Senior Theses and Projects   Student Scholarship

Spring 2020

Ethicizing Art: A Rancièrean Analysis of 'Feminist' Art and the Notion of Victimhood

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May 1st, 2020

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Professor Erik Vogt for his insightful guidance and tireless help. He helped me channel my varied interests into a thesis which explores many of the questions that have been important to me these past four years. His flexibility and understanding in the midst of this pandemic has been unmeasurably helpful. I have learned so much from him this year, and hope to continue developing these ideas post-grad. I feel incredibly privileged to have worked under someone with such a passionate philosophical mind.

Thank you to Professor Maurice Wade for serving as my second reader and always being willing to help out. His intellectual curiosity is unparalleled, and he serves as an ideal role model for how to engage with the world. His endless well of knowledge and positive energy have been very valuable to me. I am so lucky that we got to work together in both of our last semesters here at Trinity.

Thank you to Professor Donna-Dale Marcano for helping me fall in love with philosophy as an underclassmen and insisting I pursue it. Without her, I would have never realized my deep passion for this work and honed my interest in gender philosophy specifically. I am in constant awe of her thoughtfulness, kindness, and intellect. She has consistently been there for both academic and emotional support, and has helped mold me into the thinker I am today. I could not have started or finished this major without her.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my fellow thesis writers and my fellow Philosophy Club members for their wonderful feedback and moral support throughout this process. Having to leave campus has made me realize how valuable it was to always have a friend nearby during those many long nights on level three.

Table of Contents:

Introduction:

In the year 2020, politics are *en vogue* -- both literally and figuratively. People want to flip through fashion magazines and see articles about current events and activism, not just pictures of beautiful things. There is a focus, especially within the realm of art and culture, to support sustainability, feminism, anti-racism, LGBTQ+ rights, etc. In the age of 'ethical capitalism' it feels as though politics, or at least what we colloquially refer to as politics, has engulfed the aesthetic realm. On the surface, this seems to be a movement in the right direction away from inequality, but upon further analysis I hope to show you that we have many reasons to be wary of this shift. Using the works of aesthetic and political philosopher Jacques Rancière, I will attempt to explain what exactly is meant by aesthetics, discuss the politics of aesthetics, and differentiate between political discourse and ethical discourse.

One of the most troubling consequences of this shift for me, as a student of gender and aesthetic philosophy, has been the direction feminism has gone in the 21st century. 'Feminism' as we know it today feels entirely stripped of its political power. This hollowing of feminism can be attributed to a number of factors. Some might point to its commodification as the culprit, but I see this as a byproduct of what is actually at the core of the problem: an ethical shift. Commodity feminism has flourished in the wake of feminism's depoliticization because it seems to be one of the only avenues left to practice 'feminism.' The political nature of feminism -- the discussions about who is being counted for within the political community and who is not -- have been paralyzed by a discourse of victimhood. As a woman myself, my studies have been motivated by a desire to reject this victimhood. While I always have been passionate about the project of equality, in recent years I have become more and more uncomfortable with labeling myself with

the title of 'feminist.' This became even more the case after the Me Too movement which has dominated cultural and political discourse for the past three years. It increasingly feels as though to be a woman, and to be a feminist, one must also accept that they are a victim.

This new feminist shift can be found within the culture industry and aesthetic politics. As it has moved away from politics proper, it has found a foothold in the culture of capitalism. In the aesthetics of politics the focus has been on getting more women in office or allowing women to make as much money as men. The most notable 'thinker' of this wave is a former COO of a Fortune 500 company who encouraged women to further their careers. The Me Too movement has focused much more on getting sexual criminals punished and deplatformed than passing legislation and encouraging education. To say that feminism has been depoliticized does not mean it has entirely abdicated the realm of politics proper, but it is to say that it only exists within politics proper on an aesthetic level. While the aesthetics of politics in this new era is of interest, what I will mostly be undertaking is the ethical shift within the aesthetic realm. This new feminism is much more easily recognizable within the artistic and cultural realm; it is clearly present in almost all film, music, media, etc. that is produced nowadays. The aesthetic realm is ripe with examples, and also arguably more impactful on identity formation. As a young person coming of age in the 21st century, it was through media that I first became acquainted with what we call feminism today. Moreover, film, which is arguably the ultimate artistic medium of the aesthetic age, will be the focus of my elucidations.

In the first chapter I will be looking to the three different artistic regimes that Rancière delineates. Although these three regimes are not teleologically ordered -- they can all be at play simultaneously -- the aesthetic regime is a fairly newer way of looking at art compared to the

other two. The ethical regime of images is associated with the ideas of Plato, and the representative regime with his successor Aristotle. The aesthetic revolution, ushered in by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, gave art autonomy for the first time. To even discuss the topic of art we must first understand the difference between 'arts' and 'art.' I will then discuss the outcomes of the aesthetic revolution, and delve into the politics of aesthetics in further detail. The important link between autonomy and heteronomy within the aesthetic regime will be laid out, and I will explore some of Rancière's critiques of different conceptions of modern art.

In my next chapter I will look at what Rancière calls the ethical turn. Not to be confused with the ethical regime of images, the ethical turn is a way of depoliticizing both politics and aesthetics. First, I will unpack Rancière's discussion of human rights to better understand how politics and it's opposite -- the police -- work within politics proper. This text will also provide a good background for the motivations of the ethical turn and the modern notion of victimhood. I will then turn to Rancière's critique of Jean-François Lyotard's aesthetics of the sublime in order to provide context for the foundations of the ethical turn within the aesthetic regime. Using the films *Dogville* and *Mystic River*, I will attempt to illustrate what this ethical turn looks like within the aesthetic realm, and I will discuss the War on Terror in order to do the same with the political realm. Lastly, I will turn to Sophocles' *Antigone* and discuss her significance as a heroine of the ethical turn.

In my final chapter, I will be undertaking a critique of feminism and 'feminist' art in the 21st century using Rancière's framework. I will first discuss the different waves of feminism and the ways in which I believe feminism turned into 'feminism.' Looking to Tina Chanter's

discussion of feminist art collective, Geurilla Girls, I will question the dissensual value of feminist art which is rooted in gender essentialism. This will provide an example of a heteronomous approach to feminist art; showing what happens when you dissolve art into life -- specifically in this case a life dominated by capital. I will then discuss the symbolic rupture that I believe to have occured in the wake of the *New York Times'* article on the sexual crimes of former film producer Harvey Weinstien. Within the context of the ethical turn, the concepts of consensus and victimhood are both vitally important. While the first part of this chapter attempts to lay out the consensual nature of the feminist culture industry, the second will provide an understanding of what it means to be a victim. First, I will discuss the aesthetics of the political event that was the Me Too movement. Then, using Kaja Silverman's analysis of the male gaze I will differentiate between the gaze and the look within the context of gender relations. I will discuss how the refusal to speak about and understand libidinal desire has linked infinite trauma with human sexuality. Lastly, I will do an analysis of rape-revenge fantasy film *Promising Young Woman* in order to illustrate how this sexual ethics looks within art.

Chapter 1- The Artistic Regimes

Although art is thought to be as old as humanity itself, some thinkers argue that art did

not become 'art' until the aesthetic revolution. Before the aesthetic revolution, art played a much

more instrumental role in day to day life -- often serving some sort of religious or pedagogical

purpose. In modern times we see the rise and veneration of artists like Marcel Duchamp, who

managed to make a urinal into what is considered one of the most iconic pieces of 20th century

art. How can we account for this shift in what we now call art? In his text, *The Politics of

Aesthetics,* Rancière details the three major regimes which have functioned throughout history to

identify the arts and art.

The first regime is one Rancière will call "the ethical regime of images," (Rancière 2004:

20). Rancière closely associates this regime with Platonic thought, as in this regime "'art' is not

identified as such but is subsumed under the question of images." (Rancière 2004: 20). Plato sees

the artist as ultimately inferior to the philosopher, as the philosopher is committed to the truth.

Meanwhile, the artist can only produce images that attempt to get at the truth. Images are not

only inferior to philosophy in this regime, but in some ways there is a suggestion that images are

actively working against the ultimate aim of philosophy by obscuring the truth from us. The idea

will always triumph over the image as the image is essentially just a confused idea. Images can

serve some sort of purpose for Plato, but only in the grand scheme of larger political or ethical

goals. Under the ethical regime of images, art is understood to be aimed at some specific end.

Rancière further elaborates on this Platonic conception:

> "And it is among these that he traces the dividing line: there are true arts, that is to say
> forms of knowledge based on the imitation of a model with precise ends, and artistic
> simulacra that imitate simple appearances. These imitations, differentiated by their origin,
> are then distinguished by their end or purpose… In this regime, it is a matter of knowing
> in what way images' mode of being affects the ethos, the mode of being of individuals

and communities. This question prevents 'art' from individualizing itself as such."
(Rancière 2004: 21)

There is a very economic sense around how art is treated in this regime. Evaluating art centers much more around artisanship than artistry -- the question becomes what is the utility of this object within the greater political community. Thus, art can never be removed from its educational (and consequently political) context. Another feature of this regime is that works of art have no autonomy -- they are always subject to the rule imposed by the idea. Rancière denies the critique that Plato placed "art under the yoke of politics." (Rancière 2004: 21), because art for Plato did not actually exist. Plato sees the image produced by mimesis as dangerous not only because it corrupts the truth, but because "the magician confuses the social order, the division of labour that supports the hierarchy he sets up between images and truth, confining workers to a single role, which excludes them from participating in political deliberation." (Chanter 2018: 85). Under the Platonic social order, those who make 'art' are not artists at all, they are either craftsmen or workers who exist to serve the ends of politicians, and they have no avenue to practice politics. It is important to note what the word Ethics means for Rancière, as many of the following arguments will discuss it. The ethical regime of images is not to be understood as synonymous to the ethical turn which is at the center of this thesis. When he discusses the ethical regime here, it stems from a conception of ethos as "the mode of being of individuals and communities." (Rancière 2004: 21) A Platonic conception of art is interested in regulating the mode of being of the individuals who make up a society through the arts.

The second regime that Rancière identifies is the representative regime of images, associated with Aristotle's *Poetics*. This regime breaks away from the first ethical regime in identifying "the substance of art - or rather of the arts - in the couple *poiesis mimesis*." (Rancière

2004: 21) It is important to note that in this regime, arts only appear in the plural. One decisive shift from Plato to Aristotle was that in Plato there is no art or arts, properly speaking, they get subsumed under the ethical regime of images. They are seen as activities and not validated within themselves, but rather evaluated by whether they are affirmative of the community or not. Whereas in Aristotle we see this shift towards at least recognizing the arts as τέχνη. That being said, the arts are not yet associated with the autonomy that would denote them as Art -- an entity with its own end. Rather, the arts function to provide predetermined ways of remaking predetermined realities through mimesis.

The internal structure of the arts within this regime also becomes very important. In the *Poetic*s, Aristotle is exclusively concerned with tragedy. He is not only trying to establish that the arts, such as tragedy, can claim a realm that is no longer subsumed under any other realm, but is also trying to show that it is a realm which is built upon a very specific internal structure. This structure is what truly decides whether what you have in front of you is a good or bad tragedy. In many ways, what you have in Aristotle's *Poetics* is a manual: how to write a good tragedy. In order to do so, one must pay attention to how something like a tragedy has to be internally composed. In Aristotle, the way in which he conceives of the internal structure of the tragedy is ultimately hierarchical, and this internal hierarchy of the tragedy is reflective of social hierarchies. This hierarchical nature of the representative regime is a key feature for Rancière, who writes that:

> "The representative primacy of action over characters or of narration over description, the hierarchy of genres according to the dignity of their subject matter, and the very primacy of the art of speaking, of speech in actuality, all of these elements figure into an analogy with a fully hierarchical vision of the community." (Rancière 2004: 22)

The internal logic of the arts within this regime is always a mirror of the logic present within society. This hierarchical nature of tragedy is something that holds, for him, up to the 18th century. The tragedy was strictly seen as something for the noble people to participate in and enjoy, while the commoners were allowed the comedy. One pertinent example of the way in which the representative regime functions is the struggle of the playwright Pierre Corneille to rewrite the story of Oedipus. The ancient Greek version of Oedipus written by Sophocles is very bloody and sordid, and while Corneille found the story of Oedipus to be very compelling, he could not do what the ancient Greeks did because this would violate the taste of nobility. Rancière explains that, "Sophocles' Oedipus was literally unrepresentable on the French stage for three reasons: the physical horror provoked by Oedipus's gouged-out eyes; a surplus of oracles, which anticipate the unfolding of the plot; and the absence of a love story." (Rancière 2003: 112) Corneille then, in response to these troubles took out the gouging and the oracles delivered by Tireseas, and added a love interest. Corneille's trouble was not so much about preserving "female sensitivities" or "an empirical relationship with the audience of his time," but rather about "representation as such. It concerns mimesis as a relationship between two terms: a poiesís and an aesthesis -- that is, a way of making and an economy of affects." (Rancière 2003: 112) The three changes that Rancière points out create an imbalance in the visible and the intelligible. A great deal of the story is made intelligible by the Oracles and the gouging of the eyes, and viewers are thought to be made aware of too much too soon. The surplus of the visible imposes itself and allows the intelligible to impose itself beyond the economy of affects that the playwright is controlling. By introducing a love interest he also gives himself even further control over the plot via adding new characters who will better translate the message into one he

feels is acceptable. The play that Corneille wrote under the yoke of the representative regime had the burden of mirroring society at the time. When it was written, the nobility did not engage in the acts depicted in the original version of Oedipus, so Corneille was tasked with creating a play that kept the message of the play intact but warped it in a way to mirror the societal norms present in 17th century France. Corneille's changes address the missing link "between what is visible and what is intelligible… a specific type of interest capable of ensuring a suitable relationship between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the expected and the unexpected; and also of adjusting the relationship of distance and proximity between stage and auditorium."(Rancière 2003: 112-3)

Mimesis, for Aristotle, was no longer a dangerous force as it was for Plato, rather it played a central role in representation. And what exactly is 'representation?' It is to be understood as a constraint in which 'the visible' is dependent upon speech. "Two operations are fused: an operation of substitution" and "an operation of exhibition." (Rancière 2003: 113) It takes our reality and substitutes it for something we were not already aware of, all while under-representing that which it attempts to put before us. It does this by producing a "sublime impression" in which we are not able "to see the forms [the representations] evoke and effect to show us." (Rancière 2003: 114) Representation functions to order our perception of reality and deploy meaning upon that which it interacts with -- the power supposedly comes from the sensible itself. Aristotle's major break from Plato was that he wanted to 'extract tragedy' from the world of Plato and use it to construct 'an order of representation' in which the 'ethical pathos of knowledge' is transferred 'into a stable relationship between 'poiesis' or 'an autonomous arrangement of actions,' and 'aesthesis,' or 'the bringing into operation of affects.' (Rancière 2003:

115) The mimetic principle here is thus not to be understood as some directive claiming that all art must necessarily convey the social order or uphold truth. While Plato always saw representation as disordering to the social construction, Aristotle saw its possible power in regulating the affects of society and deciding "within this framework, as good or bad, adequate or inadequate: partitions between the representable and the unrepresentable." (Rancière 2004: 22) It is then, in this regime, that anything 'unrepresentable' belongs. This is the regime that decides what is proper to represent and the proper way to represent such things. The constraint of mimesis here is not to be confused with a constraint of resemblance. It does not inherently function to police how closely a painting of a bowl of fruit resembles a physical bowl of fruit; rather, it sets out to decide how acceptable it is to represent a bowl of fruit in the first place and bring about a certain affect in the people who interact with it. It is not a method of making art, but rather a regime that "renders the arts autonomous," and "links this autonomy to a general order of occupations and ways of doing and making." (Rancière 2004: 22)

The third regime Rancière identifies is the aesthetic regime. In it, "artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself." (Rancière 2004: 23) In this regime, autonomy and heteronomy are bonded together -- while the work of art is given autonomy, there is also autonomy within the mode of experience. Rancière elaborates even further upon this in *The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes*, asserting that, "In the aesthetic regime of art, art is art to the extent that it is something else than art." (Rancière 2010: 118) This is in contrast to a conception of art which states that art is only art (and art is only political) if "it produces objects that, both in texture and

the way we experience them, have a radically different status to objects of consumption."

