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Axiomatic equality

Rancière and the politics of contemporary education

Jacques Rancière's "utopian rationalism" invokes the possibility of a radically de-institutionalized autodidacticism that predicates all learning merely on the basis of the will of those desiring to learn. Ultimately, however, it may be that the modern university is antithetical to any possibility of establishing true equality among its players, writes Nina Power.

Is it necessary to presuppose the intellectual equality of those you teach? To be an educator at all it seems likely that one would have at least an *implicit* theory of mind, such that one knows what one is doing (or, at least, what one aspires to be doing) when standing at the front of the classroom. Is education merely the transplanting of gobbets of information onto the blank slate of a student's mind (we could call this the Lockean approach), or are we drawing out forms of rational and creative capacity possessed (equally?) by students *qua* rational beings? Jacques Rancière contributes much to this debate, particularly in his work on the unusual educator Joseph Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. This paper attempts to analyse the possibility of what could be called the "utopian rationalism" of Jacotot (and of Rancière himself), within the context of the modern university. Rancière's work will be read alongside that of Pierre Bourdieu and Ivan Illich as other crucial figures in the understanding of the way in which educational achievement relates to certain assumptions about what teaching involves. Ultimately, it may be that the modern university is antithetical to any possibility of establishing true equality among its players — Rancière's position at times invokes the possibility of a radically de-institutionalized autodidacticism that predicates all learning merely on the basis of the will of those desiring to learn. This stance is the very opposite of the Lockean approach, which emphasizes the passivity of the student-receiver. Can the contemporary university bear the weight of Rancière's challenge?

Mainstream education arguably operates with two major contradictory imperatives: that one should in principle be able to teach everyone openly and equally and, at the same time, one must constantly rank these same students via tests, marks, and, in the case of higher education, final degree classifications. The rationalist educator is constitutively torn. But how to reconcile the desire to — on *some* level — treat students equally, with the simultaneous recognition that injustice necessarily lies at the heart of all assessment?

Here I will primarily draw on elements of the university system in the UK, although some claims will be recognizable in the US context. This paper tries to make some sense of the links between, on the one hand, the "everybody knows" type of social fact we repeatedly have to hand — for example, that 7

per cent of people in the United Kingdom attend private schools, that class mobility in Britain is at an all-time low, that some schools get all their pupils to apply to Oxbridge, while others send none (regardless of their A level scores), etc. — and the theoretical and philosophical assumptions that underpin any conception of education. From the start, I think it is important at once to recognize "the facts" but also to put the anger generated by them to both practical and theoretical use. When we see the missed educational opportunities, the subtle but pernicious mechanisms whereby students are told or, more often, tell themselves, "I can't do this," "this is not for me," "I don't belong here," we should recognize that all these things are cause for intense frustration, but to stop with the acknowledgment of them would be to concede too much to the existing state of affairs. Furthermore, there is a way in which these kinds of sentiments, far more often held by those who are more carefully reflecting on their increasingly schizophrenic role as students than those assured of their place in "the world" after years of confidence-bolstering at expensive schools, may possess a utopian kernel if their collective and class dimensions are exposed.

But what if one were to reverse the order of observation and begin not with concrete inequalities in education, of which there are almost too many to enumerate, but with a seemingly impossible assertion: that education is a question of what all students equally have, namely a baseline intelligence? As Socrates puts it in the *Meno* with reference to the slave boy: "This knowledge will not come from teaching but from questioning. He will recover it for himself."¹ Equality may *also* be something one wishes for in a future to come, after fundamental shifts in the arrangement and order of society. But this is not Rancière's point at all. Equality is not something to be achieved, but presupposed. Even Socrates — perhaps *especially* Socrates — is too much of a master figure: "Socrates interrogates in order to instruct. But whoever wishes to emancipate someone must interrogate him in the manner of men and not in the manner of scholars."² Perhaps Rancière is a little harsh on Socrates, especially as Rancière opposes to him the idea of "someone who effectively knows no more than the student" — didn't Socrates systematically demonstrate his own lack of knowledge?³ Nevertheless, there is much to this idea of thinking of education without hierarchy, of paying attention to what is most generic in thought, for student and teacher alike.

