

Aesthetic Inequality and Political Seriousness

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In his memoir *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory*, Stanley Cavell asks a question that constitutes the central preoccupation of his philosophical *oeuvre* but appears, now, as a problem of autobiographical reflection. That is to say, the question returns at the very moment in which one is expected to reach a sense of self-understanding in the evidence of a life now assembled in a continuous, thematic way, and to speak unambiguously as a lesson for others. Instead, Cavell asks: “So what is the problem of knowledge? Is it that we cannot keep moving, take in all perspectives, or that we cannot help moving, losing perspectives? It strikes me that an accurate answer to this impossible choice is to answer: ‘I am I.’”¹ To offer an accurate answer to an impossible choice is not the same thing as having rendered a determinate judgment, or a definitive decision. Rather, accuracy merely demands of me that I tend to the details of something in a faithful way, which means that I will do so without wavering, but also without giving in to the ease of dogma, wherein I merely look for the signs of whatever it was that led me to some judgment once before, or else to expect that the decision I make here will be readily transferable in some other domain. If the choice is impossible, as Cavell rightly suggests that it is, then “accuracy” does not mean that I can make the right decision or judgment. Rather, in an experience of accuracy I show myself to be capable of staying with something as it appears, and with the same insistency that this something has shown itself to me in the course of its own appearance, which happens in different times, each time. In this regard, we can understand continuity not as something unbroken in its sameness but as a mode of insistency that features discontinuity as something continuous.

In other words, more important than knowledge, where accuracy is concerned, is *insistence*. And what I want to argue for, here, is that thinking itself is better characterized in terms of insistence, rather than as that which brokers a relation between understanding and appearance. If we are willing to consider “thinking” in this way, then we will have an opening to something like political seriousness, which will follow—in my telling, at least—from a defense of aesthetic inequality. My account of political seriousness will be derived, in no small part, from Alexander García Düttmann’s conception of aesthetic seriousness, especially as it is articulated in *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood*, where he tells us that: “The creation of a work of art and the explication of a thought are nothing other than the expression assumed by an experience of insistency. Only something real can be insistent, never something possible.”²

It should be noted that García Düttmann cautions us from too quickly relating aesthetic seriousness to political problems, insofar as:

“Political or judicial or social praxis” presses toward a decision in which it is necessarily brought to a close; in art, by contrast, the “drama of the decision” is dispensed with, “in favor of a potentially infinite process of understanding,” an “as if” which distinguishes aesthetic experience from all other kinds of experience.³

And yet, if we regard political seriousness as the form of an insistency that does not compel a decision, *per se*, and demands instead something like an *accurate answer to an impossible choice*,

then we may very well find ourselves in a much better place for thinking about political agency.

To get to this point, however, I will need to move through at least three others before it. First, I want to offer a brief account of García Düttmann's conception of aesthetic seriousness as an insistency that is inseparable from thought, though necessarily separable from something called knowledge. Following from this will be an account of the problems that arise from a belief in ignorance as a form of equality brokered in aesthetic terms, such as we find in Rancière. Finally, I want to suggest how aesthetic seriousness leads to political seriousness insofar as it can be said to offer us something like a collective experience of willing that depends on accuracy and fidelity. What I am working toward, ultimately, is the problem of inequality, but it is not a problem that needs to be solved in the aesthetic, if being solved means being made to go away. Instead, it will be shown that aesthetics re-describes the experience of inequality as a capacity for insistence, by which no less than two—but ultimately many more—are united on the basis of irreducible difference much more than by any similarity that can be named.

