09 2007

Instituting and Distributing

On the Relationship Between Politics and Police Following Rancière as a Development of the Problem of Distribution with Deleuze

Gerald Raunig

Translated by Aileen Derieg

In Jacques Rancière's political aesthetics a question is raised about the political and about the policing of art as a problem of distribution. In this article I would like to describe Rancière's theorem as a further development of Gilles Deleuze' earlier ideas and examine particularly its relationship to activist and instituent practices. When I speak of an "instituent practice", this actualization of the future in a present becoming is not the opposite of institution the way utopia, for instance, is the opposite of bad reality. Nor is it to be understood, in the way that Castoriadis' concept pair *instituant/institué*[1] and Negri's *pouvoir constituant/constitué*[2] are conceptualized, necessarily in relation to being instituted or to constituted power. Rather, instituent

practice as a process and concatenation of instituent events means an absolute concept beyond the opposite of institution: it does not oppose the institution, but it does flee from institutionalization and structuralization.

Here I would like to especially investigate one aspect of this kind of idea of instituent practice, specifically that of the nature of the relationship between distributing and instituting. From my perspective this particularly means questioning the mode of instituting as establishing a new arrangement. This consequently also includes the connection between constituent power and instituent practice, of social composition and instituting, and it raises questions about the form of concatenation, questions of inclusion and questions of authority in a double sense: "authority" as subject and "origin" of instituting, as collective or individual authorship (*auctoritas*), but also of authority as a decisive instance implicitly or explicitly establishing itself as a hierarchical position. If instituent practice can be understood as a process, as a current and as an incision, event, then it is the event of instituting in which it is predecided how cooperation, collectivity and participation develop, how the *con-* in constituent power (as a sign of what is shared) relates to the mode of instituting.[3]

To differentiate these questions, I would like to refer to Gilles Deleuze' explanations of the various types of distribution in *Difference and Repetition* from 1968. In the first chapter on "Difference itself", in between his considerations of "organic representation" and "orgiastic representation", Deleuze writes about two forms of distribution that correspond to these concepts:

“No doubt there is still hierarchy and distribution in univocal being, in relation to the individuating factors and their sense, but distribution and even hierarchy have two completely different, irreconcilable acceptations. We must first of all distinguish a type of distribution which implies a dividing up of that which is distributed: it is a matter of dividing up the distributed as such. It is here that in judgement the rules of analogy are all-powerful. In so far as common sense and good sense are qualities of judgement, these are presented as principles of division which declare themselves the best distributed. A distribution of this type proceeds by fixed and proportional determinations which may be assimilated to 'properties' or limited territories within representation.”[4]

Instituting is posited here through the mode of a universally presumed “common sense”, through latent or clearly recognizable authority, and through reterritorializations that are carried out according to pre-existing territorial principles. The rules of this model of sedentariness are in keeping with a relatively static, inflexible concept of space. Deleuze’ examples for this first type of distribution conducted through counting, striating and property rights, are the distribution of land in post-Homerian societies and the division of areas, categories and attributes under the gods of antiquity, which in turn distributed boundaries and portions among mortals “according to fate”.

“Then there is a completely other distribution which must be called nomadic, a nomadic *nomos*, without property, enclosure or measure. Here, there is no longer a division of that which is distributed but rather a division among those who distribute themselves in an open space – a space which is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.”[5]

In the second type of distribution there is no law, no claim, no authority; the movement of the arrangement takes place as principally open, unlimited, covering a space as large as possible. The space itself is taken here neither as empty, waiting to be filled, nor as full or previously divided, but rather as a "space of scope". This second distribution, which is more demonic than divine, more orgiastic than organic, involves "... the unsettling difficulties that nomadic distributions introduce into the sedentary structures of representation."[6]

To "distribute, apportion space" or to "...distribute themselves in space", these are two different possibilities for a conceptual development in a continuum that does not presuppose the two poles to be mutually exclusive: space as a given dimension of distribution, apportionment and division, of inclusion and exclusion, space as an immanent effect of an endless, immeasurable movement of distributing, of spreading out, in which space appears neither as empty nor as limited space. Which type of distribution prevails in the development of space and sociality, however, also determines how the "parts" are to be understood: as identities, as organic parts of a social and spatial body, which is in turn the sum of its parts, or as singularities in a plane of immanence, as orgiastic partakers that cannot be counted, are beyond countability, beyond measure, beyond calculability.