The supposed relationship between rationalism and education has a long and intricate history, from Plato's demonstration of mathematical capacity in the *Meno* to Paulo Freire's humanist conception of pedagogy as a political strategy. But what exactly is the relationship between pedagogy and rationalism in practice? What might a contemporary rationalism in higher education look like, given the myriad economic and social contradictions at work in the contemporary academy? Theories about the supposed "naturalness" of intellectual inequality between classes are once again in the ascendancy, as if genetics, or IQ tests for that matter, were directly translatable into the life-experiences and choices of individuals.⁴ Even aside from such reactionary idiocies as the supposed genetic hierarchy of classes in education, what we could call "market cynicism" reigns supreme, with a degree increasingly understood as the product purchased for a certain amount of money and a certain quantity of time served.⁵ This cynicism emerges both from within the institution and is increasingly to be found in students as well, forced by their financial status and the rhetoric of the university to think of themselves in purely economic terms.

If one thing characterizes the current status of students in the university, it is *confusion*. Confusion about their status — are they clients, as the university brochure is at pains to assure them, or are they subjects—supposed—to-be criticized (or even failed)? Are they buying a degree, or are the students themselves the "product" to be sold (or to sell themselves) to employers? The "split student" of contemporary academia is depoliticized precisely because he or she is uncertain what his or her demands might be, or to whom to make them. The pressure on universities, too, to serve up as many adequately qualified students as possible has led to well-documented grade inflation and an ambivalence towards previously abhorred practices such as plagiarism.⁶ Torn between the imperative to behave "more like a business," to increase its income through extra-academic activities, such as hosting corporate events, and its historical drive to explore and build upon the accumulated knowledge of centuries, the modern university is as confused as the split students who attend it. We could update Foucault's question — "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" — with the amended query "what is so astonishing about the fact that our universities resemble our businesses, our shopping malls, our corporate meeting rooms — all of which in turn resemble our new proto-privatized universities?"⁷ The shift from disciplinary societies to control societies, so acutely described by Foucault and Deleuze, means that, indeed, "[c]ontrol is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous."⁸ The university has been transformed from a "closed environment" to an eminently porous one, with spaces of further and higher education doubling up as conference centres, spaces for credit card companies to hawk their wares, where books are replaced by corporate-sponsored computers and lab equipment.

Theories of universal pedagogy, that is to say, "a pedagogy that takes nothing for granted," and the attempt to put these into practice may seem out of place in this brave new world of student consumerism and universities-as-businesses, an archaic throwback to outmoded, optimistic Enlightenment models of generic capacity and the promise of knowledge for all.⁹ Yet, perversely, the assumption of universalist, egalitarian, rationalist (although not in the sense the market would understand it) principles (or axioms, as we shall see) in education may be precisely the way out of a certain deep cynicism that pervades the attitudes of students toward their degrees, of lecturers to their students, and of the university to its responsibility to educate, and not merely to train. As Deleuze puts it: "For the *school system*: continuous forms of control, and the effect on the school of perpetual training, the corresponding abandonment of all university research, the introduction of the 'corporation' at all levels of schooling."¹⁰ Although he is certainly prescient with regard to the omnipresence of the corporation, it is interesting (and depressing) to note that university research has itself become encoded in another kind of control and monitoring of information (the Research Assessment Exercise results, the continual quest for rankings, the pressure to have as many citations as possible). The idea of "perpetual training" is indeed one of the hallmarks of contemporary political thinking about education; Labour's key manifesto pledge to get 50 per cent of young people into higher education would create a heavily indebted, desperate workforce, and prevents too many 18-year olds appearing on the job market for employment that doesn't exist.

Rancière, pedagogy, and immaterial labour

Here we turn to contemporary theories of intellectual equality in the work of Jacques Rancière, in the light of certain empirical conditions and factors (above all the confusion noted above). The utopian elements of his work on education help to reveal just how bad things are as they stand, which is all the more reason to move so far away from a mere noting of "the facts" of contemporary university life.