(Rancière 2009: 96) Rancière is not concerned with gatekeeping art in any similar manner -- he

understands that the possibility of keeping life and art separate in the aesthetic regime is

impossible. It is free from the hierarchies and rules of the other two regimes. This is the regime

ushered in by the Kantian Genius who produces art without a law. The artist is a mere

passageway from nature to art -- there is no consideration of social order, the ethical ends of the

art, or the representability of the art. The aesthetic regime of art brings about the "elimination of

a boundary that restricts the available choice of representable subjects and ways of representing

them." (Rancière 2009: 126) It is also important to note that in this regime, not only is what we

can represent no longer regulated, but *how* we represent them is also freed. This is the regime

that ushered in our modern conception of art -- the regime in which a banana taped to a wall can

be shown at Art Basel. What was once seen as just a fruit and a piece of duct tape can instead be

cultural commentary on how we ascribe monetary and social worth to objects. While some may

scoff at such creations, one could argue that the piece of art which caused so much discussion

(and the subsequent performance artist who took it off the wall and ate it) managed to

redistribute the sensible and question what Rancière will call the police order. Politics is brought

about via dissensus, while the police order is confirmed through consensus. "Politics, as the

opposite of the police, is a form of dissensus that polemically confirms the axiom of

equality—the only political axiom for him." (Guénoun 2009: 177)

At this point, it might be relevant to take recourse to Rancière's theses on politics to better

understand this relationship. In the 7th thesis Rancière states that: "Politics stands in distinct

opposition to the police. The police is a distribution of the sensible whose principle is the

absence of void and supplement." (Rancière 2010: 36) The police order is to be understood in terms of consensus, and for Rancière, consensus means much more than we usually attribute to it. Consensus thinks that it is possible to structure society in such a way that everybody is included. For this reason, contemporary Western democracies are emblematic of consensual political orders and as a result, they are not really democracies within this framework. Here democracy refers to the *demos*, and the *demos* is made up of a group of people who have been counted out by the status quo. These voiceless people, at some point, enter the stage of politics and show that they have a voice too. It is only through those that are excluded that the possibility of universalization can be brought about. The consensual structure sells the story that everything can be resolved by the police order, and that everyone is included in the police order.

The police order "consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: 'Move along! There's nothing to see here!' The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation." (Rancière 2010: 37) One can see consensus at play within most bureaucratic structures. Bureaucracy claims to have rules and solutions for any problem that arises. There is never any interruption within the order because the order is always thought to plan for and support all possible happenings within it. Of course, we see how it is rarely the case that a police order actually functions to do this. The pandemic of 2020 has shone a light on the acute failings of the police order to account for everything. Bureaucracies all over the world are floundering to come up with resolutions that solve everyone's problems merely through administrative steps. A moment like this one shines a particularly bright light on the fact that the system was very much

not built to include everyone and everything. And, of course, the message from those institutions is that we should not question any of the steps being taken, but rather have faith that the system will be able to solve all the problems.

If the essence of the police is consensus, the essence of politics is dissensus. Dissensus is not to be understood as "a confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself." (Rancière 2010: 38) Anything that functions to do this is engaging in politics (or in the case of art, inviting the engagement of politics) by making visible this gap and functioning to redistribute the sensible. Politics "consists in transforming this space of 'moving-along', of circulation, into a space for the appearance of a subject: the people, the workers, the citizens. It consists in re-figuring space, that is in what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it. It is the instituting of a dispute over the distribution of the sensible, over that *nemein* that finds every *nomos* of the community." (Rancière 2010: 37) The pandemic we are facing has managed to put those on the stage who were formerly fairly uncounted for. Those we like to call 'unskilled' laborers -- pharmacists, grocers, delivery people, nurses, etc. -- are the people currently holding our world together. In the United States, we have seen mayors and governors step in and provide free child care and emergency benefits to these 'unskilled' laborers because of how immensely we are relying upon their abilities to do their jobs. The true skill and importance of these people within our community is finally being brought to the stage. That being said, it is important to note that political dissensus is not synonymous to aesthetic dissensus. While the situation I discuss above has the ability of bringing forth progress, aesthetic dissensus is to be understood in a different fashion.

The question then arises, what exactly is the outcome of this aesthetic dissensus? Can it ever reach some sort of resolution? The answer is no. You have to keep dissensus going; this is important because art must never be directly political. There exists a crucial distinction between aesthetic dissensus and political dissensus. So then the question then becomes, if art is dissensual, and politics is dissensual, how can we differentiate between these two forms of dissensus? Now what art does, if art is dissensual (and it can only be dissensual if it maintains the paradoxical conjunction between art and life) is that it restructures the sensible texture that is constitutive of what we perceive and understand as our world. But art itself is not transformative of that. What art is capable of doing is offering certain sites at which politics can intervene and build from there. For Rancière, politics in the political realm functions on two preconditions. The first is that politics is always collective -- there is no individual politics. Secondly, politics must always include an appeal to universality. In politics we find a process that Rancière associates with subjectification in which individuals are turned into a collective. Modern art does not operate at the level of individuals, it rather operates at the pre-individual level. Aesthetic dissensus is not the same as political dissensus because political dissensus requires collectivity -- it requires organization. Therefore, aesthetic dissensus must constantly play out in order to allow politics to build. Aesthetic dissensus itself can never account for progress; it is characterized by a certain inactivity that comes out of maintaining the paradoxical knot between art and life.

It bears discussing in further details the consequences of the aesthetic regime. Rancière explains that the "aesthetic experience will bear the art of the beautiful *and* the art of the living… The aesthetic experience is effective inasmuch as it is the experience of that *and*." (Rancière 2010: 116) What exactly does that mean for Rancière? He sees an unavoidable, paradoxical

conjunction between art and life, and opposes the different ways of understanding the aesthetic regime that do not maintain this knot. Art is no longer a specific craft that is subsumed under some social order, art takes on its own autonomous life and has the ability to give itself its own laws. This is not unique to the aesthetic regime. There is a connection between art and society in the representative regime as well, but there it is a mirroring -- one is to mirror the other. Whereas, in the aesthetic revolution art is given more freedom to play with life. But, this is not to say that art exists devoid of any influence or rule from the dominant social order. This creates a conflict in which the nuances of the aesthetic regime lie. Art then functions to affect life and life functions to affect art. The politics of art is to be found precisely in this conjunction, as for Rancière, politics is always conflictual.

The relationship between autonomy and heteronomy can be summed up in three points coming from Schiller's formula for the original scene of aesthetics: "First, the autonomy staged by the aesthetic regime of art is not that of the work of art but a mode of experience." Schiller

demonstrates this by discussing a statue of a goddess called the *Juno Ludovisi* (shown above). The goddess bears "no trace of will or aim," because "the qualities of the goddess are those of the statue as well." (Rancière 2010:117) While she was obviously created by someone, she also does not outwardly demonstrate that will as she herself embodies the goddess. The artist's intention does not at all show in the goddess, and she sends no real message. We know this to not be the case. Of course someone had to take a slab of marble and turn it into something resembling a goddess, but if one divorced logic from the situation they would not be able to explain *why* the slab of artist was meant to resemble a goddess. It has all the same qualities of any slab of marble you can find in nature, other than the fact it is differently shaped. The feeling when I interact with it is not brought about by the marble, it is brought about by the experience of interacting with the marble.

The second point is that "the aesthetic experience is one of heterogeneity, such that, for the subject of that experience, it is also the dismissal of a certain autonomy." (Rancière 2010: 117) In this interaction with the *Juno Ludovisi*, I enjoy a negative sort of autonomy. This autonomy comes from the communicability of aesthetic universality. When I stand in front of a painting, my sensory faculties and my cognitive faculties engage in a free (dissensual) play that leads me to a heterogenous experience. The work of art has an autonomy that imposes its heterogeneity onto me. My experience with the piece of art is not only my own. There exists the possibility of aesthetic universalizability -- it is why I am able to have discussions about a work of art with someone else. Regardless of the fact that the material work of art has no free will itself, it is able to impose a heterogeneity onto its spectators. This is a situation in which the autonomy of reason that I regularly feel in non-aesthetic experiences is overtaken by my

sensibilities. This autonomy is paradoxically related to a withdrawal of power. As the understanding becomes subsumed underneath the free appearance we are shown frontiers our mind has never before been able to process, as our understanding is not capable of accessing those experiences alone. While engaging with the *Juno Ludovisi* "the goddess and the spectator, the free play and the free appearance, are caught up together in a specific sensorium, cancelling the oppositions of activity and passivity, will and resistance." (Rancière 2010: 117) It is at this moment that politics occurs.

To elucidate this particular idea, it would be beneficial to note how Rancière comes to understand this autonomy through his reading of Kant's third critique. When Kant discusses the interaction of the faculties, he calls it a free *harmonious* play of the faculties -- this is what accounts for our experience of the beautiful within Kant. Rancière has a very specific understanding of this free play of the understanding and the imagination. He does not read the qualification of harmonious in a traditional way, but rather reads it in a dissensual manner. It is not the case that we have a sort of harmony that is established; what we undergo is a dissensual play that remains conflictual. The understanding and imagination in Kant enter into a "harmonious" play, but that play does not bring about any point of culmination. Kant is clear to point out that the play continues, and it continues by means of mutual enrichment. The beautiful involves "the facilitated play of both powers of the mind (imagination and understanding) enlivened through mutual agreement." (Kant 1790: 104) This play is both ongoing and mutually enriching, *because* of the backdrop of conflict between these two faculties. Their consensus is not desirable because their consensus implies stasis. Rather, their engagement allows for constant challenging of each other -- this is what Rancière sees as a dissensual relationship. "In the

Kantian analysis, free play and free appearance suspend the power of form over matter, of intelligence over sensibility." (Rancière 2009: 30-31)

The power of form over matter is done away with, but this does not mean that matter now has power over form. The free play is an activity with no goal or end -- no governing body or rule to be subsumed under. Moreover, the suspension of the power of understanding present in the free play, is "correlated to another suspension, namely the suspension of [the viewers] own powers before the appearance of the 'idle' work, the work which, like the goddess, owes its unprecedented perfection to the fact that the will is withdrawn from its appearing." (Rancière 2009: 30) The free play and free appearance are able to foster new communities precisely because of this very particular reading of Kant's experience of the beautiful as a challenge of the status quo. They serve to refute, within the current sensible, the subsuming of sensible matter under intelligible form, and instead allow form and matter to mutually enrich each other. The aesthetic process becomes political for Rancière because the opposition between form and matter also signifies "a difference between two humanities." (Rancière 2009: 31) Form and matter, for Rancière, is not merely an artistic opposition, it also serves to symbolize a domination of the police order over common sense. It is thus through a mutual enrichment of activity and passivity that the police order is challenged.

The third and final point is that "the object of that experience is aesthetic insofar as it is not, or at least not only, art." (Rancière 2010: 117) This is important for Rancière because it illustrates one of the key differences of the aesthetic regime from the other regimes. For an artwork to fit within the aesthetic regime, it must be more than mere mimesis or ethical end -- it has to offer a free appearance which posits a new form of life that is not separated into spheres.

What Rancière seems to be getting at when he says, "art is art to the extent that it is something else other than art [in the aesthetic regime]," (Rancière 2010: 118) is that art has to have a certain autonomy. It cannot be beholden to any particular form or will. Instead of passive matter being beholden to active form, the aesthetic experience is created in the midst of their contradiction. The statue stops performing the function of representing a goddess and instead can be a piece of artwork which we have the freedom to understand as a multitude of things. Man undergoes an "emancipation from materiality," (Rancière 2010: 118) by being able to look at the statue for more than just its function -- and through free play of reason and understanding, he is able to arrive to a conception of it that has political or societal connotations beyond anything the artist may have intended. This aestheticization is characterized by one key formula for Rancière: "art is an autonomous form of life." (Rancière 2010: 118) There are multiple ways of understanding modern art, though. The autonomist conception valorizes autonomy over life and the heteronomous conception valorizes life over autonomy. Rancière will oppose both these ways of understanding. A discussion of his oppositions will help us better understand the relationship Rancière imagines between politics and art. He will also oppose the postmodern conception of understanding modern art, but that will be better understood within the context of later discussions on the ethical turn.

The autonomist or modernist conception of art claims that art is to be understood exclusively in terms of autonomy -- that is, in terms of art as an entity that is capable of giving itself its own laws. It gives itself its own laws on the basis of the specific medium in which and with which it works. The claim by modernists is that once art turns modern, each art basically tries to develop and elaborate its own laws on the basis of its own medium. Rancière sees

Clement Greenberg's thinking to be emblematic of the problems of the autonomist conception. Art for art's sake was to be understood by Greenberg as "expression of the absolute," in which the absolute is the process where "content becomes something to be avoided like the plague." (Greenberg 1961: 5) This is a problem for Rancière because it leads, ultimately, to an end of art. The paradoxical bond between art and life must be preserved, because any attempt at dissolving this bond or resolving this bond ultimately leads to the dissolution of both terms. What Greenberg and his fellow modernists sought to move past was "historical modernism in general, the idea of a new art attuned to all the vibrations of universal life: an art capable of both matching the accelerated rhythms of industry, society, and urban life, and of giving infinite resonance to the most ordinary minutes of everyday life." (Rancière 2011: 262) Greenberg seems to suggest that it is possible to conceive of an art that is in utter opposition to commodified society or kitch. To understand art exclusively in terms of its autonomy, according to Greenberg, allows art to be free from the evils of capitalism. Capitalism had managed to seep into life, therefore art itself must be entirely removed from life if it wishes to avoid commodification. The complete "autonomy of art' replaces any concepts of conscious experience with the processes of the medium and form: a novel about the novel, a painting about painting… Autonomy, as the operation of the self-constrained artistic system that implodes the artwork, lends it depth. There is only one destination: nowhere." (Chowdhury 2019) This ultimately ends up being the issue with modernist art, there is no longer any free play of understanding and sensibility as sensibility possesses all of the autonomy. When art is nothing but art, it no longer is able to participate in politics, and the impact of life on art is done away with. It is also crucially no longer part of the aesthetic experience as it no longer encapsulates the art of the living. The modernist

understanding tries to dissolve the notion of politics and ends up dissolving art along with it. Art then becomes an entirely ideological venture.

