EVERYTHING
IS IN EVERYTHING

JACQUES RANCIÈRE
*Between INTELLECTUAL EMANCIPATION and AESTHETIC EDUCATION*

*Edited by*
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The essays collected in this volume represent versions of papers presented at the “Everything is in Everything: From Intellectual Emancipation to Aesthetic Education” symposium hosted by the Graduate Studies in Art program at Art Center College of Design on March 11-12, 2011. The lone exception is the interview that Jacques Rancière, not being able to attend this conference, has allowed us to translate and publish here.

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The Editors
I have to start with a deviation from our subject. Some months ago many of us were following as closely as we could the riots in the Arab countries. The events taking place in Tahrir square and elsewhere opened up a new possibility for politics. A feeling of sympathy, close to enthusiasm, arose in us for the strength and the simplicity of this "will of the people," as Peter Hallward would call it, gathering itself there with the sole aim of emancipation. The absence of any radical Islamist ideology was so blatantly apparent that even Western politicians had to restrain at one point from their instant first reaction, which was to warn us about the danger of instability and the possibility of an Islamist takeover. Indeed, the opposite was happening: it was precisely the absence of any fundamentalist religious speech as well as the absence of any call for Western democracy that were among the decisive characteristics of the protests.

And then we had to admit: that this was never thought to be possible. Did we not all implicitly believe the common myth that the people in these countries were not really able to emancipate themselves, but rather could only fall prey to radical Islamism at some point? At least we allowed ourselves to be told by our media and our contemporaries that due to the lack of enlightenment, emancipatory movements would have no chance in the Middle East.

We have been taught the opposite. We have been taught that we have to mistrust our conception of the possible and that we should instead develop our concept of the impossible. What we should learn is that we know nothing about the impossible. We not only know nothing, but we take this lack of knowledge as a lack of existence. And we take it as a barrier for our thought: we literally try to think only within the constraints of our knowledge.

And if it were only for polemical reasons, to begin to learn, to be taught by the impossible, we should remind ourselves that the strongest barrier of impossibility is now on our side: it is in fact impossible to have political uprisings in our secure first world. So there are two faces of the impossible. On the one side it functions as
a prohibition, and on the other side it seems that what is new finds its starting point outside of the realm of our knowledge.

We can assert that it is a fact that for us today politics has become impossible. Politics in the precise sense of the embodying of a new process of emancipation that would be beyond our knowledge of the techniques of society. Without having the space to further elaborate this point, we can cite the name Alain Badiou, who has obviously worked on this knot with the utmost precision.²

What we should learn then is that, from the impossible, politics itself can take form. If one supposes that we could learn this from the events in the Middle East, then a fundamental question has to be answered: in what way and to what extent do these events relate to us, to our situation? To this question there is a first, quite common answer. A stupid answer: namely, another question about the continuation of the oil supplies from Libya or bringing up the threat of refugees heading towards European soil. A German newspaper put it the following way: if Saudi Arabia also has its riots, oil prices would be affected dramatically, and then the Arab Spring would finally arrive in Europe—at gas stations.

But the real question is indeed, how do we and how can we relate to the impossible events we witnessed? How can we learn more about the question of the impossible? To say it differently, and to put it as Alain Badiou has put it recently, we should be pupils of these movements. But how can we be pupils of foreign events?²

This whole question might be understood as a deviation away from the subject of aesthetic education. But my point will be, as you might guess, that on the contrary this is not a deviation at all, and that we can connect these problems if we look into Rancière’s works on aesthetics, and try to elaborate and extend his argument as to what it means to follow an emancipatory lesson today.