First a few words about what I take to be Rancière's position on education. I take this reading from *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, originally published in France in 1987. Although his work is by no means prescriptive, and is characterized above all by a careful and detailed historical intricacy, we can take elements of his work on education as a relatively clear framework. The most important of these for my purposes is the axiomatic assumption of intelligence. Rancière's conception of intelligence is worthy of careful exposition in this regard. Rancière's claim is disarmingly simple yet explosive the moment it touches on educational practice. Rancière takes his cue from the maverick nineteenth-century pedagogue Joseph Jacotot, whose simple question was "[w]ere all men virtually capable of understanding what others had done and understood?"¹¹ What this means, as Peter Hallward puts it, is that:

Everyone has the same intelligence, and differences in knowledge are simply a matter of opportunity and motivation. On the basis of this assumption, superior knowledge ceases to be a necessary qualification of the teacher, just as the process of explanation — together with metaphors that distinguish students as slow or quick, or conceive of educational time in terms of progress, training, qualification, and so on — ceases to be an integral part of teaching.¹²

Rancière, via Jacotot, asserts that "all people are equally intelligent," and that furthermore, knowledge is not necessary to teaching nor explication necessary to learning.¹³ This might of course mean that we are undermining the role of the lecturer or teacher from the start. The educator is no longer the source of or repository for greater understanding or knowledge, nor does he or she remain the figure behind the original meaning of "pedagogue" (leading the child). To rid education (and politics too, for that matter) of the figure of a certain kind of "master" is Rancière's guiding ambition.

If, against the backdrop of really existing social hierarchies and class divisions, we make a decision to place concrete observation and description to one side and rather make equality both "a point of departure" and a "practice," what can we mean? Would this even be possible when the grossly divided and divisive reproduction of economic and cultural capital in all its entrenched and repetitious forms greets us at every turn?

There is an important link to be made between the pedagogical situation I am describing here and broader changes in the nature of work. Paolo Virno, in particular, has made much of the idea that it is only now, when the differential traits of the species (i.e., that which separates us from other animals, namely verbal thought, the transindividual character of the mind, and the lack of specialized instincts) are the "raw material" of capitalist organization, that we can return again to the question of a politics of human nature.¹⁴ This immediately touches upon the question of "generic capacity" in an educational context, and links directly to what Marx referred to as the "general intellect" — the knowledges that constitute the heart of social production in the broadest

possible terms.

The question of "generic capacity," the idea of an intelligence shared by everyone and no one in particular, is both the omnipresent manifestation of contemporary immaterial labour and yet the question most strangely obscured in education.¹⁵ Massimo De Angelis and David Harvie have gone a long way to making clear the connections between the more general tendencies of intellectual labour in the post-Fordist context and the demands of contemporary academia:

Work in academia seems to capture the basic features of immaterial labour: a form of directly social work, in which the form of social cooperation is crucial in defining the "output," a form of doing that is necessarily grounded on relational awareness, and that produces affects (our students are, after all, our "customers" and they will be compiling a "customer satisfaction" questionnaire at the end of their courses with us). It goes without saying that academic work is also a context for the production of ideas, research papers and books; moreover that this production is "biopolitical" and can occur at any moment of the 24/7 span: we both have experienced waking up in the middle of the night with the solution to a problem insoluble during 9 to 5, or have reached an insight that will find its way into a paper while playing with a child.¹⁶

The proximity between the "social" nature of the work undertaken by both the student and the lecturer is both menacing and potentially promising. Once the illusion of mastery has been broken and students and staff alike feel themselves "on the same side" as part of an institution nominally committed to learning and wider social issues, then the generic, social nature of the pedagogical scenario may take on a more significant role. In Virno and others, this potentiality involves the "peculiar public character of the intellect" as the site of both current practices of exploitation and potential sites of resistance.¹⁷ All of these questions come into sharp focus when geared towards educational institutions and players — the "school," the "university," the "student," the "teacher." If we are to accept the claim that we live in an age in which "flexibility," the capacity to communicate, and the ability to manipulate language have more importance in the graduate job market than the facility of doing any one thing in particular (summed up in the ubiquitous but meaningless phrase "transferable skills"), then students and their lecturers are really very much on the same side, whether they like it or not.

Whilst Rancière is critical of the entire apparatus of learning and the term "pedagogy" in particular, deeming it tainted by its association with the division between passive student and master explicator, his posing of the question "who has the right to think?" — i.e., the question of equality — is the guiding one here for several reasons.¹⁸ Higher education no longer operates in terms of excluding those not deemed suitable to attend, but rather operates on a principle of what we might call "differentiated inclusion". That is to say, almost anyone can go to university, and indeed is encouraged to do so both by governments keen on avoiding having to find jobs for 18-year olds and by loan companies who make a profit on the interest on student debt. In this sense, the discussion of cultural capital in Bourdieu must be updated to reflect the fact that education is less about excluding those who "shouldn't" be there, than of including everyone within higher education in a hierarchical way (the same *kinds* of students tend to go to the same *kinds* of universities, like attracts like).