I. Aesthetic Seriousness

In *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood*, García Düttmann develops the notion of aesthetic seriousness in relation to Adorno's claim from *Negative Dialectics* that: "The place of utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality."⁴ This passage appears as the very first sentence of García Düttmann's text and does so without quotation marks, even though it is stated, there, exactly as Adorno wrote it. And yet, it is not that García Düttmann is trying to hide something from us. Rather, attribution is made in an endnote in the middle of the sentence that follows. The lack of quotation marks signals, from the very start, the sharing of an insight, not only with Adorno but also with Visconti. If placed around the very first sentence, quotation marks would only have announced a border between Adorno and García Düttmann, the setting apart of an idea in the acknowledgement of ownership. If we are to borrow what we read, we will pay some price for doing so, which is the primary function of quotation: to acknowledge this thing that you share and also that it does not belong to you.

One of the most compelling aspects of García Düttmann's conception of aesthetic seriousness is that it is related to the sharing of an insight. But how can this be? What could it mean to share an insight if utopia is blocked by possibility and never by immediate reality? The "possible," as we know, does not mean anything whatsoever; rather, it indicates what has happened, or been said, at least once. If something is possible then we know that it can be done, and, most importantly, how to do it again. If an insight is something that can be shared, then we will need to know what it means to have something in common that cannot, nevertheless, be submitted to possibilization: rendered unserious in the exposure of what holds no less than two, if not more, together. An insight, it seems, is something that is both binding and insistent, and depends on the threat of possibilization, but strictly as the beginning of an intention.

The question of intention is at the core of García Düttmann's notion of aesthetic seriousness, but in a way that departs radically from more traditional accounts that tend to re-describe cause in the image of its effect. What matters more, in García Düttmann's theory of intention, is the process of making as an account of thinking, above and beyond what becomes of the work once it has reached a state of completion and is perceived by others. There may be a cause, in García Düttmann's account, but it is only in the realm of the

possible that the effect will cue the critic to re-describe that cause in its own likeness, which is another way of announcing the tautological character of most theories of intention, which are—above all else—accounts of the mind in relation to what that mind manifests. In this regard, aesthetic seriousness is nothing like a traditional interpretation of an artwork, performed along intentional lines in strict observation of a horizon of expectation. Such a horizon is typically assembled on the basis of everything else the artist has made before or after the work that we are now wondering over, the function of which is merely to assure ourselves that what we think about the work is what the artist herself thought first. And yet, the once of the artist's seeing is much more likely to have been derived by previous interpretations of the work than from any genuine sense of what the artist could have thought or done in this or that context, or else divulged in an interview. In this way, traditional conceptions of intentionality demand that we search for signs of consistency rather than difference, and do so as an interpretive activity that draws its force from the possible rather than from immediate reality.

The intentional critic, more traditionally conceived, is much more concerned to locate what John Searle once described as an asymmetrical relation between the direction of causation and the direction of fit. For instance, in *Intentionality*, Searle contends that: "Where the direction of causation is world-to-mind, as in the case of perception, the direction of fit is mind-to-world; and where the direction of causation is mind-to-world, as in the case of action, the direction of fit is world-to-mind."⁵ The relations posited here between causation and fit—be they world-to-mind or else mind-to-world—are not asymmetrical so much as tautological. In the first case, the supposed correctness of a given perception is measured by its symmetry with the world that caused it. Having received an impression from the world, my mind must also be able to verify the content of that impression as something also external to me. Likewise, if I am acting on the world in some manner, that action—or the effect of my action as something intended—must be shown to have been in accord with what I had first imagined, which could only follow from what I perceived. Acting well, in this scenario, could only mean acting in one way, which happens to correspond to the manner in which I have been acted upon in an effort of perception. There is no asymmetry, here, regardless of whether one moves from perception to action, or else from action to perception. Searle's account of intention, which separates perception from action, is something more like conjoined tautologies that reverberate exclusively in the closure of the possible. By contrast, one of the most important aspects of García Düttmann's conception of aesthetic seriousness—and his account of intention as a way of understanding process rather than result—is that it altogether avoids a distinction between perception and action in the work of intention, which will be crucially important to what I want to argue for as a related mode of political seriousness.