So the first part of the question could be put the following way: is it possible to learn from emancipatory movements? Is something like an emancipatory education possible? To say the least, one would at first say that this is very problematic. We might end up placing the emancipatory movement in the position of some kind of master, and the emancipatory education would, in its educational part, not be emancipatory at all. We cannot be the pupils of these events in the sense that there is some sort of a master-image telling us how emancipation would work not only in this particular instance, but in general. A second argument might state that we simply cannot learn anything from any other moment of emancipation, because the situation is completely different, due to different cultures, etc. But clearly,
these arguments would not be universalist enough. The universalist stance would rather be that those events, as events of emancipation, in their truth address anybody, anybody who is willing to engage himself in the emancipatory process; they are neither a master plan for other situations nor is the conception of equality they propose different than any other situation. So, one has to stick to the question and even generalize it: is there any possibility of emancipatory education at all?

With Rancière, one has to think emancipation in terms of time and space, and therefore the relation between art and politics, which lies at the heart of Rancière’s thought. And in relation to the question of how to learn from emancipatory moments, the question of art will come to be decisive. This would then be the second part of the question: can we frame a certain thought of emancipatory education within the constellation of politics and art that Rancière claims to be central for the aesthetic regime?

The scene of emancipation, or:
How to pass from one to the other

Let us start with the role of education in the process of emancipation. In a recent book, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière has taken up the thread of education again, which he had opened at a very early point of his thought. He reminds us of the ignorant schoolmaster Jacotot, to whom Rancière dedicated a book, and he reminds us of the scene of emancipation that was to be found in Jacotot’s system of education. The system that Jacotot developed was based on the interruption of the classical scene of education in which a knowing master and an unknowing pupil form the central constellation. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière transforms this constellation into the constellation we find in a theatre, namely the constellation of a group of spectators before a performance.

As in his book on Jacotot, where Rancière undermines the relation between the active and the passive, the knowing schoolmaster and the unknowing pupil or the ignorant, Rancière’s aim is to change our fundamental conception of the relation between the audience and the work of art. He does not attempt to turn the audience into an active, interacting audience that would be integrated in the performance. Rather one has to interrupt the relation of the master and the pupil at its very roots: Rancière’s attempt is—as Jacotot showed—to understand the spectator as someone who
already has a certain knowledge. With the help of this knowledge which anybody already has at his or her disposal, this anybody is capable of working on his own sense of the spectacle, of creating his or her own sense out of it. Because this power of translation is the capacity of anyone, the community in play is the community of anybodies, unspecified, gathered together only in their commonly shared capacity to translate.

In turn, the artist, Rancière adds, is not a person transforming his knowledge or his ideas via the medium of the artwork, then placing it into the realm of the spectator: he or she is instead working on the transformation of something he or she does not know into an artwork. So the artist, too, is involved in a process of translation. He is transferring his knowledge into a scene where he is also a spectator and does not know what actually is taking place. The artist makes himself a spectator, while the spectator makes himself a translator, a narrator, or, in short: an artist.

Indeed, Rancière reproduces the scene of Jacotot here. In the book on Jacotot, the teacher becomes an ignorant teacher, and the pupil becomes someone who already has knowledge, and they both come together in a shared absence of a specific knowledge. In the exemplary case of Jacotot, both the teacher and pupil do not speak the language of the other, and so neither one can instruct the other. They cannot communicate. Jacotot had to go into exile, and now he does not know how to continue teaching, since he is not able to communicate with his pupils. But what he does have is a book. In Jacotot's case, it is a copy of Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a bilingual edition with the original text and a translation on facing pages. Not only there is a translation of the French into Flemish; this book is also a translation of a classical text into modernity, so it is really a translation machine. This changes the situation of education. Because now both sides find proof that translation is possible, and word-by-word they can start their own translation and learn the language of the other, without any instruction or explanation. With only a bit of knowledge at their disposal they are able to translate the book: because "everything is in everything" and "all men have equal intelligence"—anybody is able to connect the knowledge he has to new knowledge.