Not all universities carry the same weight, socially or academically, and it is clear that there has been a lock-down, a kind of social stasis, in terms of the kinds of people who go where. One among many recent reports tells us that Oxford and Cambridge have failed to raise the share of students they take from state schools.¹⁹ Clearly there are plenty of mechanisms in place to ensure the more-or-less smooth reproduction of class hierarchy, many of which in Britain are hundreds of years old. Class, and the entrenched generational repetitions of private school privilege, for example, cannot be ignored. However, these empirical facts can temporarily be *suspended*, and regarded anew, when one begins with a certain form of abstraction vis-à-vis education, namely the axiomatic assumption of equality. Pitching the question of capacity to learn at this level invites the open-ended question of whether universities are necessary at all. It is worth briefly remembering the ideas of Ivan Illich in *Deschooling Society*, at least one of which prefigures the pedagogical possibilities of the Internet (or at least a certain kind of use of the Internet):

I will use the words "opportunity web" for "network" to designate specific ways to provide access to each of four sets of resources. "Network" is often used, unfortunately, to designate the channels reserved to material selected by others for indoctrination, instruction, and entertainment. But it can also be used for the telephone or the postal service, which are primarily accessible to individuals who want to send messages to one another.²⁰

If someone wanted to discuss an article, a book, a theorem or even simply a word, they could enter their interest and details onto a database and make matches. Illich conceives of these meetings taking place in coffee shops during lunch-breaks or after work, but it's clear that the Internet goes further than this by allowing the discussion to take place in the very domain in which the initial desire is announced.

The planning of educational institutions must begin, Illich argues, not with the question, "What should someone learn?" but with the question, 'What kinds of things and people might learners want to be in contact with in order to learn?'"²¹ Rancière takes this abolition of mastery even further when he argues that one can teach and learn together something that one knows nothing about: "[Jacotot] proclaimed that one could teach what one didn't know, and that a poor and ignorant father could, if he was emancipated, conduct the education of his children, without the aid of any master explicator. And he indicated the way of that 'universal teaching' — *to learn something and to relate it to all the rest by this principle: all men have equal intelligence.*"²² Illich's networks and Jacotot's axiom, combined with an understanding of the nature of contemporary immaterial labour, may well render the university obsolete, too much the bastion of cynical marketing and a lack of any genuine learning. As Mary Evans puts it in her attack on contemporary higher education, *Killing Thinking*: "perhaps the real democratization of the universities will lie in the departure of future generations from them."²³

Intelligence for all

Let's say we haven't yet given up on the university completely and want to apply Rancière's ideas in practice. What dangers lie ahead? There are certainly temptations at work for both the lecturer and the student in the classical teacher-pupil hierarchy.

One temptation is the patronizing attempt to over-identify with the imperative "not to learn" supposedly possessed by students. We could call this the "slacker" temptation — of course all students want to do is smoke dope and play Playstation! This model of teaching presupposes two intellectual classes: those who (contingently) want to learn (the lecturer him- or herself) and those who do not (most students, and by extension, most everybody). This approach is a kind of mastery, disavowed in this case and all the more pernicious for it — I know enough to tell you that you do not need to know. It is the supercilious attitude of the newspaper columnist who chucks in references to Marx, postmodernism, etc. before airily informing the less-informed reader that he or she doesn't need to bother finding out anything about them for him- or herself. Equality of intelligence is here smothered by the laziness, not of the students, but of the teacher, who churns out information without really believing that the audience will be interested in receiving it. As Rancière puts it, "explication is the work of laziness".²⁴ The fear masked here, both by assuming student apathy and by preserving the knowledge you yourself possess, is the idea that actually there is nothing "special" about your capacity to learn. As Bourdieu and Passeron put it:

The whole logic of an academic institution based on pedagogic work of the traditional type and ultimately guaranteeing the "infallibility" of the "master," finds expression in the professorial ideology of student incapacity, a mixture of tyrannical stringency and disillusioned indulgence which inclines the teacher to regard all communication failures, however unforeseen, as integral to a relationship which inherently implies poor reception of the best messages to the worst receivers.²⁵

Of course, the question of mastery cannot simply be sidestepped as easily as all that. While autodidacticism, individual or collective, may well be the ideal mode of learning, the one closest to both the will and the intelligence we presuppose belongs to all, simply turning one's back on the systems of domination and hierarchy that characterize the society of which education is merely a part is impossible. Stimulating, rather than instructing, students will hopefully encourage an already existing will to learn, rather than "stultify," in Rancière's terms; but the question of other, perhaps more pernicious, desires is never too far away. Plato is one of the first to recognize, in the *Phaedrus*, "the way in which the speaker who knows the truth may, without any serious purpose, steal away the hearts of his hearers."²⁶ Even if the more straightforwardly oppressive elements of education are stripped away, the erotics of pedagogy, and those forms of hierarchy that are predicated on a romantic attachment to the teacher on the basis that he or she "knows more" than the student are hard to deny and perhaps even harder to prevent.