The heteronomous conception of modern art is often associated with different avant-garde movements, and the goal of these movements was to dissolve art into life. The art that they attempted to create was not for the sake of art, it was supposed to be transformative of the very society in which it was produced. There are two moves that occur here. First, the aesthetic experience becomes confused with the work of art itself. Second, the historicity of the work of art becomes clear precisely because the will of the artist is also the form of the work of art. When we look at the *Juno Ludovisi* we know the historical context of it. The artist was limited in expressing divinity, so when we look at the work of art we understand his limits and how they were informed by his idea and his people. The artwork is deprived of any autonomy and is instead a mere reflection of the society that created it. Under this mode of thinking, "Art lives so long as it expresses a thought unclear to itself in a manner that resists it. It lives inasmuch as it is something other than art, namely a belief and a way of life." (Rancière 2010: 123) There is no longer a struggle to materially express our thoughts -- suddenly, art becomes nothing more than the autonomy of the artist. As art loses its value, many forms of art become redundant, although the spirit of forms remains. Form becomes universal and can be found anywhere, in anything. In this case, modern art is nothing more than a political message. If you dissolve modern art into politics, it is not simply that you dissolve art, but what is at the same time dissolved is the notion of politics. Rancière explains that, "the notion of 'art becoming life' does not simply foster demiurgic projects of a 'new life'. It also weaves a common temporality of

art which can be encapsulated in a simple formula: a new life needs a new art." (Rancière 2010: 121)

Both of these conceptions of modern art fail, for Rancière, because they fall into the trap of metapolitics. Metapolitics is art's "way of producing its own politics, proposing to politics rearrangements of its space, reconfiguring art as a political issue, or asserting itself as true politics." (Rancière 2010: 119) In a certain way it designates one of the ends, that is, one of the terminations of politics. Metapolitics refers to a conception of politics that claims that it is ultimately capable of overcoming conflict. The conflict between life and art which brings about a disruption of the police order is stifled and engulfed, either by life or by art. While politics is always conflictual, metapolitics designates a state in which conflicts can be resolved. Within politics proper, the best example of metapolitics for Rancière is Marxism. The political realm is ultimately a realm of shadow play for the Marxist. They believe everything is decided in the socioeconomic realm. Not only does it show where the contradiction lies, but also where it can be resolved. While the idea of resolution seems desirable, it ultimately suffocates the possibility of dissensus. We see this in his discussion of Marx's understanding of the duality of the commodity. Marxist critiques of the culture industry "can be seen as the epistemological face of Romantic poetics, the rationalization of its way of exchanging the signs of art and the signs of life." (Rancière 2010:127)

That being said, when Rancière discusses politics as a conflictual relationship, it has nothing to do with the rhetoric of war. The antagonism is not to be understood in a right wing perspective that sees things in terms of enemies and friends. For a community to be political, it must authorise "forms of subjectivation for the uncounted, for those unaccounted for." (Rancière

2003: 198) The conflict comes into play through the retribution of the sensible that allows those who are unaccounted for to come to the stage -- not in any sort of rhetoric around annihilation of enemies. Once the conflict becomes antagonistic in nature, we begin to veer towards the ethical. "The whole motto of the politics of the aesthetic regime, then, can be spelt out as follows: let us save the 'heterogenous sensible.'" (Rancière 2010: 124) The paradoxical knot between art and life must not be allowed to break. This is not an experience of competing interests but rather, a delicate balance which allows for the redistribution of the sensible if and only if it is engaged in free dissensual play

Chapter 2- The Ethical Turn

In order to better understand the ethical turn, we must first look at how it came to be. Rancière provides a foundation for this is a text called *Who is the Subject of Rights of Man?* Politics is an activity that always involves correcting the miscount that the police order creates. This is accomplished through bringing those that are unaccounted for within the regulative body onto the stage. Human rights discourse often centers heavily around those that we may consider unaccounted for -- refugees, stateless people, etc. But, Rancière claims recent thinking in the human rights discourse had depoliticized human rights in a problematic way. The shift from seeing right as the rights of man towards a conception of 'humanitarian' rights is emblematic of the ethical shift for Rancière. The question of human rights came to the fore in Soviet states in the 70's and 80's as the great communist projects began to crumble. The young Marx had been vehemently opposed to the idea of human rights as they always already presuppose an affirmation of the state. Critics of Marxism thought that when communism was defeated, humanity would finally be at peace within liberal democracy and all humans would have rights. Of course, looking at it now we can see how unrealistic that idea was. The rights of man "appeared more and more as the rights of the victims, the rights of those who were unable to enact any rights or even any claim in their name, so that eventually their rights had to be upheld by others, at the cost of shattering the edifice of International Rights, in the name of a new right to 'humanitarian interference'—which ultimately boiled down to the right to invasion." (Rancière 2004: 298) When the rights of Albanian Kosovars were ignored by the Yugoslavian state, there was no solution that kept things within the state. What instead had to happen was a plea to NATO to bomb Yugoslavia, and a deliberation process by NATO members to decide whether or

not this breach of human rights deserved intervention. This was not an act of human rights, this was an affirmation of the humanity of the victims through humanitarian interference. Marx's original problem with human rights -- that they required recourse to a state and thus only protected those who were part of a state -- became evident in the Balkan conflicts.

In order to account for this shift from rights of man to human rights, Rancière turns to Hannah Arendt's account of the rights of man. In Origins of Totalitarianism, she comes to the conclusion that, "the Rights of Man are the rights… of those who have no rights, the mere derision of right." (Rancière 2004: 298) According to Arendt, the plight of these people does not come from the fact that they do not have equality under a law; they are stateless people with no law that accounts for their existence. Her idea of a "state beyond oppression" seems problematic from the start. Most states which carried out ethnic cleansings and genocides have had codified laws which accounted for and facilitated this oppression. As Rancière points out, her thinking makes is seem

> "as if these people were guilty of not even being able to be oppressed, not even worthy of being oppressed. I think that we must be aware of what is at stake in this statement of a situation and status that would be 'beyond oppression,' beyond any account in terms of conflict and repression, or law and violence. As a matter of fact, there were people who wanted to oppress them and laws to do this." (Rancière 2004: 299)

This step, according to Rancière, stems from a move central to Arendt's thought: the idea that there is a rigid separation between public and private life. What ultimately hides behind this distinction between public and private life is the relationship between the political and the social. Arendt claimed that there had only ever been one successful revolution: the American Revolution. This is because the American Revolution, in contrast to the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution, was the only one that was a political revolution rather than a social

revolution. This position, from a Marxist perspective, (which in many ways Rancière remains loyal to particularly in this text) is deeply problematic as it does not account for the link between the political and socioeconomic realms.

Arendt was part of a group of philosophers in the 1970's and 1980's who were concerned with wiping out the sentiments of the anti-capitalist movements of 1968. They saw utopian thought -- such as Marxism -- as incredibly dangerous, and turned to the Ancient Greeks as the foundation for their political philosophy. Rancière sees Arendt as taking on somewhat of an archipolitical position -- a type of politics he saw as originating from Plato. Rancière claims archipolitics "reveals in all its radicality the project of a community based on the complete realization of the *arkhe* of community, total awareness, replacing the democratic configuration of politics with nothing left over. To replace this configuration with nothing left over means offering a logical solution to the paradox of the part of those who have no part." (Rancière 1998: 65) Upon first glance, this could seem ideal -- who does not want a political community in which everyone is involved. But for Rancière this is less about counting for the uncounted for than it is about policing the community so that it maintains a collective accord. Archipolitics is yet another end of politics as it envisions "'a community functioning within the regime of the Same,' one which eliminates the part of those who have no part." (Chanter 2018: 67) We can see now how Arendt's conception of human rights is said to have an archipolitical foundation. While she claims the goal of her thought is to completely realize the community within politics, what ends up occuring is the elimination of those who have no part. Her position provides:

> "a frame of description and a line of argumentation that later would prove quite effective for depoliticizing matters of power and repression and setting them in a sphere of exceptionality that is no longer political, in an anthropological sphere of sacrality situated beyond the reach of political dissensus." (Rancière 2004: 299)

Instead of accounting for the rights of the oppressed through a political lens -- the oppressed

become banished to the private sphere; they themselves belong to no political community that

involves them in the political sphere. This Arendtian separation of public and private life is

something that we cling so dearly to in the United States, and we can see the unfortunate effects

of it to this day. People cannot fathom the idea of paying for universal healthcare through their

taxes, but when a member of their (social) community posts a GoFundMe along with a sad story,

people have no problem donating. We are fine with assisting others within the 'private' sphere,

but we hate the idea of public assistance.

"This overturning of an archipolitical statement into a depoliticizing approach," (Rancière

2004: 299) is a key feature of the turn towards human rights for Rancière. Giorgio Agamben's

theorization of biopolitics represents this shift strongly. He takes Arendt's understanding of the

separation between public and private, and applies Foucault's concept of biopower to it.

> "In a first step, his argument relies on the Arendtian opposition of two lives, an
> opposition predicated on the distinction between two Greek words: *zoe*, which means
> 'bare physiological life, and *bios*, which means 'form of life,' and notably the bios
> politikos: 'the life of great actions and noble words.'" (Rancière 2004: 300)

Zoe refers to our physical existence in the world without qualification. *Bios* refers to the

particularities of our lives and the rules which govern our existence. *Zoe* is the root of the word

zoology, which refers to the study of animals in general, while *bios* is the root word of biology,

which refers to the study of organisms which make up those animals and all other living things.

While the zoologist is concerned with the study of a zebra as a zebra, the biologist wants to

understand how it came to be a zebra and how it stays a zebra through biological functioning.

In Arendt's view, "the Rights of Man and modern democracy rested on the confusion of

those two lives—which ultimately meant the reduction of *bios* to sheer *zoe*." (Rancière 2004:

300) Agamben takes this idea and applies it to Foucault's concept of sexual liberation. Foucault was wary of the wave of sexual 'liberation' that arose in the 70's, which encouraged people to discuss and have sex more openly and freely. He saw this idea of liberation as resulting from a power machine. This machine is described by Rancière as, "a new form of power that is no longer the old sovereign power of Life and Death over the subjects, but a positive power of control over biological life." (Rancière 2004: 300) Agamben argues that this allows for the power machine to come in and enact a "positive" biopolitical program. Foucault describes the phenomena positive power as a, "power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations." (Foucault 1998: 137) Agamben arguably takes a somewhat problematic step in understanding Foucault's conception of power. What Foucault describes as biopolitics and biopower is not to be understood in a traditional sense of the word power -- that is as something which is centralized and firmly anchored in one institution. Agamben takes the jump and associates it with a state in order to then link it to Carl Schmitt's state of exception. The reduction of *bios* to *zoe* in Arendt is seen as a natural step by Agamben towards a state being able to regulate and control the biological life of its members. Arednt's original conception of the opposition of two lives "becomes the complicity of democracy, viewed as the mass individualistic concern with individual life, with technologies of power holding sway over biological life as such." (Rancière 2004: 300) The political structure of the democratic state becomes concerned with humanity in the ontological sense rather than the epistemological sense. The emphasis is with the status of human itself, rather than the particularities of human life.

Consequently, a false equivocation arises between humans as a real body and humanity as an

abstract ideal.

At this point, Agamben takes another step using Schmitt's state of exception. Foucault

sees a distinct difference in the old sovereignty of political bodies and the modern phenomena of

biopower, while Agamben disagrees. Rancière describes this move:

> "Schmitt had posited the state of exception as the principle of political authority. The sovereign power is the power that decides on the state of exception in which normal legality is suspended… Agamben identifies the state of exception with the power of decision over life. What is correlated with the exceptionality of sovereign power is the *exception of life*." (Rancière 2004: 300)

According to Agamben, inherent in the logical structure of sovereignty is the assumption of

biopower. The sovereign power controls everything outside of the law, which means the

sovereign power controls life itself. There is no real distinction between natural humanity --

humanity in the biological sense -- and constructed humanity. This is what Agamben identifies

as 'bare life.' In the same way that there is no real distinction between sovereign power and

biopower, there is no real distinction between 'absolute state power' and Rights of Man. Rancière

points out that, "the Rights of Man make natural life appear as the source and the bearer of

rights." (Rancière 2004: 300) Anyone who is familiar with popular human rights discourse can

clearly see this. The International Bill of Human Rights starts off by stating that "all human

beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." (IBHR, 1948) Basing human rights, a

political notion, in biological humanity can be slippery given that biological humanity is

something that scientists themselves have even struggled to define. This is why human rights

discourse can be so quick to divulge into discussions about animal rights or semantics about

what qualifies as a human. Human rights "make birth appear as the principle of sovereignty. The

equation would still have been hidden at that time by the identification of birth—or *nativity*—

with *nationality*, that is, with the figure of the citizen." (Rancière 2004: 300) The many

humanitarian crises of the 20th century should have made this equivocation clear -- they brought

to the fore state power's relationship with bare life. Bare life, what for the state used to be "the

life of the subject that it would repress" or "the life of the enemy that it would have to kill,' is

now "a 'sacred' life—a life taken within a state of exception, a life 'beyond oppression.'"

(Rancière 2004: 301) The Holocaust, according to Agamben, is a clear example of this bare life

coming out of the rights of man. "The camp is the space of the 'absolute impossibility of deciding

between fact and law, rule and application, exception and rule.'"(Rancière 2004: 301) All the

freedoms that Jewish people were given in their private lives were given by the sovereign power

that could (and did) ultimately choose to suspend those freedoms at any moment. Rancière sees

this paralyzing conclusion as ultimately stemming from Arendt's view of political action. He

claims, "that the radical suspension of politics in the exception of bare life is the ultimate

consequence of Arendt's archipolitical position, of her attempt to preserve the political from the

contamination of private, social, apolitical life." (Rancière 2004: 301) In seeking to include all

subjects into the political sphere, she ultimately ends up depoliticizing human rights. While this

foray into Agamben may seem unnecessarily long and complicated, it serves to show how if one

is to accept Arednt's distinction between public and private, it results in a paralyzing of politics

proper.

      To make sense of this ontological trap, Rancière looks at Arendt's argument about the

Rights of Man (which Agamben's argument supports). She sets up a quandary in which

> "either the rights of the citizen are the rights of man—but the rights of man are the rights
> of the unpoliticized person; they are the rights of those who have no rights, which

amounts to nothing—or the rights of man are the rights of the citizen, the rights attached to the fact of being a citizen of such or such constitutional state. " (Rancière 2004: 302) Rancière claims this tautology is set up because it ignores the third key assumption that "the Rights of Man are the rights of those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights that they have not." (Rancière 2004: 302) This is, in true Rancièrean fashion, a nearly impossible claim to understand at first sight. In order to elucidate this, let us first look at exactly why Arendt's formula does not work. The giver of rights is not at the same time the receiver of rights -- 'human' rights do not come from any one human, this would result in a logical tautology. Rancière instead offers the explanation that, "the relation of the subject to his or her rights... is enacted through a double negation. The subject of rights is the subject, or more accurately the process of subjectivization, that bridges the interval between two forms of the existence of those rights." (Rancière 2004:302)

This is quite an important feature in his understanding of human rights -- there is no one form of human rights. Human rights first come in a written, codified form. This is what we see in bills of rights. Secondly, they come in the form of people choosing to actually exercise their rights within the world. In the first form, they end up visually representing inequality. The fact that the U.S. has, in its Bill of Rights, a given right to vote and yet it still engages in voter suppression brings inequality to the stage. The fact that those rights are not upheld becomes significant in that "they are not only an abstract ideal, situated far from the givens of the situation. They are also part of the configuration of the given." (Rancière 2004: 303) In the second form, human rights are the rights of those who demand the realization of their rights. The idea of humanity or citizenry is not a static thing that we are all included in. The world around us is constantly affirming or negating our belonging in those groups, and we ourselves have the

opportunity to enter into a dispute about our belonging. If we accept that all men are born free

and equal and deserve rights, we naturally must ask in what sphere those rights are being

affirmed? "If you answer, as Arendt does, that it is the sphere of citizenship, the sphere of

political life, separated from the sphere of private life, you sort out the problem in advance."

(Rancière 2004: 303)

But then quickly the next problem that arises is where to draw the border between public

and private life. Rancière claims that, "politics is about that border. It is the activity that brings it

back into question." (Rancière 2004: 303) The murkiness of the border was made clear by

French revolutionary Olympe De Gouges who famously claimed that, "if women are entitled to

go to the scaffold, they are entitled to go to the assembly." (Rancière 2004: 303) Women were

supposedly not part of political life at the time -- they could not vote or hold public office. But

they were still able to be reprimanded by the law if they broke laws. The border between private

and public could not so clearly be drawn because public laws also govern private life. With this

statement, Olympe de Gouges created a dissensual challenge in which she called into question

the consensual conception of what had been given by the rights discourse of the time. In this case

the oppressed were given the opportunity for a twofold demonstration in which "They could

demonstrate that they were deprived of the rights that they had, thanks to the Declaration of

Rights. And they could demonstrate, through their public action, that they had the rights that the

constitution denied to them, that they could enact those rights." (Rancière 2004: 304) This is

exactly what Rancière meant by 'those who have not the rights that they have and have the rights

that they have not.' They do not have the rights which are formally codified in some sort of bill

or law, but at the same time possess a claim to those rights they lack.

This is a prime example of political dissensus for Rancière -- and this serves to get rid of the tautology one falls into with Arendt's conception of human rights. "The very difference between man and citizen is not a sign of disjunction proving that the rights are either void or tautological. It is the opening of an interval for political subjectivization." (Rancière 2004: 304) This understanding of rights as a dissensual process is what will serve to distinguish Rancière from his peers who fall deep into the trap of humanism that results in ultimate victimization. We see then that rights can be tremendously powerful for Rancière as they provide room for dissensus. But, they can also be dangerous if the distinction is not made between forms of rights, leading to utter victimization and dehumanization of those without the full rights of citizenship. Rancière points out that the failure of past rights discourse, "is not only the vicious circle of a theory; it is also the result of an effective reconfiguration of the political field, of an actual process of [consensus]." (Rancière 2004: 306) As I previously discussed, consensus consists in removing any contradiction, and making it appear as if the system is able to account for anything. It attempts to close "the spaces of dissensus by plugging the intervals and patching over the possible gaps between appearance and reality or law and fact." (Rancière 2004: 306) If it is put into law that all humans have rights, then these rights must be identified with certain groups and turned into fact. They cannot remain an abstract form which permits us to question matter and vice versa. Once the freedom of speech starts to become a consensual fact in the real world, it ceases to have any meaning. It is no longer a right of man but rather a given of our lifestyles.

