representation of "missing people" by literature that, according to Rancière, makes Deleuze's neo-vitalism attractive for Negri and Hardt's pantheist Marxism, with its promise of a final reunion of humankind at the sensory level. Rancière comments that such a utopian project, which

uncritically blends the aesthetic with the political into a revolution carried out by masses of global migrants, neglects the inevitable reemergence of fissures within the envisaged future community.

In *Empire*, they write about nomadic movements which break the borders within Empire. However, the nomadic movements which break Empire's borders are groups of workers who pay astronomical amounts of money to smugglers in order to get to Europe, workers who are then parked in confinement zones, waiting to be turned back. To transform this reality of displacements into anti-imperialist political movements and energies is something totally extravagant. (qtd. in Citton 2009: 125)

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For Rancière, Deleuze's non-reflected modernist idea of literature abandons the metaphysics of representation with its hierarchies and divisions, only to introduce in its place the performative metaphysics of impersonal becoming, based on the principle of equality. Such an inversion of the hierarchical paternal community into the egalitarian fraternal community, exemplified in the book on Kafka, makes Deleuze uncritically adhere to minor literature as the new "hero' of the story" (Rancière 2004: 154). This mythical figure, charged with the political program of inventing "a people to come", expresses by its "action through non-action" a world of subversive a-signifying atoms (or affects) that subsists beneath the world of representation (or concepts). Accordingly, instead of being a *creative* term as proclaimed, Deleuze's minor literature is merely an *expressive* term typical of majoritarian agencies. With its writer transformed into the pure medium of the irrefutable power of the senses, it allegedly represents the transcendence of life. Yet by being raised to such an agent of transcendence, it only reduplicates the hermeneutic pattern of an all-determining background force. Therefore, "the principle of indifference that characterizes it deprives the fraternal community of any ontological priority it may have over the community of the Father" (Vallury 2009: 234). Both communities operate on the same principle of reintroducing transcendence into their immanence: "We do not go on, from the multitudinous incantation of Being toward any political justice. Literature opens no passage to a Deleuzian politics" (Rancière 2004: 163–64).

By countering this conceptualization of literary revolution because it repeats the fallacies of its proclaimed opponent, i.e. political revolution, Rancière refuses equivalence of the artistic and political re-description of equality, trying to keep them apart and maintain the tension between their respective claims. "In order for the resistance of art not to disappear

in its opposite, an unresolved tension between the two resistances must be maintained" (Rancière 2008: 35, trans. mine). Let us start with the political resistance to the aesthetic equality. First, how does Rancière interpret this concept? Contrary to its usual rendering as art theory in general, Rancière sees aesthetics as a configuration of ways of doing, seeing, thinking and speaking, which operate as habitual forms of exclusion and inclusion within the delimited field of the sensible. In other words, aesthetics defines what is doable, seeable, thinkable and sayable under given social and historical circumstances. Politics (*la politique*), however, disrupts this field through an act of *disagreement* (*la mésentente*),<sup>4</sup> opening a space for the emergence of new modes of subjectivization. These were previously unheard and unseen, but after the political performance of the act of disagreement, they are allowed equal participation in the given sphere of experience (Rancière 1999: vii–xiii, 43–60). "Disagreement invents names and utterances, arguments and demonstrations that set up new collectives where anyone can get themselves counted in the count of uncounted (2011b: 41)." Yet since political disagreement necessarily aims to legitimize new identities, it must in turn exclude new, non-legitimized ones.

Unlike politics, which takes the indicated approach to disagreement, literature subverts the aesthetic equality through an act of *misunderstanding* (*le malentendu*). Underneath the reigning relationship between words and bodies, the latter introduces "the staging of mute things that are there for no reason, meaningless [...], the world of less than human micro-individualities that impose a different scale of magnitude from the scale of political subjects" (44).<sup>5</sup> Hence the literary act of misunderstanding works on the relationship between words and bodies, and on the counting of agents from a side other than the political act of disagreement, which takes the counting of agents for granted:

In that regime, meaning is no longer a relationship of will to will. It is a relationship of sign to sign, a relationship written on mute things and on the body of language itself. Literature is the deployment and deciphering of these signs written on things themselves. (15)

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<sup>4</sup> Rancière states in the first of his "Ten Theses on Politics" that "politics is not the exercise of power" but "the political relationship that allows one to think the possibility of a political subject", a distinctive subject who takes part in "the fact of ruling and the fact of being ruled" (2001: 1).