Aesthetic seriousness consists, García Düttmann tells us—and again with reference to Adorno—in the "making [of] things 'in ignorance of what they are.'"⁶ If we make something in ignorance, we are beyond a belief in an asymmetrical relation between causation and fit, and a distinction between perception and action, since "fit" could only be what persists in the realm of the possible, and is never subject, thereby, to our ignorance. Or as García Düttmann puts it: "The intention remains focused on something that withdraws from it."⁷ In this way, the serious regularly borders up against the unserious, or the possible, as García Düttmann indicates, but what comes of that intention cannot be known in relation to that border, since what I intend is something other than what is nevertheless a condition of the existence of this thing I now make in an aesthetically serious way. The serious draws

its force from the unserious in the non-cognitive clarity the possible affords as an option negated, which leads García Düttmann to describe the aesthetically serious work as something that features only meaningless signs, which he describes as “a sign that wants for nothing and needs no signified to justify its existence.”⁸

If aesthetic seriousness features a sign that needs no signified, as Searle’s model of intention clearly does—and does so expressly to sustain a distinction between inside and outside—then we can only know when this thing that we are making goes wrong, which is what occurs when the sign is lost to something already signified, or to possibility itself. As meaningless, the sign is never submitted to judgment, only to a demand for accuracy. What we don’t know is why it works, just that it does. The reason for this, as García Düttmann puts it, is that the serious work is not “reflexively duplicated.”⁹ He writes:

For to the same extent that that the making of things in ignorance of what they are is a making, the production of an artwork, and not, say, a compulsive or unintentional movement, one may assert that this making is a kind of knowledge, a “practical knowledge” that does not rest on observation. When asked what he is doing when he does this or that, an artist replies: “I am making an artwork,” not: “Well now, what *am* I actually doing, let’s see, I’ve done this and that, so I must be making an artwork.” If, then, his making is a making of things in ignorance of what they are, the making as making is not reflexively duplicated. Between the artist’s making and every conceivable observation which cancels it as a making, as an intentional action, a gulf opens up, precisely because the making requires no additional observation, because no gulf may open up between it and the world if it is to validate itself as a making.¹⁰

If no gulf opens up between making and the world, which results from an avoidance of the possible as a mode of reflexive duplication, then aesthetic seriousness is not only a way of producing art or a philosophical concept—the difference of which, in any case, is cancelled in advance by virtue of the way that being serious means observing no known procedures. Rather, aesthetic seriousness, I would argue, describes the aesthetic dimension of the will, in which a distinction can no longer be made between thinking and being, since reflexive self-duplication—or recourse to the possible—is precisely what removes us from immediate reality. Thinking and making can no more be separated, say, than could knowledge and craft in the opposed realm of the possible, insofar as the latter can become a skill on the basis of habituation and a frame of reference for what has worked at least once.

Thinking, if it is to happen at all, is aesthetically serious and inseparable, as such, from action. If no gulf opens between the making and the world, then we have no need to think of causality and fit as existing in an asymmetrical relation where perception and action are distinguished on the basis of the former’s movement from world-to-mind, and the latter’s movement from mind-to-world. Aesthetic seriousness is instead a way of being responsive to the sensible. It is what gives form to the sensible, which includes the one giving shape. I cannot separate myself from what I shape, even when I give away what I finish.¹¹ In this respect, García Düttmann’s aesthetic seriousness shares something with Christoph Menke’s more recent conception of the aesthetic as force. There, Menke very importantly defines aesthetics as:

...a way of thinking that conceives the indissoluble indeterminacy of sensibility in conjunction with its internally guided, principled activity. The sensible is radically indeterminate because its generation of ideas cannot be reduced to self-conscious and self-controlled acts, performances of methodical operations of the intellect. At the same time, the ideas generated by the senses are neither a mere confluence of causal effects nor a haphazard and arbitrary play, but an internal, though unconscious, operation belonging to the imagination.¹²