Rancière then looks at the essay written by Jean-François Lyotard on the topic of human rights entitled *The Rights of the Other*. The theme of this paper can be described as this: "What

do Human Rights mean in the context of the humanitarian situation? It is part of an attempt to rethink rights by first rethinking *Wrong*." (Rancière 2004: 307) The issue of rethinking wrong came to the fore after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many Marxist thinkers attempted to grapple with the crimes committed by the Soviet Union, a nation that was meant to be the beginning of a utopia.

> "The crimes of dead totalitarian regimes had to be rethought: they were said to be not so much the specific effects of perverse ideologies and outlaw regimes as the manifestations of an infinite wrong—a wrong that could no longer be conceptualized within the opposition of democracy and antidemocracy, of legitimate state or lawless state, but which appeared as an absolute evil, an unthinkable and unredeemable evil." (Rancière 2004: 307)

Rancière sees Lyotard's conception of the Inhuman as the ultimate example of this new way of thinking. Lyotard saw the situations we view as 'inhuman' to be "the consequences of our betrayal of another Inhuman, what we could call a ''good'' Inhuman." (Rancière 2004: 307-308) This 'good' inhuman can be seen as many things, "the Unconscious," "the Law," "God," or "birth and infancy," but whatever you choose to call it, it is the part of ourselves which is not in control -- "irreducible otherness." (Rancière 2004: 308) For Lyotard, there is always something that is untouchable and unable to be understood for human beings. This is not something he believes we should attempt to master or quell. In fact, according to Lyotard, absolute evil comes about precisely when humanity attempts to tame the untamable. The enlightenment promised humanity absolute freedom and absolute rationality. The message was that everything could be conquered, understood and controlled by humanity.

Thinkers like Lyotard had lived in Europe through the great wars and genocides of the 20th century and were, in many ways, motivated by a desire to think through those atrocities. The notion of absolute evil was emblematic of the atrocities committed by the Third Reich for

Lyotard. The Nazis wanted to rid the world of the religion which had an "unnamable God." While Christianity made God human, the Jewish religion does not permit depicting God -- God remains an entity of Otherness. This notion of unamability or lack of formalism has often been associated with Judaism in Western thought. For Kant, Jewish Law is a prime example of what he refers to as the sublime, a type of aesthetic judgment that occurs without recourse to form. He argues that, "Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in-heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc." (Kant 1790: 135) Judaism becomes the ultimate religion of the sublime. In the same way that moral law sublimates the sensibilities, Jewish Law mandates that the religion never be represented in any sensible form. For Lytoard then, the Jewish people become the symbol of the Other, and those who wish to tame the Other can only do so via an extermination of the Jews. Thus, "the rights that must be held as a response to the 'humanitarian' lack of rights are the rights of the Other, the rights of the Inhuman." (Rancière 2004: 308) This view ultimately paralyzes politics. Those who are uncounted for cannot be brought to the stage, they remain associated with the unknowable and unrepresentable as the infinite Other. According to Lyotard, human emancipation is not something to strive for; in fact, doing this ultimately results in evil. Our only options are allowing ourselves to exist under the oppressive weight of otherness, or attempting to completely eradicate it from the earth. "As in Agamben, this means infinitizing the wrong, substituting for the processing of a political wrong a sort of ontological destiny that allows only 'resistance.'" (Rancière 2004: 308)

On a geopolitical level, this manifests in the form of humanitarian interference. Resistance does not allow for political action -- those who suffer at the hands of 'evil' cannot

attempt to fight for their rights. This is because if they had rights in the first place, they would not be in such a position. Instead they must appeal to those who end up inheriting the rights they were stripped of in order to be saved. Rancière describes this situation as a "return to sender." (Rancière 2004: 309) The victimized groups do not get to keep the rights the benevolent (likely Western) states so graciously gifted them, because they remain beholden to some sort of Otherness. Instead of using them then, they must send them back in the hopes that whoever gave them can come in and vindicate the victims. "The human rights that are sent back are now the rights of the absolute victim. The absolute victim is the victim of an absolute evil. Therefore the rights that come back to the sender—who is now the avenger—are akin to a power of infinite justice against the Axis of Evil." (Rancière 2004: 309) What could be a dissensual conflict that examined the difference between law and fact instead bleeds the two together. Those distinctions become erased and replaced with "a sheer ethical conflict between Good and Evil." (Rancière 2004: 309)

Looking at human rights can help us understand the ethical turn within the realm of politics proper, but the ethical turn is something that occured in art as well as politics. Working through Rancière's critique of Lyotard's conception of an aesthetics of the sublime will help me elucidate this concept. The aesthetics of the sublime is posited in contrast to the aesthetics of the beautiful, which I have previously explained to be something that comes out of mutual play between the imagination and the understanding. The sublime, on the other hand, is a feeling of negative pleasure or respect in which we feel the superiority of our power of reason over nature. Lyotard claims that, "'for the last century, the arts have not had the beautiful as their main concern, but something which has to do with the sublime.'" (Rancière 2009: 88) Lyotard sees the

aesthetics of the sublime as the route to account for the avant-garde and "bear witness to the unrepresentable." (Rancière 2009: 89) Rancière claims Lyotard committed a category mistake because Kant himself says, when we talk about the sublime, we no longer talk about art strictly speaking.

> "The pleasure in the sublime in nature, as a pleasure of contemplation involving subtle reasoning, also lays claim to universal participation, yet already presupposes another feeling, namely that of its supersensible vocation, which, no matter how obscure it might be, has a moral foundation." (Kant 1790: 172)

This passage suggests that the supersensible is always rooted in the moral. When the moral indirectly comes into play with aesthetic judgements, they become aesthetic judgements of the sublime as they involve reasoning. It also is important to note that moral judgements do differ from aesthetic judgements of the sublime for Kant. Moral judgements are made through the concept of the good. Aesthetic judgements of all kinds do not operate under guidance by any concept. In Kant, morality is only indirectly present in aesthetic judgements of the sublime. There is still a constitutive difference between the good and the sublime, regardless of the fact they are both associated with the supersensible. To equate the two would be making the same sort of category mistakes at Rancière levels against Lyotard. It is also crucial to understand that in a way for Kant, the limits of art are defined by the beautiful. According to Rancière, it is impossible within the Kantian framework to identify a work of art as sublime.

This focus on the aesthetics of the sublime comes out of Lyotard's focus on the role of art after Auschwitz. For him, the question of ethics needed to be included within the question of art after such a catastrophic event. Lyotard implores, "'What is an *art,* painting or music, an art and not a moral practice, in the context of such a disaster?'" (Rancière 2009: 90) While Lyotard asks, what does a sublime art look like, Rancière thinks he should *first* be asking, is there such a thing?

The Lyotardian sublime concerns sensuous matter itself. "Where the art of the beautiful imposes form on matter, the art of the sublime consists in approaching matter, 'approaching presence without means to the recourse of presentation'." (Rancière 2009: 90) This conception centers around understanding sensuous matter as it relates to the world. Lyotard conceives of sensuous matter's relation to the world in two ways. First, matter is pure difference which is irreducible, "not determined by any set of conceptual differences such as timbre or nuance, the singularity of which stands in contrast to the play of differences and determinations that govern musical composition or the harmony of colours." (Rancière 2009: 91) Lyotard calls this material difference immateriality. The idea of immaterial materiality itself is not a new concept -- the idea of something which exists outside of our grasp -- but what Lyotard did with his aesthetics of the sublime which was novel is imposed onto materiality the properties which Kant imposed on form. In Kant, form has power to impose law onto matter while here we see matter given its own law. What Lyotard is trying to articulate via this focus on materiality is the experience of the sublime -- the experience of a chasm. With this first move, Lyotard echoes a position similar to that of the modernists; he tells us the subject matter of these arts is nothing but their materiality.

This moment is then coupled further with the second characteristic of matter: the inform. What Lyotard emphasizes by turning to the materiality of different arts is not something that could be understood in a formalist manner, though. It has to be understood through the notion of the inform. Rancière describes this second quality as, "it's power to make passable. It's 'immateriality' does not reside in any particular sensible quality. It resides only in what is common to all of them: they are 'the event of a passion.'"(Rancière 2009: 92) It does not matter the particulars of a color or note in a piece of art. All that matters is the ability of the work to

overwhelm the mind and put it in the face of an Other. "After conferring the autonomy of form on timbre and nuance, Lyotard confers on them the disruptive power of the inform, the discord specific to the experience of the sublime." (Rancière 2009: 92) This separates Lyotard from a traditional modernist understanding of modern art that is concerned primarily with form and formal aspects (such as the one Greenberg articulates). The materiality is importantly immaterial, though, because Lyotard removes it from traditional modernist, formalist aesthetics that you find in Kant's notion of the beautiful and imposes the inform upon it that you find in Kant's notion of the sublime. Lyotard turns against the Kant of the beautiful by mobilizing the Kant of the sublime. Aesthetics judgements, then, become no longer subordinated to identifiable formal criteria.

In the Kant of the sublime, the imagination becomes powerless to give form to the ideas of reason and thus, the autonomy of aesthetic free play between the understanding and the imagination is superseded by the autonomy of reason grounded in a moral foundation. Rancière explains how Lyotard turns Kant's logic strictly on its head,"'The soul comes into existence dependent on the sensible, thus violated, humiliated. The aesthetic condition is enslavement to the *aistheton*, without which it is anesthesia.'" (Rancière 2009: 93) Just as we saw with Lyotard's conception of the Inhuman, in this scenario the soul has two options: either it can be servile to the senses which it cannot truly understand or be completely eradicated -- serve or die. In Kant, the aesthetics of the sublime brings to the fore the law of the mind through the failure of the imagination to comprehend. When we see something like Mount Everest -- something so big that our imagination cannot grasp it -- reason steps in to explain to us how the mountain came to be. With Lyotard the logic is again inverted: "subordination to the *aistheton* signifies subordination

to the law of alterity… Ethical experience is that of a subordination without appeal to the law of an Other." (Rancière 2009: 94) Lyotard is primarily interested in the experience of the sublime, and for him, that is characteristically an experience of shock. These two moments -- the materiality and the inform -- are what bring about that shock.

Rancière sees Lyotard as fundamentally misconstruing Kant in order to find in him something that is simply not there: a theory of the artistic avant-garde which dissolves aesthetic autonomy into ethical heteronomy. This is tied up in Lyotard's (and other Marxist thinkers of the time) desire to safeguard art against the threat of commercialization. A paradoxical conjunction is set up in Lyotard where revolution itself is to be understood as the "safeguarding artistic novelty against form of reversion to outmoded expressions and compromises with commercial aestheticization." (Rancière 2009: 94) The creation of new forms that occurs with the pastiche or modernist movements had to be understood by Lyotard and his contemporaries as nothing but an appropriation of art by capitalism, or commodification. Thus, the artistic revolution for Lyotard was also a devolution into old forms of artistic expression. But the artistic revolution was also crucially for Lyotard meant to preserve "a notion of art as that which testifies to the immemorial dependency of the human mind on the unmasterable presence, that following Lacan, he calls Thing." (Rancière 2009: 94) Here we have a conception of revolution which is both dedicated to formalism of the past, while seeking to do away with the formalism of the present and focus art towards this insurmountable task of bearing witness to the discord brought about via the Thing.

There is something peculiar that comes out of Lyotard's rethinking of the avant-garde. Strictly speaking for Rancière, anything that cannot be represented belongs in the representative regime. How then can we account for this conception of the unrepresentable within the aesthetic

regime? This is one of the reasons this way of looking at modern art falls flat for Rancière. Strictly speaking, there cannot be anything unrepresentable within the aesthetic regime. But postmodernism "fulfills a desire for there to be something unrepresentable, or unavailable, so that the practice of art can be enlisted in the necessity of the ethical detour." In this way, "the ethics of the unrepresentable might still be an inverted form of the aesthetic promise." (Rancière 2009: 132)

In order to understand how this can be the case, Rancière turns to Lyotard's critique of trans-avantgardism. Although it would be incorrect to call Lyotard an emblematic modernist in the way Greenberg is, Lyotard's critique of Italian trans-avantgardism is read in a modernist manner. Lyotard claims that, "'Mixing on the same surface neo- or hyper-realist motifs with abstract, lyrical or conceptual motifs means that everything is equivalent because everything is good for consumption. This is an attempt to establish and have approved a new 'taste'. This taste is no taste.'" (Rancière 2009: 95) But this then begs the question, why is this new taste not actually a taste for Lyotard? Rancière accuses Lyotard of giving the simplistic answer "it is not a taste because it ought not to be." (Rancière 2009: 95) This impulse comes out of an idea popular in Marxist aesthetic circles of the time that art and life were two spheres which had to be kept separate. In certain ways, one finds within his discussion of the avant-garde modernist remainders that are not dissimilar to that of Adorno. The link between them is this Marxist account of art being art only if it is also political, and art being political only if "it produces objects that, both in texture and the way we experience them, have a radically different status to objects of consumption." (Rancière 2009: 96) Lyotard and Adorno both attempt to think through a situation in which what is pleasurable is distinctly different from what is good. This is, of

course, an attempt to think through the distinction proposed by Kant. The aesthetic judgment in Kant is what brings about a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, while the agreeable or good is reducible to mere sensibility. This helps them to write off the desire we get from objects of consumption under capitalism as mere expression of the agreeable. Both Lyotard and Adorno are focused on maintaining this distinction between the agreeable and the good. The idea is that people desire commodities of the culture industry not because they are beautiful but because of the desire instilled in us by the culture of capital. Thus, what is beautiful to us cannot at the same time be agreeable, as all agreeableness is reducible to commodity fetishization. Rancière, though, is not interested at all in keeping art pure from commodification -- he does not see anything problematic in the notion of commodified art.

In both Adorno and Lyotard, "Art is a practice of dissensus. And it is by means of this dissensus, not by enlisting a specific cause, that artworks receive their specific qualities and get linked to an external good." (Rancière 2009: 96) But one of the major differences between the two is that Adorno sees the dissensus as coming out of an internal contradiction in the artwork. Although Adorno seems to subscribe to something like a modernist conception of modern art, there remains a sense of this paradoxical linkage between autonomy and heteronomy. For him, art exclusively reflects upon its own materiality, but Adorno also realizes that this autonomy can never happen to some degree. This is because there is always a heteronomy that intervenes. It is an utter impossibility that a work of art can escape commodification -- each and every work of art is also a commodity. The difference between what he considers advanced art and the art of the culture industry is that advanced art reflects this impossibility in its own materiality. With Lyotard we also see a conception of dissensus, but instead of a contradiction, it is a disaster. This

disaster is "'original': it testifies to an alienation that no longer has anything to do with the capitalist separation of pleasure and enjoyment, but is the simple destiny of dependency proper to the human animal." (Rancière 2009: 96) This is how we can come to understand Lyotard's reworking of Kant. Aesthetic pleasure must be subsumed under the ethical law of heteronomy because allowing aesthetic autonomy also allows for the possibility of corruption through an attempt to tame the Thing.

To understand the Lyotardian sublime even further, Rancière looks also at Schiller's understanding of the Third Critique and how it compares to Lyotard's. In the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller understands the politics of Kant's work to be wrapped up in the conception of aesthetic free play. In the aesthetic moment, there is no domination of the understanding or a domination of the sensibilities, instead the two engage in a free play (which Rancière calls dissensual) that provides mutual enrichment. This particular understanding of the free play is crucial to why Rancière rejects a reading of Kant's aesthetics as an affirmation of the status quo. Using this interpretation of Kant, one needs to take no recourse to the notion of the sublime in order to account for the possibility of dissensus. The usual domination of form over matter is immobilized in the aesthetic experience and consensus is challenged. The aesthetic experience, for Schiller, allows for both an attraction and a repulsion. The *Juno Ludovisi* is able to carry out such a task "because it manifests that character of divinity which is also… that of humanity in its fullness: she does not work, she plays. She neither yields nor resists." (Rancière 2009: 98) The common sense achieved from the aesthetic experience is distinct from the consensus of the political experience. It allows for universality that does not need to sacrifice equality. Schiller's aesthetics also allows for the possibility of falling into a metapolitics of its

own "which, against the upheavals of state forms, proposes a revolution of the forms of the lived sensory world."[1] (Rancière 2009: 99) Schiller ends up taking a metapolitical position because if what Schiller is suggesting is true -- that one is capable of reconceiving the relationship between form and content -- this would bring about a reconciliation that would dissolve the paradoxical conjunction between art and life. A rejection of the Schillerian understanding of the beautiful can also ultimately lead towards a metapolitical conception of art. For Ranciere, the need to take recourse to the sublime is unnecessary because the experience of the beautiful in Kant (and expanded upon by Schiller) is already able to accomplish what those defenders of the sublime ascribe to the sublime. The experience of contradictions is operative in the experience of the beautiful. For both Adorno and Lyotard, this dissensual relationship between form and matter is something that they can only conceive in terms of the sublime. But, they conceive of this dissensual relationship in different ways that represent for Rancière two different metapolitical understanding of aesthetics, namely modernist[2] in Adorno and postmodernist[3]/ethical in Lyotard.