<sup>5</sup> For an elaboration of the idea of literary misunderstanding, see Rancière 2011b: 31–45.

Or even more explicitly:

Misunderstanding works on the relationship and the count from another angle, by suspending the forms of individuality through which consensual logic binds bodies to meanings. Politics works on the whole, literature works on the units. Its specific form of dissensuality consists in creating new forms of individuality that dismantle the correspondences established between states of bodies and meanings [...]. (42)

298 Yet the literary rearrangement of units is much more radical, since it aims at a complete dissolution of acknowledged identities through their persistent and systematic de-identification, de-hierarchization, deregulation, interrogation, disappropriation and disembodiment. Through such uncompromised egalitarian politics, literature aims for an all-inclusive and indifferent equality, as opposed to the partial and provisional equality underlying the political act of disagreement. As Rancière spells out in *The Night of Labor*, French workers of the 1830s and 1840s tried to reconfigure their country's police order (*l'ordre policier*) so as to be recognized as speaking and thinking subjects, to be included in the official counting. Whereas political disagreement is thus set in motion by the historically excluded, to whom a wrong (*la tort*) has been done—"a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions in a society" (Rancière 2005: 51)—literary misunderstanding acts in the name of *universal equality*. Excavating inarticulate, anarchic, unconscious and indeterminate sensations beneath the ruling distribution of the sensible (*la partage du sensible*), it interrogates not only aesthetic, but also political equality. Rancière's point is that, if both political and aesthetic equality operate as agents of exclusive (*either-or*) logic, then literature, along with other arts and philosophy, acts as an agent of inclusive (*as-well-as*) logic. In Deleuze's conception, this is ultimately comparable with the way in which literature, along with other arts and philosophy, acts as an agent of becoming, engulfing everything in its chaotic whirl. Rancière's conception, which clearly draws on Kant's and Schiller's revolutionary aesthetics of self-exemption (thus returning to the same German Romanticist sources as Deleuze), is that literature represents equality as the transcendental force of negation, bereft of any identity:

The suspension of power, the *neither ... nor ...* specific to the aesthetic state, [...] announces a wholly new revolution: a revolution in the forms of sensory existence, instead of a simple upheaval of the forms of state; a revolution that is not mere displacement of powers, but a neutralization of the very

forms by which power is exercised, overturning other powers and having themselves overturned. (Rancière 2009: 99)

In this way, Rancière separates literature from politics and establishes between their modes of equality not just tension or conflict, as he formulates, but a *binary opposition*. There is a similarity between the manner in which Rancière confronts the hierarchical logic of politics and the egalitarian logic of literature, and that in which Foucault confronts the discursive and non-discursive, in his *Archéologie* (1970), or in which Lyotard confronts discursive and figural logic, in *Discours, figure* (1971). In other words, despite Rancière's meticulous efforts to distance himself from both Foucault's (2005: 50) and Lyotard's (2009: 88–107) methodology, he reproduces it. Since oppositions by definition contain power asymmetry, in all these oppositions the first pole is homogenized into a hierarchically organized field guided by the exclusionist *either-or logic*, which permits the second pole to gradually reconfigure it with its all-inclusive *as-well-as logic*. Rancière thereby unwittingly reproduces not merely Deleuze's but Foucault's and Lyotard's binaries as well (as he does with Althusser's oppositional thought, as pointed out above). What results from his one-sided presentation of both politics and literature is a never-ending battle between the exclusivist mastery of the former and the inclusivist emancipation of the latter.

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However, Rancière not only inadvertently follows Deleuze's critically targeted re-description of revolution, but also places literature at the service of the transcendental force of negation, deprived of all identity marks. In fact, he redoubles Deleuze's method of effectuating this by favoring a persistent dissolution of the identities of subjects, genres, styles, topics and emotions into affects. Apparently the latter allow for less restrained mutual combinations, "open an aleatory distribution of places and cases" and "heighten the contingency of the being-there-together" (Rancière 1995: 90). Rancière does not hesitate to apply Deleuzian vocabulary when he states that Flaubert's "literary indifference" "asserts a molecular equality of affects that stands in opposition to the molar equality of subjects constructing a democratic political scene" (2005: 56). As opposed to the loud public and political revolutions that result in renewed mastery, both philosophers interpret this covert and mute artistic revolution as democratization true and proper. However, as the envisaged community of equals (*la communauté des égaux*) can never really be attained—occurring without taking place (Rancière 1995: 82), it is rather an "ever to-be-recommended invention" (90)—it operates as the basic presupposition rather than the final goal

of “ongoing democratization”. It is a vague prospect, a time-elongating cosmopolitan horizon to which hopes are attached. It is a supposition that must be “endlessly repositated”, “forever in need of reiteration” (84). In the spirit of a weak messianic tradition, it implies an eternal delay.