Rancière calls the "normal" situation of education the situation of inequality because it rests on the distinction between the knowing and the unknowing. The situation of emancipation, however, is the situation of equality, because it is free of any determination and it is through learning that both persons will prove that their knowledge is
equally capable of learning the language of the other. They proceed from the knowledge they have and learn by themselves. Nevertheless one has to remember the fact that the emancipatory scene is still a scene of education, and the schoolmaster is an ignorant one, but still a schoolmaster. Rancière's (and Jacotot's) objection is directed against the transmission of knowledge from a knowing person to an unknowing. It is this hierarchy that is abolished in the emancipatory scene. But what is still transmitted, even and perhaps most necessarily in the emancipatory scene, is the will. The schoolmaster is able to encourage the will of the other, to make him want to translate. This will is transmitted via the book; this transmission between the two unknowing persons is only possible via the book as a medium.

If we come back to the scene of art, and its relation between an artist and an audience, there is obviously only one candidate left to take the role of the book: the work of art itself. The work of art becomes a kind of third, a mediation between the artist and the spectator. But this middle term does not mediate a specific content. It is an empty place, just as Jacotot's book is an empty third. Empty in the precise sense that the confrontation between two languages does not exhibit the process of translation; the bilingual book is only a material effect that proves the possibility of a process of translation retroactively.

The problem with this scene of emancipation, as Rancière has several times stated it in relation to Jacotot, is that it does not lead us to any political scene. For Jacotot, emancipation is always possible, but it is always the emancipation of the individual. Nothing leads from individual emancipation to an emancipated society, because the latter is necessarily always structured and hierarchical. In his book Disagreement, Rancière therefore shifts the argument. If Jacotot's claim was that emancipation will always be lost as soon as an attempt is made to integrate it into the social order of bodies and spaces, Rancière now starts from the axiom that the social order of bodies and spaces inscribes a "wrong" into society, that is, it mis-treats equality. Emancipation can then be thought at the level of communities, because now society establishes scenes of inequality and produces an unspecified, uncounted remainder. This remainder is per se collective. Rancière thus shifts the problem of emancipation from an individual to a collective level.

So emancipatory education seems to encounter a problem, as soon as it translated into the context of a collective. Already in Jacotot's practice, we seem at some point to lose the idea of the collective or of the community. Clearly, the question of community is also part of the classical scene of education: for it is obvious that if a
teacher transmits knowledge to the brains of his pupils, he might be able to build up a sort of a perverted collective, in which everyone knows the same thing in the end. For as long as it has existed, the classical scene of education has been about the reproduction of the state.

In the scene of emancipation, then, this social link is lost. This is indeed not a side effect; the loss of the social link is rather one of the central moments of the emancipation. The emancipatory process consists primarily of a practice of dis-identification: don’t be a knowing teacher anymore, don’t be an unknowing pupil anymore. Emancipation is the loss of roles and places. Jacotot seems to leave us with a mass of emancipated individuals, and it is not clear how to make the way to a political collective from here. Jacotot simply escapes this question by claiming that emancipation cannot rise to the level of society. Impossible.

But even in the emancipatory scene, there are always two. In the scene of emancipation no knowledge will be transmitted, but there is a will to be passed on. You always need the ignorant schoolmaster to encourage the will of the other. To put it differently, looking from the other side, from the side of the one who is seeking knowledge: what you need is not a master, what you need is not only the will to translate and to learn, but also the courage for the new. It is the ignorant schoolmaster who encourages, but the book does as well, as a manifest example that the impossible already has been possible. The schoolmaster can transmit his will, and the book is a material proof of possible emancipation.

Courage, which we can add as a supplement to the Rancierian framework, can be taken from a famous phrase of Kant that could perhaps serve as a motto for Jacotot’s scene of emancipation. “Have courage to make use of your own understanding!” was Kant’s well-known answer to the question: What is Enlightenment? In this sense, the needed courage is the courage for the new, supplementing the will for new knowledge. So will and courage, in a way, form the link between the emancipated schoolmaster, the pupil who is about to emancipate himself, and the book. But this will is still not a collective will. It is, if one may put it like this, the will of the two.