The double movement of attraction and repulsion that one finds in Schiller is imposed upon the sublime. Adorno employs this line of thinking in the service of rejecting a conception of a division of labour that keeps commodity and culture separate. "The path towards emancipation is the one that exacerbates the separation, that... reaffirms the good of dissensus by rejecting all forms of reconciliation between the beautiful and pleasure." (Rancière 2009: 103) In Lyotard, we see a focus on this irreconcilability as the both the ultimate goal and the end of aesthetics. Art no longer has the role of critiquing society as it did in Adorno, rather its function

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[1] What Ranciere is discussing here is an avant-garde metapolitics.
[2] Adorno is not entirely a modernist thinker. He is a modernist in that his conception of art rests upon the material, but his understanding of material is also quite complex because he has a dialectical understanding of material.
[3] Although Ranciere sees Lyotard as emblematic of postmodern art, his charge against Lyotard may not be entirely well-founded. In *The Postmodern Condition,* Lyotard is actually very critical of certain features of postmodernism.

is testifying to the otherness of the Other. And for Rancière, the ultimate goal of Lyotard is tied up in his desire to connect aesthetics to yet another 'grand narrative.' Marxist thought attempted to bring everything back to capital. Everything could (and had to be) explained at the level of the economy in Marxism. Lyotard extricated aesthetics from that yoke only to place it under a new yoke, that of the Other/Thing/Inhuman. He sets up a new metapolitical scenario in which "the West's modern history is identified not with the emancipation of the proletariat but with the programmed extermination of the Jews." (Rancière 2009: 103) The avant-garde conception of art is important to Lyotard in that it maintains the line between art and products of the culture industry, but in a way he divulges from typical avant-garde conceptions of art. The autonomy of art is no longer tied up in "the game of a contradiction; it is the inscription of a shock. The shock is still an alienation of sorts but it is an insurmountable one." (Rancière 2009: 103) And where Schiller's formula once promised freedom out of the aesthetic experience, Lyotard demands infinite servility to the Other. For Rancière, what Lyotard seems to completely neglect is this moment that was so important to the different avant-garde moments -- the move meant to close the gap between art and life. The understanding of these different movements (i.e. Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism, Constructivism, etc) was that the transformation of the meaning of art was at the same time a transformation of the meaning of life. Within Rancière's own framework, then, these different avant-garde movements could be seen as success of Schiller, and this is a moment that is ignored by Lyotard.

Rancière had set up his conception of the ethical turn throughout his texts on human rights and the aesthetics of the sublime, but in his last chapter of *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Rancière lays out a clear argument for why he believes both aesthetics and politics have taken an

ethical turn. In the modern age, ethics is commonly thought to be a system that analyzes the validity and the consequences of human actions with regard to their effect on collective wellbeing. Rancière considers this to be a misnomer -- the above system is actually one of morality. Ethics is an entirely different act -- it is first and foremost "the identification of all forms of discourse and practice under the same indistinct point of view." (Rancière 2009: 110) This point of view becomes a law for every decision and human action that takes place within the ethical regime. Not only that, but the very existence of everything within the world and the ordering of the world is always subject to the ultimate law. "The growing indistinction between fact and law" ushers in a new period in which what used to be the binary of right and wrong now becomes an ultimatum between good and evil. Fact -- what is -- is no longer able to be separated from law -- what ought to be. All these distinctions become distilled into the notion of terror or trauma. The ethical turn comes from a conjunction of two ways of understanding the Greek word *ethos*: "both the dwelling and the way of being, the way of life corresponding to this dwelling. Ethics, then, is a kind of thinking which establishes the identity between an environment, a way of being, and a principle of action.'' (Rancière 2009: 110)

This new ethical regime of art came about partly through an attempt by 20th century thinkers to understand Auschwitz. Western civilization as a whole had never experienced anything like Auschwitz and, as such, had no way to understand Auschwitz. While in the past, an act carried out by a political apparatus in the name of betterment of a state would have been judged through the lens of historical precedent or political necessity, Auschwitz was incomprehensible. The question of why Auschwitz had been carried out was above all else, an ethical question. What the Third Reich had carried out was not wrong -- it was pure evil. This

positing of a new, radical Other paralyzes any and all thoughts following it. It was paradoxically so horrible that it could never truly be comprehended, and at the same time also so horrible that it demanded every thought to be dedicated to comprehending it. It sets up something that can never be dissected, understood, or even so much as touched. The only way forward is annihilation of this radical evil or standing transfixed in front of it.

But, this ethical turn was not something that happened directly in response to just Auschwitz. Another crucial feature of it is that it goes hand in hand with the rejection of the achievements of the great utopias of 1968. After the Fascists were defeated in World War II, there was hope that the ideas of Marx would be the way forward in the new world. But then communist leaders came in like Mao and Stalin who were carrying out atrocities just as egregious as the Fascists who had come before them. There was a focus among thinkers to understand why the project of Marxism had been realized so poorly in places like the USSR. Some theorists of the time -- such as Hannah Arendt -- argued that Marxism and Nazism were both different types of totalitarianism, while others -- such as the Frankfurt School -- argued Marxism merely needed to be rethought. Then in '68 people around the world began to rise up against imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, etc. The ethical turn was a direct response to these movements. It is tied up in this notion that the 20th century was nothing but an experience of totalitarianism on the right and on the left, and that the left vestiges of this quasi-totalitarian thought could be found in '68. The ethical turn functioned to depoliticize politics and stifle this revolutionary spirit. It tells us that systems of oppression which are fundamentally tied to capitalism can coexist with capitalism. We are told: 'you can have capitalist anti-racism, capitalist feminism, capitalist anti-imperialism, etc.' This is problematic within Rancière's

framework because "Politics, as the opposite of the police, is a form of dissensus that polemically confirms the axiom of equality—the only political axiom for him." (Guénoun 2009: 177) The ethical turn ultimately functions to depoliticize everything that it touches, therefore the idea that you can fight for any sort of equality *without* politics is entirely contradictory.

Within the new ethical regime, Rancière explains both politics and art's subjection to the turning of fact into law. While art may feel more political than it ever has been, ethics have actually paralyzed the politics of aesthetics. Politics for Rancière is "not, as is often said, the opposite of morals. It is its division." (Rancière 2009: 111) This ethical turn does not necessarily mean a return to the ethical regime of art; the ethical turn exists independently of the three regimes. It does share characteristics with the ethical regime in that it measures the worth of art through its political worth. In the ethical regime of images, artistic images are held up to "the standard that philosophy provides" (Chanter 2018: 84) while the ethical turn of aesthetics measures art against the unattainable standard of the Other. In both cases, though, the artwork is always already deficient in the eyes of the rule imposed on it by the dominant political order. This has the effect of separating art entirely from the political, ultimately leading it down a path to nowhere. It also shares features with the representative regime in that it is concerned with regulating what is and what is not representable. This comes out of the unthinkability Lyotard associates with the Holocaust. For Rancière:

> "to claim that it is a trauma beyond all traumas that requires a language unique to its unspeakability is problematic both because it privileges this one event over others, as if by definition it is more unthinkable than other traumas, and because it runs counter to a defining feature of the aesthetic regime, in which there is nothing that is unrepresentable." (Chanter 2018: 91)

It is important to note that the regimes Rancière discusses are not necessarily ordered in a teleological sense -- the features of all of them can manifest in different ways at the same time. This is how we can have a manifestation of all three regimes of images within the ethical turn: the Platonic regime in its depoliticizing nature, the representative in its unrepresentability, and the aesthetic in the formalism we see through its subreption of the ethical event. With the ethical turn, we see that ethics comes to take on a new meaning from the original Greek term-- it is "a new and specific interpretive schema governed entirely by one event—Auschwitz —emblematic of totalitarian catastrophe and by a single law— ''the new law of Moses''—which is a Janus-faced dictum facing, on one side, Moses (a name that has come to symbolize Jewish ethics) and on the other McDonald's (a name which has come to symbolize international capitalism)." (Guénoun 2009: 179) This new sense of ethics implies a constant sublimation of the self to the Other, in which there is no aesthetic separation from reason.

Politics is a matter of making visible and bringing new things to the stage of sensorium -- and for Rancière this is only carried out through the conflict of dissensus. The ethical turn functions to stifle that conflict and confuse law and fact; there is a double-subreption in which the ethical event is concealed by the work of art, and the work of art is concealed by the ethical event. In this case, we either must submit "to the law of the Other that does us violence, or indulgence in the law of the self that leads us into an enslavement by commercial culture." (Rancière 2009: 105) In the wake of Auschwitz, the law of Moses is being used by Rancière in the sense of submitting to the law of the Other, and the law of McDonald's in the sense of submitting yourself to a culture of capital, both which makes freedom impossible. One can either

be a victim of the system or participate in the system, and the only alternative to these choices are to destroy the system entirely.

Rancière then turns to Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* to elucidate exactly what this ethical turn looks like in art. It is loosely based off of Bertold Brecht's *Saint Joan of The Stockyards*, in which Joan of Arc becomes Joan Dark and is transposed into Depression-era Chicago. Joan Dark starts off as a member of a Christian Salvation Army-esque organization who is trying to bring Christian morality into the ultra-capitalist chaos around her. In an attempt to reach the poor slaughterhouse workers with her message, she confronts the slaughterhouse owner. When she does this, he lets her come see the factory for herself. While there, she sacrifices herself for one the workers and soon realizes her Christian morality and the organization which she put her faith into is impotent in fighting the violence of capitalism. She dies disillusioned with her old organization, yet nonetheless a martyr.

In Dogville, we are told the story of Grace, who stumbles into a tiny mining town in Colorado while on the run for her life. The townspeople are at first wary of Grace, so Tom, the spiritual leader of the town who first encouraged Grace to stay, suggests Grace earns their approval by doing chores for them. After she does them, the townspeople agree to let her stay for two weeks and decide at the end what to do with her. Grace continues to do her chores, which she even earns a little bit of money for, and at the end of this period the town agrees to let her stay. Soon, the town realizes Grace is on the run from the law for a bank robbery and Tom suggests Grace do even more chores for even less pay. At this point she seems to be slightly uncomfortable with the idea but obliges. Over time Grace is abused and exploited by the townspeople, and when she tries to escape they violentently punish her.

The way Von Trier chose to transform the story of Saint Joan was in a ethicizing way. In the original Brechtian fable we are first shown two groups that seem to be at odds with each other: the Christians and the Capitalists. But over time we come to realize that the 'good' side is not so good at all. Joan's faith in the Straw Hats is then "transformed into a militant morality, which took as its criterion the necessities of the struggle against oppression." (Rancière 2009: 110-111) There was no one morality, we are shown both Christian morality and the militant morality that Joan eventually adapts. Good or evil is not readily identified because 'good' or 'right' is also identified on the side which stands in opposition to the rights of the oppressed. Most importantly those that were previously unaccounted for -- the slaughterhouse workers -- are both literally and figuratively brought to the stage. For Rancière, Saint Joan is a perfect example of politics. "The opposition of two types of violence was therefore also that between two sorts of morals and of rights. This dividing of violence, morality, and right has a name. It is called politics. Politics is not, as is often said, the opposite of morals. It is its dividing." (Rancière 2009: 111)

Von Trier then takes this idea and corrodes it by transposing it into the world of *Dogville* without the Brechtian split. In *Dogville* we are given a character who has no purpose other than trying to be accepted. There is no counting for the unaccounted or uncovering the truth behind her motivations. Von Trier distills that all down and gives us a character who is good, and others who are evil. Grace is amenable and easy to root for like our original heroine, but she is not meant to help us understand the complexities of the violence around her. She is exploited and abused by the townspeople for reasons that cannot be comprehended -- the evil encountered by Grace in Dogville "refers to no other cause but itself." (Rancière 2009: 111) We find out that

Grace's father was the head of the mobsters that she was running from, and watch her decide Dogville must be punished for their crimes. She ordered the mobsters to kill every living being in Dogville, save the dog named Moses, and burn it to the ground. The evil of the community was so infinite that it could not be accounted for and understood -- the only possible answer was to destroy it. And, of course, it is not Grace herself which brings it to its heel, the evil is only able to be addressed by her father, who convinces her Dogville cannot be forgiven. "The Brechtian lesson was: 'Only violence helps where violence reigns'. The transformed formula appropriate to our consensual and humanitarian times is 'Only evil repays evil.'" (Rancière 2009: 111) Von Trier was heavily critiqued for the film by the jury at Cannes for its lack of humanism, and Rancière argues that the lack of humanism in it comes precisely from its positing of infinite justice. It tells us that we can take justice into our own hands wherever injustice befalls us.

Another prime example of this infinite justice for Rancière is Clint Eastwood's film *Mystic River*. In *Mystic River* Jimmy executes his former friend Dave because he believes Dave to be the perpetrator behing the murder of his daughter. Jimmy has gotten away with the murder because his friend and accomplice Sean in the police force helped Jimmy cover it up. Sean helped Jimmy cover it up because when they were both boys, they were responsible for Dave being kidnapped and raped. They feel that they are responsible for the trauma that Dave endured, and see it as their fault that he has become the type of man one would suspect of murdering a young girl. In past cinematographic tales of the falsely accused, truth is that which ultimately rights the wrongs originally posed. "Today, evil, with its innocent and guilty parties, has been turned into the trauma which knows of either innocence or guilt, which lines in the zone of indistinction between guilt and innocence, between psychic disturbance and social unrest."

(Rancière 2009: 112) Evil can again not be understood in this scenario. Jimmy kills Dave in response to the trauma of losing his daughter, and soon we find out Dave was victim to this because of the trauma which has befallen him. At that point, we can also assume that those perpetrators were also themselves victims of trauma, because of course evil repays evil. The original source of evil is not of concern -- all that the film serves to do is give witness to the profound trauma which everyone involved endures. "Not only is a scenario of disturbance and sickness used to replace one of justice. The sickness itself has changed meaning… Childhood trauma has become the trauma of being born, the simple misfortune that befalls every human being for being an animal born too early." (Rancière 2009: 112) The punishment that occurs is no longer about justice, because there is no right and wrong to be found anymore, instead violence is seen as a necessary and reasonable response to trauma.

Where there is trauma in art and psychoanalysis, there is terror in politics. Terror is "a trauma elevated to the status of a civilizational phenomenon." (Rancière 2009: 114) George H.W. Bush's never ending 'War on Terror' is emblematic of this doling out of infinite justice. The lives lost on September 11th, 2001 are no longer what matters to people -- the physical destruction caused that day has been dwarfed exponentially by the damage the United States let loose in the Middle East. In the preface of his book, *The Great War of Our Time*, former CIA director Michael Morrell and Bush advisor describes what compelled him to write his book: "I wanted to tell the remarkable story of CIA's fight against the group that killed nearly three thousand people on that beautiful sunny morning in September 2001." (Morell 2015: xiii) I will not bore you with the details, but needless to say the events Morell goes on to describe in his book (mixed in with anecdotes from his otherwise comfortable life in Northern Virginia) took

the lives of many more than three thousand people. For these people, the interest is not avenging some wrong or doling out any justice. It is about keeping the threat of terror constantly at bay through a never ending campaign of violence. In the past, a general would at least fight with his soldiers -- war was about settling some score ,and those who had stakes in the matter came out to fight. Now, the commanding officers have no interest in the fight itself. They sit at their desks in Washington D.C. and send people off to die in hopes of keeping this neverending terror at bay.