If so, any instance of aesthetic seriousness will lead to the production of art and also to the making of philosophical concepts, but those will become inseparable from other ways of being, thinking, and doing in the world, even as they also remain necessarily distinct—as finished texts or isolable objects—from other ways of being, thinking, and doing in the world. Intention is the name of that distinction, even as it brooks no border between inside and outside. And as something aesthetic, the will is also guided by an intention—as most theories of the will suppose—but one that does not derive its strength from known or even knowable procedures, which would dilute the force of the will in the certainties of the possible, or the ease of dogma. If what we have in aesthetic seriousness is a description of the will as a mode of unconscious insistency, then we are also on our way to a conception of political seriousness, so long as we can identify what it will mean to share an insight, since any account of political seriousness will have to involve more than one person. This is also where aesthetic seriousness and political seriousness can be seen to part ways, insofar as we can say—as I believe we can—that only the latter requires the sharing of an insight, since the reordering of the social requires more than one.

II. Ignorance

In order to think about aesthetic seriousness as political seriousness, we need to consider how something that privileges inequality might also produce an important change in the social that can be enjoyed by more than one. For, as García Düttmann rather provocatively argues: “Whoever has a feeling for aesthetic seriousness knows that not everything can grow or prosper equally.”¹³ While it might be less controversial to regard such a statement as concerning only art and philosophy, I think it has much to tell us, as well, about the aesthetic dimension of the will as it involves collectivity. To see this, one need only compare this idea of an ignorance that is also an intention with the ignorance proposed by Jacques Rancière, which he regularly poses as a solution to the problem of social inequality in aesthetic terms.

Much of Rancière’s recent work on aesthetics and politics concerns reception and spectatorship more than it does process, such as we see in García Düttmann. Rancière’s theorization of aesthetic regimes and the distribution of the sensible follows from his study of Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, and stands in opposition to mastery in the realm of knowledge, which follows from and reinforces, in turn, mastery in the realm of governance. The lesson of Jacotot, as we know all too well (and who could fail to notice that it has become the norm of so-called emancipatory pedagogy everywhere?), is that we teach what we do not understand—math if we are trained in literature, art if we are trained in science—and wholly in an effort to level a presumed inequality between teacher and student that is said to replicate hierarchies that persist on the order of the social. Moreover, an emancipatory conception of ignorance, for Rancière, is one that dethrones the notion that “*man is a will served by an intelligence.*”¹⁴ That is to say, the idea that we are served by, and subject to, the intelligence of the Master, which we can only replicate and remain faithful to

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as a duplication. In its place, Rancière prefers the teacher to know as little as the student, such that there are, in effect, no more teachers and thus no more judgments, only an equality that can only be accomplished on the basis of de-emphasizing whatever it is that we have cultivated in ourselves. Rancière seems to believe that: “The relation between two ignorant people confronting the book they don’t know how to read is simply a radical form of the effort one brings every minute to translating and counter-translating thoughts into words and words into thoughts.”¹⁵

But what would come, in reality, of such a reading? In order to make this claim, whereby the relief from aesthetic mastery leads to an experience of equality in the social, one must dispense with the idea of meaning, which Rancière relates to the work of the will. And while I have no trouble being rid of the idea of meaning—insofar as meaning involves a judgment that can be proven right or wrong—the staging of equality, in this scenario, would also preclude any notion of accuracy, which I want to suggest as an experience of remaining with the text in a faithful and yet non-dogmatic way. In Rancière’s aesthetic democracy, one can, conceivably, say anything. The emancipatory potential of saying anything whatsoever consists in merely having said something other than what was said or shown by someone who has stayed with a text for an extended duration, as reader or maker. Yet for those of us who do it, we regularly see that close reading only enlarges the fascination and mystery of an aesthetically serious work, never forecloses it. To read something serious with someone in a serious way is not to submit the work or oneself to mastery, if by mastery we mean something possible, which is never guided by an intention to see other than we have before, such that we are not really seeing at all. What aesthetic seriousness demands of us—and hence the risk of thinking of it as an articulation of the will—is that we must also give some part of ourselves over to that idea, which has a particular form, and is also someone else’s. If I read with accuracy, I may disappear for some time, but not forever, and never wholly. In disciplining myself in order to learn to stay with what is not my own, such that it becomes a part of what I now do, I have also the means to distinguish myself from what I nevertheless submit to.