Now, if we think of a group of pupils, say, it is still unclear if this will also allows us to connect people in an emancipatory moment. We could say that at the heart of the question of education there persists the question of the translation of a dis-identifying and dis-sociating method into a political collective. Given that this is also the problem of the transition from Jacotot’s emancipatory scene to
a scene of collectivization, I would propose to call it the problem of communist education.

To elaborate this problem, we can change our perspective. In a talk Rancière gave at the first conference on the *Idea of Communism* in May 2009 in London, he addressed this problem again. He asked: “The question is: how can the collectivization of the capacity of anybody coincide with the global organization of a society? How can the anarchical principle of emancipation become the principle of a social distribution of tasks, positions and powers?” In associating himself with the Badiou’s *Communist Hypothesis*, Rancière claims that we need a sort of history of communist moments, which we can soon understand as moments of emancipation. This history would rather be a non-history of moments in which ordinary time is interrupted, a non-history of singular points of timelessness.

Emancipation is always un-timely, being precisely a split within time and space. And if we want to think emancipation in a collective framework—what Rancière here, and I would say after a long time, calls Communism again—we would have to disentangle these communist moments from the narratives that try to join them to a story with a necessity and an inner goal. At the level of structure, we confront the same problem here: how to unite moments of dis-identification? Rancière’s answer seems in part to be that the rethinking of communist moments as they have existed may encourage us or give us “confidence” in the possibility of the impossible. They give us the confidence to think the impossible because they are themselves a collection of impossibilities that happened in space and time. Now, why does Rancière speak of Communism here? He gives three reasons, which I will briefly quote: the first is that the name communism “emphasizes the principle of the unity and equality of intelligences”; the second is that “it emphasizes the affirmative aspect of the process of collectivization of this principle”; and finally “it stresses the self-superseding capacity of the process, its boundlessness, which entails its ability to invent futures that are not yet imaginable.”

The aspects of affirmation and the superseding quality of the process are in a certain sense relatively new in Rancière’s conception of the process of emancipation. One could relate them back to the scene of emancipation and to its notion of the encouragement needed for the process of emancipation to take place. “Communism” names the type of link that was earlier found between the will and courage, that is, a link of indetermination. But in this linking of different scenes of collective emancipation, in this linking of communist moments of the past to those of the future, it is also already collective structures
that are linked. If we speak of courage, if we speak of confidence, or the will, we can now speak about a collective courage or collective confidence. We are in the realm of what in a political sense we can call communist education, in the sense Rancière gives to the word: emphasizing the unity and equality of intelligences, the affirmative aspect of the process of collectivization, and the inner boundlessness of this process. Communist education turns the scene of emancipation into a collective one: but a collective scene of confidence and courage for emancipation, not a collective that would in any sense be determined.

So we gain confidence from past moments. But the problem of education also refers us to the question as to how we can be taught by events actually happening in the present? For the time being, we have only transferred the scene of emancipation from an individual level to a collective one, but we still do not see very clearly how the process of collectivization could arise.

I think that we can find in Rancière a very special proposition in which we are taught to be confident not only historically, but in the present. This proposition also concerns the question how this confidence can be built, and where it can stem from, in those times in which collective emancipation is absent. And, despite all the parallels, I think on this point the art object shows itself to be, for Rancière, a different kind of object than Jacotot’s book was.