Morell himself makes this evidently clear when he explains another reason he chose to write his book is that "most importantly… the threat of terrorism has not gone away. It did not die in Abbottabad along with Bin Laden. It is going to be with us for decades to come, and as a nation we must be prepared. If we are not, we will, with certainty, face another devastating attack on our homeland." (Morell 2015: xiv) The terminology here is all chosen to make us feel as though we are constantly at risk of being attacked. It was written to make it clear that even though 9/11 is over and the U.S. has killed the person most responsible for it, it is not finished being avenged -- and it will likely not be done being avenged for an undisclosed period of time. "The logic of this form of justice is to stop only once the terror itself has stopped, but this is a terror which by definition never stops for beings who must endure the trauma of birth." (Rancière 2009: 114) To be alive in the 21st century is to constantly be at risk of attack -- evil is acceptable because evil is assumed to be hiding in the shadows at any given moment, and evil can be the only thing which repays evil. Justice is everywhere and nowhere because we must all be on the offensive at all times, ready for the next 'devastating attack on our homeland,' self, or way of being. The facts of what happened that day on 9/11 become distilled into the law of infinite justice.

The ethical turn is not about injecting morality into our political and cultural machines, it is actually about getting rid of any traces of it. For Rancière, morality implies "the division of different forms of morality and of rights, the division between ways of opposing right to fact." (Rancière 2009: 115) To look at the 9/11 attacks through the lens of morality, one would have to look at the facts and understand the damage done to the Middle East through colonialism, the redrawing of borders during the Paris Peace Conference, CIA intervention in the region, US occupation in Saudi Arabia at the time, etc. Three thousand people were killed that day, and that is undoubtedly a wrong -- but the conditions leading up to the decision to carry out that attack cannot be wiped from the record. This lack of morality is what Rancière has referred to as consensus.

This shift in the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma in art can be encapsulated by the Greek tragedy, Antigone, according to Rancière. Psychoanalytic art used to be centered around an Oedipal notion -- that "trauma amounted to a forgotten event that could be cured when trauma was reactivated." (Rancière 2009: 113) But now, there has been a shift in thinking towards moral humanism. Bonnie Honig describes this in her book *Antigone Interrupted*: "This humanism asserts that what is common to humans is not rationality but the ontological fact of mortality, not the capacity to reason but vulnerability to suffering." (Honig 2013:17) Antigone has replaced Oedipus in psychoanalytic theorization and in turn, trauma has become something central to the human condition rather than a condition with a rational cause. Rancière describes this below:

> "There is neither beginning nor end to the trauma encapsulated in Antigone. The tragedy bespeaks the discontent of a civilization in which the laws of a social order are undermined by the very things that support them: the powers of filiation, earth and night. Antigone, said Lacan, is not the heroine of the human rights created by modern democratic piety. Instead, she is the terrorist, the witness of the secret terror that underlies the social order." (Rancière 2009: 113-114)

The story of Antigone starts with suffering. Her two brothers have just finished fighting opposite sides of a civil war, and one of them has died. Creon, the new ruler of Thebes, decrees her brother will not be allowed a proper burial. Antigone disobeys Creon's wishes and gives her brother the proper burial. Antigone is often thought to represent the laws of the home while Creon represents the laws of the land. When she is caught doing this she does not deny it, and Creon puts her to death by way of leaving her to die in a cave. Antigone expresses regret over her decisions and hangs herself, dying seemingly for the cause of nothing. Part of the beauty of tragedy is that even though the characters must die, it is always in the purpose of some greater good. Their universal principles live on with them. Antigone, though, has no purpose other than to suffer. "Antigone represents grief for ungrievable life or solitary conscience rising up against arrogant power," (Honig 2013: 18) She is the victim who never had any real shot at being saved. Even if her and Creon were meant to be two different poles of morality, she never stands a chance in the face of the power that the law gives Creon. Her only power lies in her suffering's ability to bear witness to the evil of the law. She represents the fact which becomes subsumed under law within the ethical turn.

On the other hand, there is a recent tradition of reading Antigone as a revolutionary figure. Both Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler discuss her in this context. Butler thinks Antigone has been misunderstood by many as being apolitical due to the reading Hegel gives, which confines "Antigone to the sphere of kinship and family, leaving politics to Creon." (De Sanctis 2012: 27) Hegel sees Antigone as emblematic of family values; standing in opposition to the state. Butler thinks this interpretation misses the point because, "there cannot really be kinship without the mediation and support of the state and vice versa." (De Sanctis 2012: 28) The state

and society are posited as a binary, while Butler believes that in reality they are inherently linked to each other. Furthermore, Antigone's complicated relationship with her family is an even stronger suggestion that this Hegelian binary does not hold. Butler argues this is clear through the fact the Antigone is both a child of incest and displays incestual tendencies.

> "Antigone, therefore, 'represents not kinship in its ideal form but its deformation and displacement' (Butler 2000: 24). Not only is she Oedipus's daughter and sister, not only is she cold and rather hostile towards the other members of her family, her exclusive affection for her brother Polyneices also seems to be more than sisterly love. (De Sanctis 2012: 28)

In Butler's reading, Antigone is not the representative of the law of the home, but rather a subversive critique of it to some degree. She is not defying Creon for an upholding of morality, but rather motivated by her own taboo desires which subvert the laws of the home.

Butler then goes on to critique Lacan's understanding of Antigone as emblematic of the ethics of desire. Lacan does not see her as upholding the laws of the family, but rather considers her as a figure that is driven entirely by desire. In this interpretation, she is not a self-aware political figure at all, and is motivated by her subconscious feelings for Polyneices. Lacan then falls into the same binary as Hegel because he removes Antigone from the political and associates her with the unconscionable Other. Butler, on the other hand, claims that "the structure of kinship, the Law of the Father that prohibits incest – which for Lacan is the basis of the symbolic and thus the very possibility of the social, since the mother stands for the forever lost object of desire – is exactly what Antigone challenges." (De Sanctis 2012: 29) She champions Antigone for choosing her brother over her husband because it challenges the heterosexual marriage structures which Butler views as oppressive. Butler champions Antigone both as a victim *par excellence* of the laws of heterosexual marriage, and a political hero for having the

strength to challenge those laws. Lacan sees her as an ethical figure who exists entirely outside

of the political -- very much reading her in line with a symbol of the ethical turn. Butler reads

Antigone as a much more dissensual figure, and presents her desire as political and social. She

sees Antigone as working within the confines of the law to point out the shortcomings of the law.

Žižek agrees with Butler's rejection of Antigone as emblematic of the home, but does not

think this is the case because of her incestual relationships. He agrees with Butler's claim that

Antigone is rejecting motherhood, but thinks her coldness towards her sister Ismene is even more

important. "Whereas Ismene is the friendly neighbour, or, in Lacanian terms, our semblable,

Antigone perfectly embodies the scary Other we cannot understand: she is what Lacan calls 'das

Ding', the Thing." (De Sanctis 2012: 31) While Ismene represents the friendly other, Antigone is

entirely emblematic of the law of the inhuman Other for Žižek. This happens because Antigone

has stepped outside of the social order which makes the Other intelligible to us. Antigone is

'between two deaths' because she is still physically alive for most of the play, yet symbolically

dead as she has chosen to step outside of the social order and exists in the domain of the inhuman

Other. This domain is what Lacan calls 'Ate,' meaning 'ruin, reckless impulse, madness, fixation.'

Žižek claims that "the domain of Ate is unbearable for more than a little time. This is why

Antigone goes through her second (physical) death. The only other option would be to step back

into the symbolic order, but this is something Antigone would never do." (De Sanctis 2012: 32)

For this reason, she becomes the ultimate ethical figure.

Žižek does not see Antigone as this ethical figure because she opposes Creon in the

typical clash between state and society, she rather makes herself inhuman by rejecting the

symbolic order. This is ultimately tied to a death drive, for Žižek, because she cannot physically

exist in the world for much longer after she has symbolically annihilated herself.

> "She is a revolutionary figure, because she acts. It is opportune to introduce here Žižek's conception of 'Act' as opposed to 'action'. The latter is an ordinary accomplishment, something we do that has no particular relevance to our lives. An Act, on the other hand, is something that makes us subjects… To become a subject, to act, she has to exit the symbolic order and, by means of this transgression, enter the domain of Ate." (De Sanctis 2012: 32)

In order to act, according to Žižek, we must first allow ourselves to be imposed upon by the Law.

Butler sees Antigone's repetition of the Law as proof that she is challenging the symbolic from

within, whereas Žižek is as her accepting her objectivity in the face of the Other and submitting

herself to the domain of Ate. "The Lacanian symbolic order becomes, in Žižek, one thing with

the social. Thus, Antigone's Act rises above the sphere of kinship (Hegel) and that of language

(Lacan in Butler's reading) and regains its political value." (De Sanctis 2012: 33) This is

because, by becoming the Thing, Antigone is acting and therefore challenging the existing social

order. This act, for Žižek, is the only way to challenge the social order. In order for a rupture,

there is a necessary violence that takes place in the form of the Act. In this framework then, both

the creation and the preservation of the law requires violence. Both thinkers would agree that

Antigone's revolutionary power comes about in the way she opposes the Law, showing that

where there is Law there must also be exception.

Antigone is the perfect protagonist for the ethical turn because, as a woman, she poses as

the perfect candidate for the absolute victim. Although she is often associated with the law of the

home, she arguably more broadly represents the law of the Other or the law of Moses. Creon, on

the other hand, represents the law of the Order or the law of McDonald's, and ultimately her law

never stands a chance in the face of his. I believe Antigone not only to be significant for her role

within the broader ethical turn, but also her application to the new binary I will lay out in the next chapter: the law of the Gaze and the law of the Victim. Antigone, as one of history's most well known women who suffered, exists as the figurehead of female suffering for many centuries to come. While female victimhood is hardly a novel topic, I will argue the Me Too movement has further ethicized victimhood in way that depoliticizes feminist politics and art, and has led to the imposition of an unknowable trauma on sexuality.

Chapter 3- Feminism in Consensual Times

Rancière's ethical turn has been of particular interest to me because I believe it to be a driving force behind the deradicalization of feminism that has characterized the 21st century. Feminism is typically divided into 'waves' characterized by different focuses. The wave analogies can be somewhat oversimplying -- the feminist thought coming out of all these eras were more diverse than I can do justice to -- but looking at feminst thought through the wave narratives will help us better understand how it developed alongside the ethical turn occurring in the overall political and cultural spheres. The first-wave of feminism was focused on gaining the status of personhood for women and securing the right to vote. This wave was led mostly by white Suffragettes such as Mary Wollstoncroft and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The second-wave of feminism arose in the 1960's. This era, by far, produced the most radical thought, and was far more intersectional than its predecessor. In fact, this is when the concept of intersectionality was first verbalized. Materially, this focused on securing women social equality as well as political equality. In this wave, one can find the strongest concentration of Marxist, queer, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist thought presented in conjuction with feminism. Some of the most notable thinkers of this era include Simone De Beauvoir, Angela Davis, and Catherine Mackinnon. While there is no doubt that the second-wave feminist movement had its problems (particularly with the lack of intersectionality that characterized some of the thought coming from white women), it continues to be the period that disrupted the police order of gender in the most radical way.

Feminism, as did all other political movements, felt the ethical turn in response to these revolutionary politics we saw crystallized in 1968. The new feminism that came out in response

to the second-wave attempted to strip it of all its radical features and marry it with the neoliberal consensual order in a palatable way. It seems much harder to actually define what thought came out of this era -- and that is arguably because there was not as much dissensual thought being formulated at the time. It seemed to manifest much more in the professional realm -- this is the era in which women were encouraged to break the glass ceiling. Gender scholar Angela McRobbie takes the step of arguing that we should not even look at this period as the 'third-wave,' rather she sees it as a movement towards post-feminism. She characterizes it as a time in "which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined." (McRobbie 2008: 11) There tends to be a lot of disagreement around when the third-wave ends and the fourth-wave begins, but for the same reasons as McRobbie I would argue that it does not really matter. The ethical turn actually depoliticized feminism to the extent that there is no real ideological difference between the two. What is called 'the fourth-wave' was just a popularization of third-wave ideas within mainstream culture. The people who moved forth new feminism were less theoreticians or political activists than they were corporatists. Sociologist Catherine Rottenberg argues that the most important text of this period was Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In*, a book written by the former COO of Facebook about how women can have both career and family success (Rottenberg 2013: 418). Unlike their predecessors, the 'thinkers' of this era offer little immanent critique of the system itself. Their main focus is how to achieve personal success while working within existing consensual structures.

The dissensual discourse that occured within the second-wave was largely neutralized. Women, the group that once made up a political community was transformed into an ethical community. Rancière defines a political community as "a community that is structurally divided,

not between divergent interest groups and opinions, but divided in relation to itself." (Rancière 2009: 114) Within a political community, one can find different forms of morality and different approaches to opposing right to fact. Oppression is not about an evil trying to tame the untamable, it is about understanding how codified rights match up to political realities. Rancière describes exactly what this consensus looks like:

> "The classical form of political conflict opposes several 'peoples' in one: the people inscribed in the existing forms of the law and the constitution; the people embodied in the state; the ones ignored by this law or whose right the State does not recognize; and the one that makes its claims in the name of another right that is yet to be inscribed in facts. Consensus is the reduction of these various 'peoples' into a single people identical with the count of a population and it's parts, of the interests of a global population and it's parts." (Rancière 2009: 115)

We can use the example of the second-wave feminists to illustrate what this may look like in actuality. Feminist scholar bell hooks critques the first-wave and examines the ways in which it miscounted the experiences of all women. She discusses the failings of the suffrage movements and the white feminists that came after them. Although some white Suffragettes objected, the 19th amendment technically gave all women including women of color the right to vote. If one were to assume fact and right to be the same, then one could pronounce this particular struggle to be over. Women of all races had the same constitutional rights of men of all races, thus we could declare America a free and equal nation. hooks points out the flaws in this. She discusses how, although women were supposedly equal, "While white women were rejoicing over obtaining their right to vote, a system of racial apartheid was being institutionalized throughout the U.S. that would threaten the freedom of black women far more crucially than sexual imperialism" (hooks 1981: 172) She explains the voter suppression that separates fact and law in the era of the first-wave. Quoting June Sochen, she points out how, "'when black women went to the polls in

Alabama or Georgia, they found that white election officials had a bag of tricks ready to prevent them from voting.'" (hooks 1981: 172) A truly dissensual analysis of the suffragette movements would also be incomplete without a class analysis. The feminists of the first-wave were mostly upper-class women who did not understand the burden of class oppression. Many poor women of all races became disillusioned with first-wave feminism because "even though the [National Women's Party] pledged to work for full equality for women, it actively worked to promote solely the interests of white middle and upper class women." (hooks 1981: 172)

The way the 19th amendment had been realized did not in fact reward black women and poor women with the same rights as rich white women, because Jim Crow racism and American capitalism was preventing those rights from being actualized properly. hooks aims to point out how the feminist morality of the first-wave had been ineffective in actualizing the rights of all women. It needed to be transformed into a more militant morality that fought against the ways black and poor women's legal rights did not match up to their actualization within the state and also demanded a new right to equal treatment (rather than separate but equal treatment). In this example, we see both how a legal right is bestowed upon some and not recognized in others, and we see the demand for a new right that has not yet been inscribed. She takes a dissensual approach to feminism by bringing to the stage the structural differences present in the political community; pointing out that "in a capitalist, racist, imperialist state there is no one social status women share as a collective group." (hooks 1981: 136) This is not to say that a racial critique of feminism is in itself already subversive. Identity politics can be very consensual, especially if it deemphasizes the question of capital. hooks is clear to state that "resolution of the conflict between black and white women cannot begin until all women acknowledge that a feminist

movement which is *both* classist and racist is a mere sham." (hooks 1981: 157) What is

dissensual about hooks' approach here is the way in which she critiques the generalization of the

concept of woman, and points out how fact and law did not match up. When contextualizing the

failures of the first-wave, hooks accounts for all systems of oppression, not just gender

oppression, in order to bring to the stage those that have not been counted for. Through

dissensual approaches we can work towards equality by ascribing new rights and recognizing the

ways the current ones are not being actualized properly.