The risk, in any case, is not as great as it sounds. After all, how would we increase our ability to translate our thoughts into words—and our words to each other—if not by some effort of insistency, which is the opposite of saying anything whatsoever in a continuous way. If it were, then saying anything whatsoever would require that every translation be *sui generis*, in which case, no translation will occur. Considered in political terms—and supposing that structures of learning and structures of governance exist in an asymmetrical relation predicated on the separation of perception and action—then all that such readings could accomplish, at the level of real politics, is what Peter Hallward has rightly criticized in Rancière as a staging of “the process of their own disaggregation.”¹⁶ Put this way, the cost of equality is the total absence of genuine emancipation, since all that we can be emancipated from is the possibility that someone might know something more or better than I myself know it, which is—I would argue—what we should want an elected leader in a democracy to be, not to mention surgeons, bus drivers, bankers, and so on. And that leveling process begins—it must be emphasized—at the level of aesthetics. If I am going to make an informed decision about the action that I will take, which includes who it is that I will vote for, and if I can be said to have a capacity to be moved in an experience of political oration, I fail to see how the will to equality as a mutual incompetence would produce anything less than barbarism, supposing that no attempt at politics—or the aggregation of the social—is ever made. In an American context, at least, this is precisely what we are seeing in the

increasingly widespread appeal to inexperience as a political value in the officials we hope to elect, or merely dethrone in the belief that ignorance must be refreshed continually for the sake of equality. What one finds in the U.S. as a widespread protest of congressional deadlock is not an appeal to centrism and compromise, but to a managed form of barbarism that thrives on a generalized negation, on a rejection of culture and civility that only violence can sustain as permanent disaggregation.

This New Barbarism that follows from the enforcement of equality, which begins along aesthetic lines—and is what we see posited in Rancière as a democratic ideal—likewise draws its seeming ineluctability from labor practices that are celebrated in the paradoxical terms of autonomy and equality. For instance, in *The Society of Equals*, Pierre Rosanvallon has argued that in the workplace today—in France just as much as in the U.S.—the notion of skill, which he defines as a “general aptitude or specific level of knowledge or know-how” has been replaced by a notion of competence, where “the competent subject is one who is capable of making the right decisions in the face of unforeseen contingencies.”¹⁷ On the one hand, we could say that the management of unforeseen contingencies is one way of describing aesthetic seriousness—or the aesthetic dimension of the will—and promises, in this very way, to reduce the distance between my labor and me. Such an understanding can be seen in the utopian vision of labor articulated in the paintings Fernand Léger made between the 1920s and the 1950s that feature geometric color abstractions of industrial labor environments, which Léger once imagined as potentially real workspaces in which we find ourselves compelled by the beauty of what we produce and the place in which we produce. However, as Rosanvallon makes clear, “competence” merely means that everyone will be rendered equal in their ability to do more than they could do before, such that what gets done gets done more efficiently, and also less well, to the point where competence—as an individual’s capacity to manage unforeseeable contingencies—allows for the reduction of the labor force, on the presumption that we can work more autonomously precisely because we have been rendered equal in our ability to do more than one thing. If competence improves on skill, insofar as the latter is something more like craft—that is to say, predicated on a distinction between perception and action—it is something altogether other to seriousness, since it reduces our relation to the sensible from an experience of insistency to whatever can be managed most effectively and by the least number of possible workers—all of whom, in any case, will be trained to think equally, so that what manifests in a state of constant difference can be controlled. Is this not the way that Rancière describes the equality of thought in *The Emancipated Spectator*, where he first explicitly relates the lesson of Jacotot to aesthetics? There, Rancière tells us that: “Intellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence. This does not signify the equal value of all manifestations of intelligence, but the self-equality of intelligence in all its manifestations.”¹⁸