The Scene of Art

At the beginning I claimed that if we really want ask how we can learn from emancipatory moments in Rancière, then we would have to ask about art. And after this detour concerning the question of how the individual scene of emancipation can be turned into a collective one, determining the link without a link that courage is, and showing how this courage may be won historically, we can now finally turn to art. The first question is simple and obvious. If what I would like to call—for reasons that will soon be explained—the scene of art reproduces the scene of emancipation as witnessed in Jacotot, do we not encounter once again the problem that the scene of art is not a political scene and there is no path that leads from the scene of art to a political scene? As we have seen, Rancière draws parallels between the scene of art and Jacotot’s scene of emancipation, and we actually do encounter the same problem here. But with a slight change indeed, because now the question is rather how to get from
the scene of an object (of art) to a subjective process. It is not about emancipation as a process between two individuals anymore, but about emancipation as a subjective process in relation to a specific object. Still, one could say that this closely resembles the scene of emancipation and the importance of the book in it. But the role of the book in Jacotot and the role of work of art function differently, and I will try to explain why.

In his book *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière asserts that “Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection,” and this definition is meant to define the disruptive effect of artworks, though we could also relate it to Jacotot.

In the book cited, Rancière is speaking about works of art, mostly theatrical performances. Such performances, like any other art work belonging to the realm of the aesthetic regime, can be characterized following Rancière as something producing sensory anomalies, disrupting the orders of time and space, dissociating the chain of cause and effect. In this way, art objects or scenes of art produce an effect of disruption. And with regard to the spectator they produce a dis-identification, and even a “community of dis-identified persons.”

Artworks neither represent emancipation nor do they immediately incorporate it. They are some kind of third, like Jacotot’s book, and they can be a tool of emancipation.

Now it is here that one encounters several problems. First, it is clear that Rancière conceives of artworks as related to emancipation. But it is far from obvious how to understand this relation when we have to understand emancipation as something more than Jacotot did, as more than individual emancipation.

The first thing we can observe is that both the book in Jacotot’s emancipatory scene and the work of art occupy the place of the object. There are individuals who emancipate themselves in relation to a certain object. Emancipation itself can never be objectified, it can never be caught in determinations and definitions, it is a purely subjective process, but it is a process in relation to objects or to objectivity. The object itself cannot be emancipatory: we cannot say that Jacotot’s book in itself is emancipatory, or possesses some strange emancipatory energy. Neither can we say anything similar about the work of art. But it does have a certain political effect. It has, as Rancière puts it, “a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit
their functions and destinations. This is where the aesthetic and the political intersect, at the site of the disruptive effect.

But let us stay with the object for a moment. The work of art disrupts the normal order of the sensible, and the political procedure finds its starting point in such a rupture. This disrupting of the normal order of space and time is a negative effect of the work of art. It is its de-specification, its not-fitting-in, its withdrawing from the structure of distinction, its undecidability as an object that makes it a strange, alien object in time and space. As an object in time and space, the art object claims to be itself another, general order of space and time in the same moment it continues to remain an alien object within the normal order of space and time. This other space and time, which it is, even as it remains inside the same, normal space and time—because the work of art disrupts the order of the sensible as a sensible being itself—can therefore only be a split. It is a split in the order of space and time in the precise sense of being both: out of and in this world. It is in this world, made out of it, and outside of it.

What is the object that is called an art object, then? We are left with two possibilities: either we understand objects of art to be those objects that are singular ruptures in the sensible, or we assert that this split in the sensible can be encountered anywhere, and everything can possibly be a work of art. The second answer resembles the Deleuzian one, in the sense of an event that would be integrated into the univocity of being. Rancière’s answer seems to be the first one, emphasizing that objects of art objectify ruptures of the sensible in the form of produced objects.