It follows that Rancière’s crucial concept of *universal equality*, analogous to Deleuze’s immanence, is hypothesized as an ultimate Outside which finds its differential historical and political expression only in the disguised and displaced form, i.e., within particular distributions of the sensible. Although doomed to be eternally withheld, universal equality remains a persistent regulative principle, stimulating a continuous eliciting of the “hidden truth” of its distorted political and historical manifestations. In that particular regard it is strongly reminiscent of Blanchot’s absent Outside “in its very realization always yet to come” (1993: 259; 1992: 42ff.; 2003: 224ff.), which, as we have pointed out, recalls the early German Romanticist tradition. By representing universal equality as “the part that has no part” (*le part sans part*) in whatever empirical distribution of the sensible, Rancière authorizes the relentless hermeneutic activity to subvert the latter in the name of the former. “The essence of equality is not so much to unify as to declassify, to undo the supposed naturalness of orders and replace it with the controversial figures of division” (Rancière 1995: 32–3):

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And this equality shapes and defines a community, though it must be remembered that this community has no material substance. It is borne at each and every moment by someone for someone else—for a potential infinity of others. (82)

However, if the democratic politics of literature is a pure activity of declassification that follows the empty and constantly delayed ideal, conceived in the spirit of the weak messianic tradition, then the empirical distributions of the sensible are its necessary prerequisites, and must be undone to liberate the universal equality that lies beneath them. Does this persistent exemption of literature from the empirical distributions of the sensible not ultimately entail an interpretive fever of “penetrating into depth” beneath false appearances, comparable to that which Rancière, exemplifying with the modern novel, described as “hermeneutic profusion” (2011b: 23)? In highlighting “the suspension of power, the *neither ... nor ...*” logic as a “wholly new revolution” of literature (2009: 99), Rancière in the first place, of course, draws on Kant’s reflective judgment, extended thereupon in Schiller’s anthropologic argument. Yet early German Romanticism, by following this extension and applying reflective judgment to literature’s

consistent tearing apart of firm abodes, raised the novel to the representative literary genre. As an imperial "genre that is not one", the novel is, according to Friedrich Schlegel's *Letter on the Novel* (from the *Dialogue on Poetry*), always in the process of self-dissolution. This cancellation of its specific generic boundaries until it completely merges with the world-in-the-making by becoming its *natural representative*, fully accords with Friedrich Schlegel's contention in the "Athenäum Fragment, No. 116" that the endless number of modern genres, if properly re-described, amount to the same genre: the novel. Accordingly, in Rancière's interpretation, literature becomes a consistent re-description of its former deluded forms by its latter enlightened self. By regarding such a merciless undoing of appearances as the only true mode of revolution, he inadvertently uncovers the novelistic roots of his idea of literature. Literature as he conceives it persistently refers to the hidden world of contingency beyond the empirical distributions of the sensible, in the same way the novelistic author continuously undoes the illusions of his/her figures, and of himself/herself. As exemplary representatives of the "indirect rule" characteristic of the liberal imperial governance—or the colonial regime of governmentality—both Rancière's and early Romanticist agents demonstrate a feverish hermeneutic activity of self-exemption from given identities. Their method of maintaining and reasserting sovereignty consists in untiringly introducing distances from the others by following the lead germane to the permanent state of exception: "I am what I am not."

In *The Politics of Literature* Rancière blames psychoanalysis and Marxism for uncritically inheriting this "hermeneutic profusion" of their methodology from the narrative techniques of the novel, but the structure of his argument on the true democracy also appears to be unmistakably "novelistic". This is why, despite the universal ambition raised by his idea of literature, he ultimately adheres to that interpretation of literature's mission genuine to equivocal European modernity. In lieu of the proclaimed universal equality, this adherence spawns a restricted equality of the few far-seers against the unequal majority of ignorant others in the background. Supported by the same weak messianic tradition as Blanchot's *Outside* or Deleuze's immanence, Rancière's universal equality thus becomes a biased agent of globalization which, contrary to the envisioned goal, fosters a continuous bifurcation of humankind into agencies (or "thinkers") and enablers (or "workers"). To put this undesired outcome in his own terms, his regulating ideal in the final analysis introduces an asymmetrical "pedagogic relationship" between masters and pupils (Rancière 2011a: 144) among humankind. As this relationship was the main target of the critique Rancière

leveled at Althusser's thought, it seems that Rancière reproduces Althusser's blind spots, along with those of Foucault, Lyotard and Deleuze.