What Rosanvallon’s characterization of competence ought to make clear, in this context, is that what Rancière promotes as a mode of equality achieved along aesthetic lines is better understood as a form of exhaustion, whereby the equality we earn in the management of contingency is also what will prevent us from doing anything well, or any one thing for very long, which is what links insistency to seriousness. Equality, in this case, is the enemy of insistency, accuracy, and the will as an aesthetic condition, which is what provokes us to stay with something that we do not know, where we might otherwise take recourse to what has worked once before and thus not at all. This is what competence promises as compensation every time we opt out of the difficulty that presents itself to a life conducted in seriousness. And while competence might be predicated on a supposed equality between workers before

a series of unspecified tasks, its effect is only to widen a gap not only between rich and poor, but also between the employed and the unemployed.

III. Fidelity

The question that remains to be answered, then, is how the ignorance proposed by García Düttmann as a condition of aesthetic seriousness—which I take to be description of the will, in which perception and action can no longer be separated—can be said to solve the problem of inequality that a belief in competence produces; especially as competence defines equality as form of autonomy. What I want to suggest, in particular, is that political seriousness does not depend on the eradication of inequality. Rather, the aesthetic inequality that comes from seriousness, which depends on the careful treatment of the meaningless sign that is guided by an intention that must nevertheless break off, is what leads to a unity in the social that finds its collective force on the basis of inequalities that must remain featured in the social as something positive. What this asks, then—as I stated at the outset—is that we come to an understanding of what it means to share an insight and not disappear, in the moment of sharing, into the other, as if without quotation marks, which guarantees, in turn, that it is only I who will go missing, not the one with whom I sympathize. This is the problem of mastery as Rancière imagines it.

García Düttmann offers one important solution to this problem in “What Remains of Fidelity After Serious Thought,” in which he considers, with respect to Badiou, the experience of fidelity—the fidelity, in particular, that we devote to the event of the philosopher’s thought. And it is by way of a conception of fidelity that we move from aesthetic seriousness to political seriousness. He writes:

On the one hand, fidelity would not be a commitment if it did not defy its identification; on the other hand, fidelity would abolish itself and resemble a symptom of delusion or madness if it did not test itself against the possibility of its own failure. In other words, fidelity must be an event, or remain indistinguishable from an event, and it must also mark its essential difference from the event to which it relates, or trace the outline of a more or less recognizable behavior.¹⁹

What García Düttmann makes clear here is how agreement—as the prolongation of what appeals or is worthwhile—depends on a measure of disagreement, which is where an idea is both tested and endures as something shared in a mode of insistence. Disagreement, here, is something other than saying anything whatsoever, as we see in Rancière. It is the very condition by which singularity appears, and retains its appearance in an experience of unity, by which no less than two—but potentially many more—can be said to be in a relation of fidelity to an event, which is what allows something that originates in seriousness to continue. In this way, what continues does so on the basis of series of discontinuities, in which one regularly defies, as García Düttmann suggests, one’s point of identification. Put differently, if we institute a new order of the social—and do so on the basis of the political, which can only work if it is aesthetically serious, only if it appeals to us as a meaningless sign—then what will allow the political to remain, as it was instituted as an order of the social in a continuous way, can only be sustained by critique, or else by divergent explanations that justify what continues. Such an experience of the maintenance of the social is altogether other to totalitarianism, which seeks always the same answer to the same question, or

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barbarism, which wants only to live in state of perpetual disaggregation, even when it goes by the name of democracy.