Consensus reduces these groups into one. "It incessantly works to fill in all these intervals

between right and fact through which the right and the people are divided. The political

community thus tends to be transformed into an *ethical* community, into a community that

gathers together a single people in which everyone is supposed to be counted." (Rancière 2009:

115) Consensual feminism is that feminism which attempts to argue there exists some sort of

collective status as Woman, ignoring the many differences in which the rights of different

women manifest into fact. One phenomena of consensual feminism is that of 'representation.'

This is not representation in the Rancièrian sense. It also is not about bringing people to the stage

who were previously uncounted -- this is the guise of representational feminism, but it is not

particularly interested in doing so.

One of the things commonly considered to be an important part of the third-wave of

feminism was the election of 27 women to the United States Congress in 1992 -- it was called

"The Year of the Woman." Women were told to be happy about this because finally they were

being given positions of power, but one could ask, what kind of woman? What is meant by "the

Woman" and why is it just her year rather than the year of the women, plural? In this case "the

Woman" is the woman who fits neatly into the American imperial state; she is the woman who

plays by the man's rules in order to gain the same power as the man. Sure, one could argue her

quest for power is somewhat dissensual. Her being elected to Congress makes clear the

difference in how women's and men's legal rights to office were being recognized at the time.

But her actions, as dissensual as they have the potential to be within the traditional gender

binary, lose all their revolutionary potential when they turn women into "the Woman." Why

should the election of those 27 women be a triumph for all women? Are women just a monolith

group that win together and lose together? Of course, we know that this in not the case -- some

women have much easier lives than others. But the ethical turn takes women, the political

community, and files them all under "the Woman," the ethical community. Those who are

excluded from the community either gets viewed as "the one who accidently falls outside of the

great eqaulity of all -- the sick, the retarded or the forsaken to whom the community must

extended a hand in order to restablish the 'social bond,'" or "the radical other, the one who is

separated from the community from the mere fact of being alien to it." (Rancière 2009: 116) In

the ethical community, the only two options for women who do not fit is to hope the system

extends their hand or be antagonistic to the very project of gender equality.

Since 1992, there has been more and more focus on intersectionality, but even this goal

within the context of the ethical turn has proved to be empty. The answer to the need for

intersectionality in consensual times has not been to recognize the structural differences within

the group of women -- it has been to focus on the black women who seem to be proof that a hand

has been extended. Singer Beyoncè is often considered to be an important figure of 'fourth-wave

feminism' because finally we now have a strong, powerful black woman who holds a great deal

of economic and social capital. One might think this is a sign that the structural differences which divided different types of women have been solved; black women and white women can now be declared equal. That is not the case -- what has instead happened is we see a reiteration of what happened in '92, but now a figurative hand has been extended to wealthy black women.

In the year 2020, this ethical turn cannot only be seen in feminist politics but also that which we consider feminist art. In fact, I have argued that the only true difference between the third-wave and fourth-wave of feminism is precisely the fact that it has infiltrated culture on a much larger scale. While the feminism of the 90's was focused on getting women into the political realm, the feminism of the 21st century has been focused on injecting feminism into everyday life. Calling oneself a feminist is no longer a radical statement. In fact, nowadays (especially in liberal areas) people are as afraid to admit they are not feminists as women used to be afraid to admit that they were. Directors and studios now have to be concerned -- does this pass the Bechdel test, are the female characters three dimensional, do we have enough women working on the project, etc. While this is not inherently a bad thing, it risks significantly neutralizing the revolutionary potential of feminism and transferring onto it the empty goal of 'representation.' An analysis of the way women have been presented through an ethical lens can help us better understand why 'representational' art can fall flat.

In her chapter on feminist art, Tina Chanter looks at art using the framework of consensus and dissensus to argue for the revolutionairy power of feminist art. I believe her argument bears taking a closer at to determine exactly how dissensual 'feminist' art can be in ethical times. Chanter starts off by looking at the art of the Guerilla Girls, a feminist art collective from the late 80's made up of anonymous female artists. These women were mostly focused on making art that

very directly highlighted the lack of female artists within museum and gallery spaces. Chanter claims their art is dissensual because disputing "the distribution of bodies that informs whose work is displayed in an art gallery is to contest the aesthetics determining what counts as art." (Chanter 2018:145) She looks at the Guerilla Girls' most famous piece: *Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get into the Met. Museum?*

I would argue that this artwork is less art than it is a political message. It takes a heteronomous approach to the aesthetic experience, being created for the purpose of changing the society it is being made in. The aesthetic experience which suspends autonomy and heteronomy is confused with the work of art itself. Rancière reminds us that "political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an awareness of the state of the world." (Rancière 2004: 63) Chanter recognizes that this may be the first criticism of the work of the Guerilla Girls. But to some degree, she rejects this instinct to write it off as such. She claims that for Rancière, what is of concern is not only whether a work of art has crossed into political

statement, but also whether or not that piece appeals to the consensual state or disrupts the police order. She goes on to say that:

> "Rather than assimilating this work by the Guerilla Girls to the pedagogical logic from which Rancière seeks to distance art as dissensus, or critiquing it for its aspiration to leave its status as art in order to become a political slogan that inspires collective action according to the logic of consensus, let's consider from an alternative point of view this work… It is of some interest here that this particular work concerns itself not only with the art of politics, but also with the politics of art." (Chanter 2018: 149)

Some things need to be considered here. Chanter seems to be suggesting that within the framework provided by Rancière, it is possible to have a work of art in the aesthetic regime that dissolves the art into life and still maintains dissensual features. This seems to be in direct contradiction with the very motto of politics of the aesthetics regime: "Let us save the heterogenous sensible." (Rancière 2010: 124) Rancière consistently insists that we must maintain this knot between art and life, because if we dissolve art into politics, politics also becomes dissolved as well. To suggest that this work of art could somehow both fit into a heteronomous model, and at the same time maintain the politics of art seems to be counterintuitive to the very notion of aesthetics in Rancière puts forth.

Chanter's defense of this piece is that "it offers a commentary on the relationship between the artist and the subject of the work of art. It does this not by asserting a political position, but by posing a question." (Chanter 2018: 149) If we were to look at this piece as we looked at the *Juno Ludovisi*, would it instill the same mutual enrichment of activity and passivity? It seems the aesthetic experience to some degree is tied into the notion of free play between imagination and understanding. One could then ask, is the imagination allowed an equal footing with the understanding when one interacts with this work. Chanter is right in pointing out that it poses a question, but it also poses that question along with two empirical observations meant to guide the

viewers towards some specific understanding of women's roles in the art world. What naturally follows from reading this question and these two facts is a logical conclusion that, yes, women seem to have a much higher chance of being shown in the Met if they are nude in a painting than if they are creating art.

Chanter sees the opposition between form and matter to take up a slightly different role in this piece, though. She sees the category of woman as a passive matter which is typically beholden to male subjectivity within the police order, and sees this work as suspending the oppositions between form and matter by questioning male subjectivity. Chanter is correct in suggesting that as a whole, women have served as passive matter in art made by men throughout the years, but that still does not point to how this work of art engages in an aesthetic exchange. In this case, the work of art is subsumed under the particularities of life. Although it critiques the world around it, it does not do so, "without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle."(Rancière 2004: 63) The actual image on the piece, a nod to Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*, functions almost entirely as branding for the Guerilla Girls, who are famous for wearing gorilla masks on their heads. The truly effective part of the piece is the words which point out the gender inequality in the art world. It would arguably achieve the same ends if the image were removed and only words were left behind. In fact, the vast majority of the Guerilla Girls' other works did not include any images, only words, and were able to achieve similar ends as this one. All their work is remembered, first and foremost, for its ability to bring awareness to inequality in the art world.

It seems to be engaging in a heteronomous political experience which does not maintain the conjunction between art and life. The work of art is not able to maintain its own laws which

have not been opposed upon it by ethics or representation. In fact, this work seems to be more characteristic of the representative regime than it is the aesthetic regime. Debates over what should be represented and how those things are represented are characteristic of the representative regime. In the representative regime the concept of art does not exist as art does not have autonomy; there is no singular 'art,' only arts. One could see how this work has potential for a technical purpose of exposing the way women are being treated in the art world, but it does not itself seem to be political *art*. Aesthetic dissensus has to be understood as a wholly separate process than political dissensus. Aesthetic dissensus offers politics sites off which to build, but it itself cannot inspire change -- it is characterized precisely by the lack of utility that comes out of maintaining the knot between art and life. Chanter suggests there is two ways to look at this piece; the first is as political slogan in which, "this work of art would thus fit seamlessly with the 'pedagogical' model, whereby a previously ignorant public is ostensibly enlightened through exposure to a 'meaningful spectacle,' which elicits 'awareness' of the state of the world." (Chanter 2018: 148) In this case, it would abdicate its status as art because it would not maintain its autonomy from life. The second way is the way she chooses to read it: as a suspension of active form's dominance over passive matter. Although I sympathize with the desire to try to find the dissensual power of the Guerilla Girls' work, I understood this piece to fall much closer in line with the first interpretation she offers. Their goal was undoubtedly noble, but I struggle to understand how their work can maintain its status as a work of art when its primary method of disrupting the visible is through a pedagogical slogan.

Even the ability of this piece to inspire collective political action seems to be questionable. In fact, since 1989 when the Guerilla Girls released this, women have not been

shown in galleries at a particularly higher rate. As of September 2019, female artists still only generate 2% of the art world's revenue. Not only is the female art market dwarfed by its male counterpart, it is much more concentrated within the hands of a few artists. Five female artists -- Yayoi Kusama, Joan Mitchell, Louise Bourgeois, Georgia O'Keeffe and Agnes Martin[4] -- account for as much as 40% of the market share. In comparison, the top five male artists account for 8% of their market. Galleries seem to be slightly more equitable than the auction world. Of the galleries surveyed in the Art Agency's study, women accounted for roughly 20-30% of artists on display. (Burns et al. 2019) If the political purpose of the Guerilla Girls' work was to mobilize the public to demand more female voices in the art world, it seems to have failed. Chanter, quoting Rancière, claims that the Guerilla Girls "can be understood to pave the way for the redefinition of 'the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what has not been,' staging an implicit challenge to the ideal standards of beauty." (Chanter 2018: 153) I feel that this is an overly generous account of the role the Guerilla Girls have played.

The Guerilla Girls were undoubtedly effective in creating some sort of lasting impact. The above work now hangs in the Tate Modern, and merchandising containing their brochures can be found all over the internet (including their own website). But without a political spirit, the mass-consumption of their work only reinforces gender essentialism in popular culture. The Guerilla Girls may have been a feminist art collective of the 80's, but their messaging fits perfectly within our consensual times. In their pieces, women appear as a monolith. And of course, the woman who appears on their most well known work of art is a white one. There is no

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[4] In descending order of how much of the market share they claim.

consideration of the struggles of particular women, and the interests of women are always presented as being directly antagonistic to those of men. They tell us that not only do men exclude women from the art world, men are also directly harming women by choosing to portray their bodies naked. The consensual group, in this case women, is always at risk of attack from male subjectivity if males are allowed their way. While the Guerilla Girls might have started their project in the hopes of encouraging dissensual thought on who belonged in galleries, their 'art' has unfortunately has turned into empty slogans brandished on tee shirts and posters in museum gift shops. This is not to say that consensus is always identical with commodification in Rancière, but the commodification of the Guerilla Girls' slogans fits very much into the consensual discourse of capitalist feminism which tells us that capital is the answer to all our oppressions. Buying merchandise with gender essentialist messages on them and financially supporting female artists (with no reference to the specific kinds of female artists which may need support and why) is posited as the solution to female objectification within the art world. The messages were consensual to begin with, and their widespread distribution even further reinforces that consensus. They function to remind women they are oppressed while not actually saying or doing much about the particular ways in which women are oppressed. On a wider scale, they represent the ways in which the concept of 'feminist art' can be co-opted to establish a notion of a monolithic woman being oppressed by men without actually offering the opportunity for dissensus which should be at the core of the aesthetic experience.

Another key feature of the ethical turn that one can find at play in 21st century feminism is the imposition of infinite trauma onto the consensual group. In October 2017, the *New York Times* came out with an article detailing the many disturbing sexual assault allegations leveled

against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstien. Soon after, actress Alyssa Milano took to the internet and encouraged women who had been victims of sexual assault to share the hashtag #MeToo in order to spread awareness of the prevalence of assault. What followed was an outpouring of women sharing their stories and a reckoning of many powerful men that had perpetuated this violence. This moment, similarly to 9/11 marked a decisive cultural shift that introduced a certain narrative of infinite trauma and reinforced a police order. At its most basic level, the phenomena of men facing a reckoning for their abuse of women is something that should be celebrated. But I would argue that certain aspects of the Me Too movement went beyond justice in a way that ultimately depoliticized it and rendered it ineffective at speaking for the rights of the oppressed.

I want to be clear here that the Me Too movement, as a whole, had important dissensual moments which provided the foundation for positive political change. What I am not attempting to do here is critique the act of bringing abusers to justice, or suggest that everything that happened as a result of the Weinstein accusations reinforced the police order. What I wish to critique is the ethicizing and consensualizing of sexual trauma that came to the fore as a result of this moment. On the surface, the original #MeToo moment which spread across social media seems to be a strong dissensual moment -- women were finally making men aware of the violence that they had faced. In certain ways, it was very successful at doing this. On the other hand, it did not seem to account for the particularities of the oppression of women and offered no clear route towards justice. It was later revealed that Milano had taken the idea of the Me Too hashtag from civil rights activist Tarana Burke, who had been trying to popularize it since 2006. Milano was able to get it off the ground because she already existed upon the stage of women

who were counted for. The hashtag cannot be credited entirely for the cultural fervor, though. The allegations against Weinstein were also powerful enough to elicit the subsequent events. The women who brought forth these allegations were mostly wealthy, beautiful, white actresses. It is not that entertainement was the only industry with a sexual assault problem or that these were the only women that were being assaulted and speaking up about it, it is that these were the kind of women society already cared about. Anyone who felt underrepresented was not given a clear avenue to critique the movement because in the ethical turn "there is no status for the excluded in the structuration of the community." (Rancière 2009: 116)

The movement did not stay within the entertainment industry for long, though. Men in all arenas begun to be accused of sexual assault, and many different kinds of women were encouraged to step forward (although the accusors who were given the most attention and credibility were still rich white women). To some degree, people were aware of consensualizing of the faces of the movement and openly critical of it -- when *Time Magazine* named "the silence breakers" their 2017 'person' of the year they were careful to profile people of all different backgrounds. But in reality, the women who were at the greatest risk of gender violence -- sex workers, domestic workers, undocumented women -- did not see much shift in their day to day lives. Overall, not much legislation was not created to inscribe their rights into fact. Certain states expanded protections for independent contractors and banned NDA's covering sexual harassment, but the biggest material shift that this inspired was the creation of the Times Up Legel Defense Fund. Hollywood women created this as a way for people to get free legal aid if they wished to bring their accusers to justice. The creation of this fund and the women who started it bring up the same issue Rancière discusses as a "return to sender" within the context of

human rights. (Rancière 2004: 309) The women who have no rights to justice are gifted rights that they cannot keep. They must return them to the sender and depend on the benevolence of those with money and power to take them seriously.