## REINTRODUCING THE AGENT OF UNIVERSALITY: POLITICS TURNED INTO POLICE

The question that must be raised is therefore whether or not this messianic rendering of universal equality entails the same substitution of the new for the old "hero' of the story", i.e., the reintroduction of transcendence into immanence, or the overturning of emancipation into mastery that Rancière objects to in Deleuze's "life" (2008: 29). Do we not testify in Rancière's concept of equality to the same monopolizing of universality as in Deleuze's concept of life's becoming? And is not literature, represented by the (European modernist) novel, raised to the natural agent of this universality in both philosophical conceptions? Accordingly, can Rancière's polemics against Deleuze be interpreted as a philosophical battle over the monopoly of universality? Bearing in mind that Rancière criticized Lyotard's ethical advocacy of the Lacanian "Thing" for the same reason (2009: 88–105), does he not replicate Lyotard's tendency "to extricate artistic modernism from political emancipation, to disconnect it in order to connect it with another historical narrative" (103), a narrative no less magnificent and "grand" than the one Lyotard criticized? This "anti-Lyotardian Lyotardian" (Žižek 2000: 172) thus carefully disconnects the all-inclusive modernist artistic resistance to the distribution of the sensible (known as "misunderstanding") from the restricted political emancipation from this distribution (known as "disagreement"), in order to uncritically reconnect them by turning modernist artistic resistance into the only true manner of political emancipation.

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In conclusion, let us inspect more closely how Rancière performs this peculiar "looping maneuver" in his argument. He claims that the aesthetic regime of art, which promotes complete equality of genres, represented figures, topics, writers and readers, was founded by Kant's and Schiller's aesthetic views. The hierarchy of the previous representative regime was definitely abolished by Kant's insistence on the singularity of art, which systematically exempts itself from all imposed norms, constituting a permanent "state of exception". At constant pains to separate true artwork from pleasurable consumption, Kant introduces into its reception the principle of double negation: neither-nor (Rancière 2009: 96–7). This

elimination of both understanding and desire from the reception of the true (genial) artwork “enabled the subject, through the free play of those faculties, to experience a new form of autonomy” (91):

Aesthetic experience is an experience of the twofold separated sensible. It is separated from the law of understanding, which subjects sensory perception to its categories, and from the law of desire which subjects our affects to the search for a good. The form captured through the aesthetic judgments is neither the form of the cognitive object nor the one of the object of desire. This “neither-nor” determines the experience of the beautiful as the experience of resistance. (Rancière 2008: 15, trans. mine)

Continuing this resistance, Schiller affirms the undistributed sensible of the “free play” that challenges the order of domination represented in the relationship between the form and the matter (Rancière 2009: 31–2):

Thanks to this double bind, aesthetic ‘free play’ ceases to be a mere intermediary between high culture and simple nature, or a stage of the moral subject’s self-discovery. Instead, it becomes the principle of a new freedom, capable of surpassing the antinomies of political liberty. (99)

Both Kant and Schiller, it is said, derive literature from freedom and equality of nature, whose power of immanence, through its ceaseless negating activity, abolishes social hierarchies. Leaning on this persistent “neither-nor” negation, literature’s new regulative principle becomes dissensus:

The core argument of the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* resides in the same double negation that characterizes Kantian aesthetic negation. It states that the latter is subject neither to the law of understanding, which requires conceptual determination, nor to the law of sensation, which demands an object of desire. [...] In itself, the ‘free agreement’ between understanding and the imagination is already in itself a disagreement or dissensus. [...] aesthetic common sense, for Schiller, is a dissensual common sense. (97–8)

Yet Kant’s and Schiller’s dissensual “neither-nor” logic, epitomized in Kant’s reflective judgment, is far from being a mere act of resistance, as Rancière regularly renders it. Rather than being historically unique and unprecedented, as he desires, it resumes the operation of self-exemption from the application of socially established rules. In the context of the European imperial and colonial modernity delineated above, this operation clearly aims at social, intellectual, cultural, political, and/or economic mastery over those entrapped in experiential judgments. As reflective judgment by definition derogates determining judgment, it is exclusive rather than inclusive: its