In taking up the Deleuzian differentiation of the distribution of space and the distribution *in* space, Jacques Rancière developed his concept of the *partage du sensible* similarly to Deleuze as a twofold one. For Rancière, the "distribution of the sensible" corresponds to an anticipation of the distribution of roles and parts that constitute a political and social order. As the central concepts of his political

philosophy, Rancière calls the two sides of the distribution "police" and "the political", and in both cases he shifts the terms far away from their conventional meaning: "The word 'distribution' is to be understood in the double sense: on the one hand as that which separates and excludes, on the other as that which allows participation."[7] The first type of distribution is "police" in the broadest sense; the terminological background for this is the modern history of the "policey" developed by Foucault as *haute police* (as a technique of administering and governing the population, unlike *basse police*, which corresponds more to the understanding of police today).[8] The second type of distribution, "the political" stages exactly that which should not exist, the "part of those who have no part". A "police distribution of the portions allotted to the different parts of society"[9] on the one hand, which is, on the other hand, broken open, confused by "the political", whereby this concept corresponds *grosso modo* to the second, nomadic-orgiastic type of distribution in Deleuze' writing. This means that the political is a "disqualification of every natural calculation of the parts of society", because it always still includes the "part of those who have no part" in the calculation.[10]

The broad historical concept of police is thus confronted with an equally broad concept of the political. Yet Rancière's pair of concepts also works in the narrower sense – which could equally apply to several practices of activist art and its interventions into the logic of the state apparatus[11] – as concrete police logic counter to the – in the most concise sense political – logic of demonstrators: the police say that "there is nothing to see in a street. The political, on the other hand, rearranges the space of circulation with the demonstration. It newly arranges what there is to be seen, to be named, to be counted."[12] Instead of the familiar duality of politicians and demonstrators propounding opposite

contents, Rancière shows us two different configurations of the visible that transgress the limited frame of the opposition and representation of content.

The event that introduces this unrest into the police distribution of the sensible is dissensus. Rancière does not consider dissensus at all simply as an opposition or deviation in content, but rather specifically as disobedience towards the distribution of the sensible and the socially striated space, the revolt against the form of police, the usurpation of equality: "Dissensus is the introduction of a fact into a sphere of sensible experience that is incompatible with it, contradicts it."[13]

Dissensus in this sense is not the same as the Bourriaudian relational aesthetics and its numerous artistic fields of application, nor as (state) cultural policies – more attributable to a police logic of striation – promoting art as a social integration practice (not only in the Anglo-American region). Nor is the search for collective identities and ("coming") communities the issue here, because the "political form is not the form of the community, the law or the state. The political form is that of dispute, through which the political exists"[14]. The Deleuzian nomadic distribution in space, further developed by Rancière as the distribution of the sensible as dissensus, is instead an answer to the question of the mode of instituting. For the event of instituting, dissensus, as Rancière understands it, is the precondition that space and sociality are not quickly striated and closed, but instead remain open for ever new events of instituting. In the moment and in the mode of instituting it is decided whether the exchange of the different with the different tends to be processed, or whether difference is identified, categorized, stratified and striated. Thwarting "police" inclusion and exclusion, confounding striated and cleanly divided

spaces, rearranging the boundaries is the precondition of an orgiastic form of distribution in any context.

As much as Rancière's political philosophy illuminates the Deleuzian concept of distribution, the French philosopher's political aesthetics constricts at a sensitive point. In several articles and interviews Rancière tends to follow a relatively simple pattern of separating art and politics, which I would call the classical schema. The old familiar schema consists of positing an opposition between content-focussed "political" art and formalistic "autonomous" art, the poles of which are favored by the users of the respective schema depending on taste or – as in Rancière's case – somewhat more elegantly suspended in a third type. In this movement – and the third type need not further concern us here – Rancière also further fuels the discourses that administer and supervise the defining categorization of the political and the aesthetic as police organs in Rancière's sense.

Counter to the pejorative identification of the works by artists who understand their practice of expression on social and political topics as political art, which Rancière declares as unpolitical, however, because of their focus on content, it must be objected that this argument not only concerns the rare case of post-Stalinist propaganda artists, but also those who regard their art as counter-information, as a means of distributing marginalized messages, even if "only" in the bourgeois art field. What Rancière overlooks in these cases is that a message that is impossible in a certain context can shift the *partage du sensible* like the examples in his political philosophy of dissensus. A similar case is Rancière's schematic representation, which throws not only Bauhaus and Beuys into the same pot of reproach, that of seeking to dissolve art totally into

life, but also the whole spectrum of post-revolutionary Russian avant-gardes along with Guy Debord and the S.I., and even Negri and Hardt as well.[15] The many nuances of the forms of the concatenation of artistic and political strategies are lost in such an abstract leveling. Despite how astonishingly interested and well informed Rancière is about contemporary art practices, his political philosophy becomes flat in the examples from the art field.

Finally, another statement from Rancière needs to be discussed, where he specifically questions the permeability of artistic and political practices.[16] Not only theoretical considerations contradict this, but also – even though many protagonists understandably object to being categorized as art – the artistic strategies of the communication guerilla, the performative practice of Yomango and the Superheroes affiliated with the Euromayday movement, the net culture hoaxes and fakes by groups such as RTMark or the Yes Men and many more. It is also contradicted by the continuous involvement of artists in micropolitical constellations and in social movements, in which the neighboring zones of political and artistic practice tend towards temporary indistinguishability. It is not necessary to say that all these examples can probably be easily regarded as dissensus in Rancière's sense[17]; they are certainly, however, instituent practices that seek to thwart the principle of the police in orgiastic forms of distribution.