Perhaps recognizing these residual forms of pedagogical asymmetry, Rancière will not, in the end, simply cut the head off the teacher-king or queen. As he puts it, for Jacotot, on the one hand, "the method of equality was above all a method of the will. One could learn by oneself and without a master explicator or when one wanted to, propelled by one's own desire or by the constraint of the situation." On the other, "[t]he students had learned without a master explicator, but not, for all that, without a master."²⁷ Jacotot's method transfers the mastery inherent in the pedagogical situation from the figure of the teacher to the solidity of the book. It is the book that becomes the more democratic (admittedly), though none the less sanctified, teacher: "Instead of paying for an explicator, couldn't a father simply give the book to his son and the child

understand directly the reasonings of the book?"²⁸ The danger of shifting the master from person to object doesn't necessarily overturn the hierarchy of student and teacher, just shifts it from the classroom to the library.

This is an important sticking point. If we take the somewhat Lutheran line that true learning is the will-driven learning of an individual with a text, motivated by the admission of the shared ignorance of the "master," then what, say, of Illich's plans mentioned above regarding more collective modes of learning? If the hierarchical mode of teacher-student learning involves one person in a position of power over many, then Rancière's solution seems to propose instead a one-on-one relationship between the reader and the text. But wouldn't a collective — if paradoxical — form of autodidacticism be more egalitarian, precisely because it would accept the minimal empirical claim that each of us has something to learn from the other? Books can be just as dogmatic masters as any human.

Autodidacticism nevertheless clearly remains a superior political model to that of the "master" inscribing on the *tabula rasa* of the passive student's mind. Rancière's radical notion of equality entails both that any individual can teach him- or herself and that teachers can teach what they don't know. The empirical nags away at this, bit by bit, however. What about those radically different starting points? What, to be blunt, about class?

Reproduction

In order to finalize some of these thoughts on Rancière and the academy, it is worth placing the insights of Jacotot alongside those of another important thinker of education and inequality: Pierre Bourdieu. Rancière is extremely critical of Bourdieu, despite some seemingly shared concerns. Overall, Rancière mounts a kind of disciplinary critique of his countryman, arguing that Bourdieu attempts to inaugurate a new science, a new form of mastery, a kind of sociological structure to reinstate the separation between those who understand and those who do not. Sociology suffers, argues Rancière, from the need to make secret what lies on the surface:

Condemned to remain within the apparent movement of *doxa*, prevented from returning it to a real movement that would no longer be a part of his domain, [the sociologist] divided the apparent movement into two. He hollowed out a dimension of paradox in the platitude of the *doxa*: it is because everybody knows that nobody can know.²⁹

Nevertheless, Bourdieu and Passeron's claims were a revelation to a generation of thinkers who wanted other explanations than the purely economic for the ways in which class reproduces itself. One is struck, Rancière says at least, by the "origi-nal commonality" of Bourdieu's problematic. "Cultural capital" includes all of those forms of knowledge (not capacities) that directly relate to one's educational and cultural status. One of these forms of cultural knowledge, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, is aspiration itself, which has a self-perpetuating effect in the context of education and the likelihood of going to university. Their theory of cultural capital tries to make sense of the advantages that tend to accrue to the same kinds of people from the same kinds of background. In this sense, it is usually understood in isolation from exam results or other kinds of academic achievements, which aim to measure native intelligence. Instead, it incorporates modes of comportment such as attitude towards study, information learned outside of the school, and the cultural

knowledge possessed by the family of the student in question, particularly those regarded as elite (opera, theatre, art, classical music, "serious" literature, etc.).³⁰

"Cultural capital" began life as a primarily educational term, and it can be used as a tool to explain why middle-class parents are much better able to understand the "rules" of their child's school and seek improvements — for example, asking for extra help for their child or knowing the right "language" to be able to talk to teachers on parents' evenings. It became a central term in attempts to understand why class mobility is often so limited, even when intelligence is taken into account. It describes the forms of extra-curricular knowledge that students from certain backgrounds possess, which, although not directly transmitted by the educational institution, are highly valued by it. Cultural capital went on to become important in more general studies of class culture, beyond its narrower educational focus, and is widely used to explain various kinds of "elimination," examining the process which ensures that middle class children go on to get middle class jobs, for example.