Moreover, a relation of fidelity does not even demand that we de-emphasize difference for the sake of unification, even though it does not oppose the de-emphasis of difference in principle; nor does it edge up against a sense of community, as something operable only in death.²⁰ Rather, what political seriousness involves is the making of something in ignorance of what it is—which is here understood as an aesthetic experience of the will that orders the sensible according to an intention that breaks with the possible. Political seriousness is sustained, in turn, by an act of fidelity that demands disagreement, or else new reasons for carrying on with what is now featured as the sensible form of the social. The sensible form of the social is what emerged as an insight and can only sustain itself on the basis that it remains one, which requires the work of others.

As an expression of political seriousness, the work of others does not involve judgment but an accurate answer to an impossible choice, as Cavell noted about the very problem of knowledge. Indeed, when Cavell answers his own question about the problem of knowledge—i.e., whether it stems from the fact that we cannot stop moving, or that we move too little—he says “I am I,” which is one way of understanding how “I” may be more than one, even as it also remains one. In *The Claim of Reason*, Cavell offers an explanation:

That I am I thus says that I am not even me—a hilarious, or rather an ecstatic, glimpse at the possibility that I am not exhausted by all of the definitions or descriptions the world gives of me to me. Everything that happens to me is my life, the woman says at the end of *Red Desert*. Very well, but I am the one who must take it upon myself.²¹

What is *Red Desert* if not an aesthetically serious description of the politically unserious, where the aesthetic is severed from the will to the extent that what might have been beautiful turns to poison precisely because no one takes all that the world describes of them upon themselves? The world described by Antonioni is rife with aesthetic potential but lacking in will, much like our own. In *Red Desert* perception and action part ways and sustain that division by way of an ugliness that cannot be disassociated from a newly globalized work force that thins its ranks throughout the world on the basis of competence, which leaves no place or time for insistence.

Furthermore, to say that “I am I” means that “I am not even me” is not, I would argue, the same thing as saying that I am nothing or no one, which Cavell himself admits as a possibility. Rather, if I cannot be exhausted by the world’s descriptions of me, which I take upon myself, then something also persists *as* me, even as descriptions to the contrary continue. What I take upon myself—what I will—is a relation to the sensible, which includes ideas.

“I am I” also indicates that I am also at least one other, a singularity that finds its difference in relation to me. And this, I think, is an important way of understanding how the singular depends on the general, and why inequality is never undone by equality or generality. Or as Rosanvallon has argued: “The difference that defines singularity binds a person to others; it does not set him apart. It arouses in others curiosity, interest, and a desire to understand.”²² If “I am I” is an accurate answer to the problem of knowledge as an impossible choice, we

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can now say that accuracy involves an insistency in thought, generated by one that produces a unity on the basis of fidelity, which does not reduce singularity but only enlarges a related field of singularities on the basis of an inequality that produces curiosity, interest, and a desire to understand. Fidelity cannot occur in state of absolute autonomy, the risk of which is political unseriousness, or barbarism.

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Notes

¹ Stanley Cavell, *Little Did I Know: Excerpts from Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), 365.

² Alexander García Düttmann, *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ John Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 122.

⁶ Alexander García Düttmann, *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood*, 4.

⁷ *Ibid.* 15.

⁸ *Ibid.* 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 8

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ In his essay, “Why Burn a Photograph? A Film by Hollis Frampton,” García Düttmann considers, among other things, what it means for the work of art, as something serious, to remain out of reach. In *World Picture 8* (Summer 2013), http://worldpicturejournal.com/WP_8/Duttmann.html

¹² Christoph Menke, *Force: A Fundamental Concept of Aesthetic Anthropology*, trans. Gerrit Jackson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 14.

¹³ Alexander García Düttmann, *Visconti: Insights into Flesh and Blood*, 28.

¹⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 51-52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶ Peter Hallward, “Staging Equality: Rancière’s Theatrocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality,” in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 147.

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¹⁷ Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Society of Equals*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 220.

¹⁸ Jacques Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso Books, 2009), 10.

¹⁹ In *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 204.

²⁰ I have in mind, here, Jean-Luc Nancy's important essay, "The Inoperative Community," in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 1-42.

²¹ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 390.

²² Rosanvallon, 260.