If we now move to the side of the spectator, we encounter the same question: either we conceive of the spectator as dependent on the concrete object in his process of emancipation, or we understand the spectator as fully independent of the object. If he or she were dependent on the object of art in the process of emancipation, we would have to assume that art objects are in the position of mastery in the process of emancipation. Only artworks would be able to initiate the process of emancipation in the spectator. If we strengthen this position a bit further, we could say that this position resembles the aesthetics of the sublime, insofar as only the art object would have the power to produce a disruptive shock. And, on the other side: if he or she were fully independent, we would completely lose the connection to the works of art. For Rancière, as I would like to put it, the spectator is not independent, for it is in the process of emancipation that he establishes a link of indetermination in relation to the work of art.
What the spectator has to do, then, is translate the process inherent in the work of art into his own emancipation. But this process is a process of dis-identification. It is a process of dis-identification and a process of learning that the impossible is possible, that it is possible to do what one cannot do. To speak another language in the case of Jacotot, or create different orders of the sensible in the case of works of art—both are scenes of emancipation. As in the scene of emancipation in Jacotot, we learn from the scene of art to deploy our own (non-teleological) will, and we learn that we have the capacity to learn and do what we will. As with Jacotot's book, the work of art does not teach us any knowledge, but rather teaches us a confidence in the impossible. This confidence has then to be turned into a knowledge again, because we do not speak any language based on confidence alone. What the object really teaches us is the confidence to turn the impossible into the possible.

The object of art, however, teaches in a different way than Jacotot's book. In contrast to the scene of emancipation, the scene of art contains a certain collective dimension, but in contrast to a political scene, the scene of art is not yet fully collectivized.

Take the way Rancière speaks about the process of emancipation in relation to the spectators:

The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other. It is a shared effect of disruption that forms the aesthetic community, we could say. So here the aesthetic community is formed through the collective experience of a singular situation of dis-identification. But, as Rancière does not wait to add, from this kind of intellectual awareness there is no road that leads to a political community. Again, there is no path from an aesthetic emancipation to a political scene. But if we return to the moment of confidence which Rancière described in relation to the communist moments, could we not say that works of art can give us confidence that a different order of the sensible is possible? And could we not say that this confidence is in itself only possible as a collective effect, precisely because the art scene is not an individual scene, but a scene that we could call public? It is public
because it is in space and time, and because it directly refers to space and time. If the book is a translation machine, the scene of art is a direct intervention in space and time. And, publicly, it immanently addresses everyone. This is also why art objects actually form scenes of art, because they are always necessarily integrated in a space and a time, and as a split in space and time they depend on a public “audience.” Otherwise the intervention in space and time through the art object would not be real.

The universal address via the medium of an object is what the spectators witness. A universal address, because it is a singular object in space and time, and as such it addresses potentially everyone. Ruptures in space and time are totalizing: they are perhaps minimal points, but they claim to be a totality. They are and they claim to be objective. So there is an address to everyone, but this address is only a negative one, because the art object is only a rupture in space and time that shows the spectator negatively that there is a distribution of space and time that does not relate to us all and that there are other possible distributions, and that therefore the possibility of other distributions will bring a founding equality to light. And therefore equality is always there and will always already have been there. But: what is this addressing of everyone in the singular distribution like? How can it touch us, if we are not able to see it, because this rupture is in itself nothing, being only a material effect in space and time?

There is a famous passage in Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* that is very similar to Rancière’s claim about the spectator, although he himself does not mention it. Kant is writing about the French Revolution, and for him it is essentially the spectator of the event who is the important figure. Kant writes that

The revolution that we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such price, even if he could hope to carry it out successfully at the second attempt. But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a sympathy that borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race.
Instead of reading here an indication of a tendency towards morality in mankind, one can also understand this differently. At this point we should take up an argument that Rado Riha develops in his reading of the Kantian critique. Riha shows how reason has to criticize itself, to make the constitution of objectivity through the faculty of understanding first of all possible. In the process of this self-criticism, reason also enables itself to appear in the empirical realm: namely as the present absence of a truth-fiction, the present absence of an absolute, or, in Kantian terms, the present absence of ideas of reason. This appearance of an idea in the empirical realm Riha calls a de-realization of the world, a de-realization of reality. The eyes of the spectators of the French Revolution, Riha concludes, de-realize the world in this sense. Now this de-realization is part of the constitution of objectivity, part of the work of reason. The objectivity based on this de-realization is the same objectivity as before, with the minimal change that it now appears in the light of the idea, a minimal change that changes everything.