“affirmative action” amounts to “affirmative exclusion” (Amselle 2003). Accordingly, Kant’s and Schiller’s modern artwork claims for itself a divine “state of exception”, as does the simultaneous claim of the French Revolution in the political realm (Agamben 2005: 25). In the same way that French revolutionaries usurp the representation of society, Kant’s aesthetic genius usurps the representation of nature. Both “monopolists of universality” pretend to be disinterested mediators of the “supreme will”, while they are actually its interested inventors, creators or constructors. This explains why not everybody can qualify for the consistent excessiveness of this will, and some must represent or “embody” it for others.

Although this exclusion underlies Kant’s and Schiller’s allocating of privilege to reflective over determining judgment, Rancière completely neglects it. Instead he associates the arrival of the aesthetic regime with that of the all-embracing, as opposed to the restricted democracy achieved by political disagreement. In an interview conducted in 2006 by Frank Ruda and Jan Völker, Rancière explains:

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The art of the aesthetic regime has its own democracy, which tends to establish the equality of sensuous events with a measure that beats the political constitution of communal subjects. Between the democracy of the pre-human, impersonal individuations and the big undertakings of the new communities of the sensible are the “populations” gathered by art that are always deficient or excessive in comparison to those manifested by political communities. (2008: 85, trans. mine)

That is to say, the literature of the aesthetic regime acts in the name of an inarticulate “population” rather than the articulate political community of the “people”, as does politics. In spite of his critique of Deleuze and Agamben (2009: 119–20), Rancière seems to act as the same self-elected agent of the dehumanized anonymous masses of enablers. In Agamben’s words, he speaks “in the name of an incapacity to speak”, and places himself in language “in the position of those who have lost it” (1999: 158, 161). In other words, he implies that “aesthetic” literature, by following the disarticulating “neither-nor” logic, reproduces the *enforced* dissolution of peoples into populations (85) by way of *reflective* judgment. It thereby allegedly represents the politics of *mélange*, hybridity, the “heterogeneous sensible” (Rancière 2002: 146) and the “proleptic union of contraries” (Rancière 2003: 31) or, in a typically Schillerian “playful” manner, a reconciliation of human divisions. Yet far from merely representing it, “aesthetic” literature *invents* this inarticulate mass, which epitomizes

equality in order to disqualify “ethical” and “representative” literature as agents of such equality. In obliterating this exclusion of other kinds of literature from the representation of “population”, Rancière associates *exclusive* “aesthetic” literature, which monopolizes the universality, with the *inclusive* virtual community. Concomitantly, he links politics, which is completely bereft of an emancipating dimension, to the *exclusive* actual community. Because he completely frees literature from exclusion, he regards this practice as being constitutive merely of politics.

Rancière’s silent relegation of the difference *within both* literature and politics to the difference *between* literature and politics paves the way for his privileging of the literary over the political understanding of equality. Such ungrounded favoring arises from the same blending of art with politics proper (and politics improper with the police) with which he reproached Deleuze’s conception, interpreting it as an inadmissible absorption of art in the political. Without first eliminating the internal fissure of both literature and politics, Rancière’s emancipation of the literary egalitarian “neither-nor” logic from the political hierarchical “either-or” logic would be impossible. In the final analysis, this entraps his argument in the same substitution of the particular for the universal as in Deleuze’s and Lyotard’s arguments. Through the erasure of this substitution, Kant’s and Schiller’s elitist reconciliation of humankind ultimately triumphs over the irresolvable division between political and non-political beings constitutive of Rancière’s political thought, by spawning his “quixotic founding of the political” (Valentine 2005: 58), which is characteristic of the recent “melancholy of the Left” (Gibson 2005). From the thinker of anarchic disruptions of the very idea of the human, he becomes the thinker of a messianic human reconciliation. To reintroduce exclusion into the emancipation—one which stubbornly denies its exclusionary character by sentencing itself to the frustrating returns of the denied—one would have to recognize the contaminating workings of determining judgment at the very heart of reflective judgment, or, for that matter, sovereignty at the very heart of governmentality. They are mutually implicated and therefore internally unstable, ambiguous and unpredictable constellations rather than consistent self-sufficient entities that exclude each other.

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