An early version of this article was published under the title "Partizipation und Polizei" in 31*, magazine of the Institute for the Theory of Design and Art, Zurich. Thanks to Isabell Lorey and Stefan Neuner for their helpful suggestions.*

[1]Cf. Alice Pechriggl, “Destituting, Instituting, Constituting … and the De/Formative Power of Affective Investment”, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0507/pechriggl/en

[2]Cf. Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution*, Semiotext(e)/MIT Press 2007, 59-66

[3]Cf. various examples in my article “Instituent Practices No. 2”, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0507/raunig/en

[4]Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, London: Continuum 2004, 36

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 37

[7]Jacques Rancière, “Konsens, Dissens, Gewalt”, in: Mihan Dabag, Anja Kapust, Bernhard Waldenfels (Ed.), *Gewalt. Strukturen, Formen, Repräsentationen*, Munich: Fink 2000, 97. See also the chapter: “Das Unrecht: Politik und Polizei”, in: Jacques Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen* [Engl.: *Disagreement*], Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2002, 33-54.

[8]Cf. Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen* [Engl.: *Disagreement*], 40. On Foucault’s concept of police, cf. Isabell Lorey, “*The Dream of the Governable City. On Plague, Policey and Raison d’état*”, http://eipcp.net/transversal/1007/lorey/en.

[9]Jacques Rancière in Conversation with Christian Höller, “Entsorgung der Demokratie”, in: *springerin* 3/2007, 22.

[10]With this aspect of calculating and counting on the one hand, and immeasurableness on the other, Rancière also alludes to Deleuze' "space that has no limits". Cf. Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen* [Engl. *Disagreement*], 39 on the "logic that counts the portions of the parts", 32 on the "introduction of the immeasurable in the midst of the distribution of speaking bodies".

[11]For instance the Reclaim the Streets movement of the 1990s and its 2005 follow-up, the Clown Army, which thwarted the dualism Robocops – Black Block at the G8 summits in Gleneagles and Heiligendamm 2007. Cf. John Jordan, "Notes whilst walking on How to Break the Heart of Empire", http://eipcp.net/transversal/1007/jordan/en. Cf. also Rancière, *Das Unvernehmen* [Engl. *Disagreement*], 41 on his concept of "political activity" as "also the activity of demonstrators or barricade fighters, who literally transform urban traffic routes into 'public space'."

[12]Rancière, "Konsens, Dissens, Gewalt", 107.

[13]Ibid., 101

[14]Ibid., 106

[15]Cf. especially Jacques Rancière, "The Politics of Aesthetics", http://www.nogome.com/blogs/dancasnacidade/archives/2005/08/jacques_rancier.html. The relevant passage about the pole in Rancière's schema, which explains the obliteration of the difference between art and life on the basis of a far-fetched colorful mixture of art practices: "This means that the separateness of aesthetic equality and freedom has to be achieved by its self-suppression. It has to be achieved in an unseparate form of common life when art and politics, work and leisure, public and private life are one and the same. Such is the program of the aesthetic revolution achieving in real life what both political dissensus and aesthetic enjoyment

can only achieve in appearance. This program was first stated two centuries ago in the oldest systematic program of German idealism, proposing to replace the dead mechanism of state power by the living body of a people animated by a philosophy turned into mythology. It was continuously revived, both in the projects of a revolution conceived as 'human revolution', meaning the self-suppression of politics, and of an art suppressing itself as a separate practice, identifying itself with the elaboration of new forms of life. It animated the 'gothic' dreams of Arts and Crafts in 19th century England as well as the technological achievements of the Werkbund or the Bauhaus in 20th century Germany, the mallarmean dream of a poetry 'preparing the festivals of the future' as well as the concrete participation of the suprematist, futurist and constructivist artists to the Soviet Revolution. It animated the projects of situationist architecture as well as Guy Debord's derive or Beuys' 'social plastic'. I think that it is still alive in Hardt and Negri's contemporary vision of the franciscan communism of the multitudes, implemented through the irresistible power of the global network exploding the boundaries of Empire. In all these cases, politics and art must achieve their self-suppression to the benefit of a new form of unseparate life."
Cf. also the somewhat edited version in Jacques Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen, Berlin: b_books 2006, 85.*

[16]Jacques Rancière in Conversation with Christian Höller, "Entsorgung der Demokratie", in: *springerin* 3/2007, 23: "Naturally that does not mean that the artistic practice has become a political practice, as some theoreticians think. They tend to regard artistic action as a new political activism, specifically because of the fact that we live in a new phase of capitalism, in which material and immaterial production, knowledge, communication and artistic action merge into one and the same process of the actualization of

a collective intelligence." As vague as Rancière's criticism of "some theoreticians" remains, it is likely that he is aiming primarily at Maurizio Lazzarato and Paolo Virno and the artistic-political practices associated with them, although their concepts of "immaterial labor", "General Intellect", "virtuosity", etc. by no means harbor a diffuse merging of art and life or the obliteration of specific differences and competences.

[17]Cf. footnote 11