With Riha, and modifying his argument for our purposes, we could say that in the eyes of the enthusiastic spectators the shimmer of the idea is mirrored, but this very idea is nothing less than a de-realization of reality. The eyes of the spectators of the French Revolution, Riha concludes, de-realize the world in this sense. Now this de-realization is part of the constitution of objectivity, part of the work of reason. The objectivity based on this de-realization is the same objectivity as before, with the minimal change that it now appears in the light of the idea, a minimal change that changes everything.

Coming back to the spectator in Rancière, we have to shift this argument a bit. We could understand the Ranciérian spectator as someone who becomes a possible mirror of the idea of equality. Becoming a possible mirror of the idea of equality makes the spectator on the one hand part of an emancipatory process that is, on the other hand, not the direct, determined result of the work of art. The spectator does not experience a power in him as an individual, but he experiences the power of an idea that integrates him into a collective subjectivity. The point I want to make is: the work of art can be considered a de-realization of the order of the sensible, and this present absence integrates the individual spectator into a collective process of dis-identification. The de-realization has a universal address, it is embodied in the specific work of art, but it addresses everyone. The
world of things, the world of the object is not all, there is more to it than we can grasp with our senses. Or: what we grasp with our senses is not all, there is more in it than what we grasp with our senses.

The art object displays this absence of a totality negatively, it is in the world and out of this world. It unfolds its effects only in the sensible, because it is a sensible object and claims to be a totality. It claims to be another total reality of space and time, but in this way it shows that the sensible we know is not all. In this, its negative effect, the work of art integrates the spectators. It integrates them directly, because of their physical presence, which is directly connected to this split in the order of the sensible.

When Jacotot's book unfolds its emancipatory effect through the help of the will of the ignorant schoolmaster, the art object offers this universal address as a concrete being that realizes its de-realization in its concrete presence, and it therefore unfolds its emancipatory effect everywhere it is. So this scene is not the scene of the two, but the scene of the concrete presence of anyone.

The affirmation of this moment (or of the scene of art) would be the affirmation of a collectivizing moment of the idea of equality. This neither leads us to a political party, nor turns the artwork into some kind of master of emancipation. It still does not lead us to a political scene. But it is a mediator between the individual scene of emancipation and the political, collective subjectivation.

This, one could understand, is Rancière's claim: today we have to start from the split in the sensible and see that the normal order of the sensible is not all. The sensible is the realm of the objective, and art is its split, and this split in being is the only moment that allows us to become subjects, starting from an absence, a present absence in space and time. Which will then allow us to learn that objective reality is always constituted through a kernel of non-objective reality.

Art is, then, the most radical education in emancipation, because it is an objective education: the scene of art is concerned with a de-realizing object. We have historical confidence through communist moments, and we have individual confidence through intellectual emancipation. But what we also have to learn is that objectivity is incomplete, and that in this incompleteness we inexist as subjects. It is through this objectivity that we can learn that we, not being objects, can become subjects. And it is from this breaking up of objectivity, which we can realize in events like those in Tahrir Square, that we can learn that we inexist in that what is called the impossible. Because, as a real spectator, we always take part in what is happening without being part of it. 19
See Peter Hallward, “In Egypt and Tunisia the will of the people is not a hollow cliché,” The Guardian, January 31, 2011; accessed http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/31/egypt-tunisia-will-of-the

In Badiou, this is of paramount importance and is developed through different texts. In The Communist Hypothesis he condenses the relation between the political event and the impossible in the following way: “[(...)] with respect to a situation or a world, an event paves the way for the possibility of what from the limited perspective of the make-up of this situation or the legality of this world— is strictly impossible...”


Jacques Rancière, “Communists without Communism?”, 73.

ibid., 75.

ibid., 73.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 73.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 75.

ibid., 75.

ibid., 75.

ibid., 75.


Ibid., 167.


Ibid., 73.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.

ibid., 72.