And if this is a case of absolute victims in the face of an absolute evil, it becomes clear who belongs on each side. While men can also be sexually assaulted, most of the Me Too discourse has centered around women as victims and men as evil. In many ways, women are presented as the symbol of the Other. What is at the center of this all is not, as one might assume, the sexual assaults of particular people -- it is the false equivocation of male desire with the gaze. In order to elucidate the differences between male desire and the gaze, I will turn to Kaja Silverman's analysis of Fassbinder. Fassbinder's films are commonly understood to operate upon an 'aesthetics of pessimism.' Fassbinder has been stated to have a "radical refusal to affirm," "a repudiation of positivity in any shape or form," an "aversion to the fictions which make psychic and social existence intolerable." (Silverman 1992: 125) Although Fassbinder has been accused of being sexist or racist, Silverman believes that is not at the core of this pessimism. Rather, what is placed at risk is "identity itself, which is no longer able to secure an 'interior' foothold." (Silverman 1992: 126) In psychoanalysis, identity formation requires the internalization of forces which are originally external. This is the case with the Lacanian mirror stage in which one builds their identity through mirror images, parental figures, and later on through cultural representations. It is also the case with the gaze. The Lacanian gaze is first realized in the mother's look at her infant as it "facilitates the join of the infant and the mirror image, and later through all of the many other actual looks with which it is confused." (Silverman 1992: 126)

The experience of the gaze can then be operated by the subject themselves and they can submit themselves to the experience of being seen even when no one else is watching. This is only a secondary experience, though. It must begin as an external phenomena. This being said, for Lacan, it becomes central to the notion of identity:

> "However, consciousness as it is redefined by Lacan hinges not only upon the internalization but the elision of the gaze; this 'seeing' of oneself being seen is experienced by the subject-of-consciousness -- by the subject, that is, who arrogates to itself a certain self-presence or sustainability -- as a seeing of itself seeing itself." (Silverman 1992: 126-7)

The important feature of Fassbinder's films, according to Silverman, is that it brings to the fore this externality of the gaze. The identity of the characters remains removed from the concept of self -- making clear how dependent they are upon the exterior to affirm themselves. The clear exteriorization of the gaze is one major feature of Fassbinder's cinema, but another equally important one, especially within the context of gender, is the separation of the gaze from the look. The gaze is something abstract, which cannot come from any particular viewers, whereas the look (or the eye) "'[sees] only from one point.'" (Silverman 1992: 129) To associate the gaze with a person or a group of people misunderstands its nature. "The relationship between eye and gaze is thus analogous in certain ways to that which links penis and phallus; the former can stand in for the latter, but can never approximate it." (Silverman 1992: 129) It is common in feminist film theory to associate the gaze with a male voyeurism, but this misses the fact that the gaze is an abstract concept which demands an internalization that cannot be affirmed by the male voyeur. This stems from a misunderstanding of the true nature of the Lacanian gaze. In fact, the person most likely to be subjected to the gaze is the vouyer himself. Silverman explains that "the look might also be said to exceed the gaze -- to carry a libidinal supplement which relegates it, in

turn, to a scopic subordination. The gaze, in other words, remains outside desire, the look stubbornly within." (Silverman 1992: 130) It is, thus, the look that we must discuss when we discuss the possible violence of male desire.

The conversation has thus far largely centered around punishing bad men, not understanding what causes men to be bad. We infantilize men, saying that boys will be boys and the (sometimes violent) sexual urges of men are unavoidable. We are told that as long as men and women coexist, men will want to do bad things to them. And instead of understanding why the urges exist, we focus on dissuading men from acting on them. Women exist as the emblem of the irreducible Otherness, and either men can submit themselves to the Other, or they can try to conquer it by violating women. Women, on the other hand, are imparted with an infinite trauma. In this case, sexual "trauma has become the trauma of being born," a woman. (Rancière 2009: 113) We are told men are evil, men only want us for our bodies, men will hurt us if we are not too cautious, etc. None of these narratives are particularly new, but what is novel is the progress they are being dressed up in. In many ways, the sexual liberation of the 1970's maintained oppressive gender roles, but began to disguise them in the hedonistic notion of choice. In the same way, the Me Too movement has maintained that the male violence of the 20th century is inevitable, but has created the guise that this can somehow be remedied by infinite justice.

One example of this infinite justice was in December 2019 when Alyssa Milano, who had built a career out of advocating for victims of assault since 2017, pulled her support for Andrew Yang's campaign over the fact that one of his aides had been accused of sexaul misconduct. Some might argue that the misconduct of an aide has nothing to do with Yang's political platform or even his own ethical compass, but Milano was not concerned with the particulars of

the situation. In many ways, the machine that had been created in the wake of the Weinstein allegations was not concerned with navigating the distinctions between law and fact. It sees itself as the avenger defending the absolute victims in the face of the absolute evil, and anyone this evil might touch is a necessary casualty.

The unknowable trauma of women then contributes to the unknowable trauma (and rage) of men. In the wake of Me Too, men have felt a new sort of fear in that they now exist within a society that seems to them to have little care for the validity of their own word when it comes to sexual assault. Men fear that if a woman one day wakes up and decides she wants to falsely accuse him of rape, his life will be ruined and there is little he can do about it. Some would say this is poetic justice for the many years women have spent not being believed about their rapes -- I would say it is no real justice at all, it is a repayment of violence with violence. Not only does this environment have the potential to traumatize the men within it, it contributes to their own negative feelings towards women; which they may turn around and repay to women in the form of sexual violence. Like the characters of *Mystic Rive*r they remain stuck in a circle of endless trauma, doomed to either impart it on someone else or submit to it in silence. It is also quite important that the submitting be in silence. Male desire is posited at this infinite evil -- something that cannot and should not be explained. For men to come out and admit the violence they may feel towards women would amount to evil within the dominant ethical order. Silverman reminds us that the look must be acknowledged "not only as a carrier of libido, but as a signifier of castration." There is a "void which is at the core of subjectivity, a void which gives rise not only to anxiety, but to desire." (Silverman 1992: 130) This dualism of the look is what is too commonly ignored. To equate the look, which is rooted in the desire to affirm one's

manliness and the fear of losing it, to an internally violent gaze ignores complexities of desire. It

ignores the fact that men also depend upon the exterior to affirm their identity, and when male

desire is so commonly associated with violence, mens only choices are to accept this violence as

part of their desire or forgo their manhood.

Women have no better choices. Female desire is often understood to be tied into making

oneself an object. Silverman thinks this is a misunderstanding of the representation of women:

> "If feminist theory has a reason to lament that system of representation, it is not because
> women so frequently function as the objects of desire (we all function simultaneously as
> subject and object), but because the male look transfers it's own lack to the female
> subject, and attempts to pass it off as the gaze. The problem, in other words, is not that
> men direct desire towards women in Hollywood films, but that male desire is so
> consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control." (Silverman 1992:
> 144)

This objectivity is forced upon women, and as a result it is quite common for women's fantasies

to involve submitting to violence of some sort. But they are told time and time again that men are

evil, and that if they choose to engage with men they are asking for any violence they receive.

Women are told they must either consent or not consent -- and when they come out of a sexual

encounter feeling violated their only avenue through which to understand that is by seeing the

sexual encounter as non-consensual. If they reject that option and maintain their consent, they

must suffer that violation in silence. Women can either be objects of male desire or deny

themselves their femininity. Part of the narrative of control that is thrust upon them also denotes

a certain requirement of purity. The binary of male subjectivity and female objectivity suggests

that women must not have any libidinal desire in the first place. If women do express any control

over their own libidinal energy, the violence they may be subjected to is seen as justified. Their

idea is that they have stepped outside of the socially mandated way of being, therefore they

deserve to be forced back into a position of victim. The gaze (or the law) subsumes the look (or the fact), ignoring the ways in which libidinal desire can be informed by social realities. Silverman goes on to suggest what feminism must demonstrate "over and over again is that all subjects, male or female, rely for their identity upon the repertoire of culturally available images, and upon a gaze which radically exceeding the libidinally vulnerable look, is not theirs to deploy." (Silverman 1992: 153) When this reality is ignored, both men and women are reduced to their sexual desires, and within an ethical regime turned into either villain or victim.

This does not necessarily have to follow the rules of these gender binaries, we have seen reckonings in the Me Too movement involving gay people or even women preying on men. But in all such cases, the normative gender binary has been replaced by some other dynamic of power (be it age, wealth, social capital, etc.). What is common in all these scenarios is the existence of a violent power holder and a victim who exemplifies the Other they wish to conquer. The victim either becomes subject to the sexual violence, or the originator of the desire ignores it and submits to the law of the Other. But even if the latter happens, the victim remains subject to sexual trauma because the look is equated to an unknowable, violent gaze. It remains constantly on the surface, ready to boil up and enact evil, and the only thing that can keep it at bay is infinite justice. And, of course, complications arise in situations which divulge from the narrative. This became evidently clear this spring when Tara Reade, a former Joe Biden staffer accused the presidential candidate of sexual assault. Milano, a Biden campaign surrogate, took the Me Too hashtag off her social media accounts and backpedalled to say that she believes Biden, and suggested maybe we should not believe all women all the time. One could possibly read this shift as a positive change towards approaching sexual assault in a more dissensual

manner, but I veer cynical. I think what was at play here was a fear of damaging the broader ethical cause, because she sees Donald Trump as a perpetrator of more evil than Biden. There is no space to think through the possibility that perhaps Biden is guilty. If Milano had followed the lead of Joan Dark, this could have been her moment to realize that her own morality had been ineffective, and taken that opportunity to adopt a more militant morality. Working for someone who had perpetrated a violence did not have to indicate she herself was guilty -- Joan was not a bad person because she aligned herself with an ineffective morality. In fact, her being willing to see this ineffectiveness and denounce it is precisely what makes her the embodiment of goodness. Instead of taking that route, Milano showed us how empty her cause was to begin with given that it fell inwards on itself the second something came to the fore which did not fit neatly within the binary of good and evil. The 'rights' given to women following the Me Too movement were proved to be predicated on the movements desire to enforce them.

I have mentioned some of the consequences of this shift in the realm of politics, but truly the best place to look in order to understand this ethical turn is the screen. As I have mentioned, the Me Too movement did not inspire as many significant legislative changes as it did cultural shifts. Looking at a film inspired by this turn will help us better understand its implications. Dubbed a "blackly comedic quasi-thriller for the MeToo age," Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*[5] follows the story of Cassandra (Harvey 2020). Cassandra works in a coffee shop by day, and by night she goes out to clubs pretending to be highly intoxicated, lets herself be taken home by predatory men, and then confronts them about their actions right as they are about

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[5] Due to the COVID19 pandemic, the public release of this film was delayed. Therefore I have unfortunately had to base my analysis off of the script. All the plot points I have pulled from the script were also discussed within the critic reviews from the Sundance 2020 release. Given that, I have reason to believe the film has mostly stayed true to script, but please be aware I have yet to see the actual film.

to violate her. At first we are not told why she is doing this, but we see her obsessively keeping track of the men she has confronted and the potential women she believes herself to have saved. As time goes on, the film slowly reveals to us why Cassandra has chosen this life. Cassandra used to be in school to be a doctor when her best friend Nina was raped by another friend. No one but Cassandra believed Nina about the assault, which drives Nina to commit suicide. This leaves Cassandra traumatized, and she drops out of medical school, moves home, and begins to wage her campaign of vigilante justice.

Unlike a typical revenge fantasy movie, Cassandra is not trying to punish these men for their crimes -- she merely wishes to educate them, and make them question the way they treat women. At first, this film seems to be a refreshing deviation from the rhetoric of the Me Too movement; after all, she seems focused on education rather than punishment, but things begin to devolve quickly. Ryan, an old friend from medical school comes into town, and they begin a romantic relationship. Through Ryan, Cassandra learns that Nina's rapist is living a happy life and engaged to be married. This sends her into a spiral, determined to bring everyone involved to justice. She retaliates in ways such as getting a former classmate intoxicated and setting her up to believe she's been raped, as well as pretending to kidnap the daughter of the medical school dean and leaving her in a place where she is vulnerable to rape. The movie is careful not have Cassandra ever perpetuate any rape; she is just meant to make everyone around her feel the trauma that her and Nina were subject to. She eventually finds a video of the event that shows Ryan, her new boyfriend, in the room while it happened. Again, the film reminds us that men can and should not be trusted, even the ones who seem as though they care for us. Aflame with rage, she forces Ryan to give her the rapist's location so that she can finally extract her revenge.

Cassandra tries to kill the perpetrator, but he ends up killing her instead. Her death is written off as a suicide, and all seems to be calm until the final twist, in which it is revealed Cassandra sent the video out to everyone she knew as a backup plan.

Promising Young Woman takes the theme of *Mystic River* and reverses it. This time the movie is about the falsely vindicated, but does this ultimately in service of the same grand narrative: the ethical one. To start, Nina and her assault, the source of all this trauma are never shown in the movie. One might understand why Fennell steers clear of depicting the rape or the suicide, but even Nina herself is never shown to us in the flashbacks. She quite literally serves as the unrepresentable Other -- that which can never truly be shown, yet still places the entire story under the yoke of testifying to her trauma. I suspect this was a deliberate choice by Fennell to make Nina into anyone or everyone that we want her to be. The movie is not about one woman's trauma. Nina serves as the figurehead for the trauma all women are subject to simply due to the misfortune of being born a woman. And the trauma Nina has left behind is one that lies in a zone of indistinction "between psychic disturbance and social unrest." (Rancière 2009: 116) Cassandra, left behind with this trauma, either has the choice of succumbing to it or pushing it out into the world around her. At first she does this in a seemingly benign way, but she shows as time goes on that she will not be satisfied until she is able to make everyone feel her pain.

Cassandra's campaign of revenge fits perfectly within the narrative of infinite justice. For Cassandra, doling out justice comes not in the form of seeing people reprimanded for their part, but making others feel her same pain. She does not go after the dean in an attempt to get her fired; she wants to make the dean feel the trauma of having a loved one violated in that way. She wants to make her classmate feel what it's like to be violated. One could argue this makes her

much better than if she was actually orchestrating these rapes, but what is at the center of this movie is not the rape itself, it is the trauma of male violence. To actually set those women up to be violated would not work with the story because the story is not truly concerned with the particulars of Nina's assault. Nina, like Antigone, just exists as the figurehead of trauma that has no beginning or end. Like Antigone, she seems ultimately helpless to put up a valiant fight against the law of the Gaze. While we originally believe Cassandra to be successfully defying, she ultimately suffers a brutal and senseless death. Her death seems to happen to attest solely to the existence of female suffering and victimhood. If she is a martyr, the cause she dies for is martyrdom itself. Honig writes of Antigone that "here tragedy's power is not that it redeems suffering, but that it exemplifies it in ways that highlight what many think to be the human's most basic common denominator – the capacity to feel pain and suffering," (Honig 2013: 18) but she may have as well been writing about Cassandra. Cassandra was never meant to avenge Nina, she was meant to represent suffering without reason.

Cassandra gives back to everyone exactly what she got, until it comes time to bring the actual assaulter to heel. Just as Rancière argued Flaubert had to kill Emma Bovary for her crime of romanticizing the world, I would argue Fennell had to kill Cassandra for her crime of trusting a man -- of allowing any room for nuance. Up until she finds the video, Cassandra is a calm, measured arbiter of infinite justice, imparting sexually-rooted trauma onto all that dared question Nina's. It is arguably Ryan's transgression that sets her into this fit of rage. She allowed her guard down for a moment and allowed herself to believe that people did not have to exist within this binary of good and evil. Fennell quickly reminds her that no, they must, and when she is caught up in her own failure to submit to the law of the Other she goes too far and gets herself killed.

Fennell also seems to be killing off her main character in the interest of making her a martyr. While I understood this attempt, it ultimately fell flat. Unlike Joan Dark, Cassandra does not sacrifice herself to save someone else. Her life is taken at the hands of the man who took her best friend's life, and for the most part, the people who helped cover it up get off free. Cassandra manages to expose Nina's rapist beyond the grave, but similarly at the end of *Dogville* one is left wondering what was the point of it all? Cassandra could have easily brought him to justice and saved her own life, but instead she succumbs to the same senseless evil which started it all. And even when that particular evil is dealt with by the video, we remember all the men Cassandra had ticked off in her notebook and the bruises they would leave on her arms. For the one that Cassandra manages to bring down, there exists hundreds more notches in that notebook waiting to dole out the next trauma in the cycle of endless traumas.

Through this analysis of *Promising Young Women*, I have attempted to show what happens when ethics is imparted upon sexuality. In order to address the problem of sexual violence, we must move towards a more dissensual understanding of gender relations and subjectivity. All-encompassing violence needs to be dissociated with male subjectivity in order for us to better understand the particularities of sexual violence. We should also attempt to examine female subjectivity, and the ways in which violence can go hand in hand with female desire as well. It is only through this sort of analysis that meaningful political action can be inspired. In order for feminism to be recoupled with the real political community -- the designation of "Woman" must be cast away in favor of understanding women as a complex body of people. Rancière's ethical turn provides us with a comprehensive structure to understand the failures of 21st century feminism and its relation to a culture of capital. Bringing politics back

into feminism will require a rejection of the notions of good and evil, victim and villain. While

this may be uncomfortable for some at first, this will only benefit all subjects within the

community in the long run -- freeing them from the yoke of infinite trauma.

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