The problem of analyzing such self-perpetuating social processes is of course that one can end up tangled in them, trapped within their sticky webs. Rancière is extremely critical of the structures by which Bourdieu seeks to explain working class involvement (or lack thereof) in higher education, such as the theory of cultural capital outlined above. He summarizes Bourdieu's claims about working class students in the following way: "they are excluded because they don't know why they are excluded; and they don't know why they are excluded because they are excluded."³¹ Without the axiomatic assertion of equal intelligence underneath his analysis, Bourdieu runs the risk of reproducing his theories of reproduction without thereby also providing the tools to undermine them.

In this vein, Rancière argues that "the sociologist's weapons are those of his adversary" — the statistical tables, the "everybody knows" kind of facts, opinion polls — mediums that can mask as much as they reveal.³² Nevertheless, Bourdieu's claims about cultural capital cannot fail to continue to resonate in an educational system that increasingly privileges the empty form of higher education as a marker of aptitude for a certain kind of job, a certain kind of lifestyle, and, above all, the replication of a specific and increasingly divisive class system. A speech by Lord Plummer, an Old Etonian, beautifully exemplifies the importance of sheer form over educational content: "They taught us nothing at Eton. It may be so, but I think they taught it very well."³³

Rancière's master without mastery points to a way in which the assumption of egalitarian intelligence might be understood, but what happens when the assumption of generic intelligence reaches the analysis of educational practice? Might not Bourdieu and Passeron be of some use after all? Their classic claims regarding reproduction in education and the concept of cultural capital arguably remain of relevance to any understanding of the mechanisms at play "behind the back" of the agents concerned:

An educational system based on a traditional type of pedagogy can fulfil its function of inculcation only so long as it addresses itself to students equipped with the linguistic and cultural capital — and the capacity to invest it profitably — which the system presupposes and consecrates without ever expressly demanding it and without methodically transmitting it.³⁴

It has to be said that taking on board both Rancière's Jacotot as well as Bourdieu and Passeron is complicated. In the first place, the context for both, as noted in the earlier, was one of exclusion — of those deemed "not cut out" for education or for the university, the literal poor or the culturally impoverished.

We must acknowledge a changed landscape: not exclusion, straightforwardly, but a peculiar form of staggered expansion. The supposedly elite institutions are still there at the top, the old-boys and girls networks still churning out elite fodder for the same kinds of jobs — politics, diplomacy, high-end culture industry work, etc. At the same time, the expansion of higher education and the re-branding of ex-Polytechnics as universities in the UK has created a situation in which no one need be excluded. It is no longer a question of keeping them out, but of ensuring they go where they are supposed to. A further change comes at the economic level. As noted, fees have created a kind of split-subject of the university: the "client" who pays for a service and yet is still a subject "supposed to be criticized" or even failed. Endless feedback forms, along the lines of customer satisfaction surveys, entail that students are supposed to know how well that which they don't yet know is being conveyed. We could call this "the subject supposed to know how it will know what it doesn't yet know." It is a subject a long way from possessing Rancière's "method of the will," and getting further away from it all the time.

A notion of "intellectual will" not predicated on academic approval would be another, more positive, matter altogether — but for that we might need a new Jacotot:

The problem is not to create scholars. It is to raise up those that believe themselves inferior in intelligence, to make them leave the swamp where they are stagnating — not the swamp of ignorance, but the swamp of self-contempt, of contempt *in and of itself* for the reasonable creature. It is to make emancipated and emancipating men.³⁵

Conclusion

It seems we are stuck then, between a broken, cynical university and an incomplete, problematic, autodidacticism. Trying to think beyond the university from within it remains a serious problem. It is hard not to imagine that best of all would ultimately be to entirely detach knowledge, understanding, and intellectual enquiry from the university completely. But how? Rancière's axiomatic positing of the equality of intelligence allows us to answer the key educational question, "who has the right to think?" with the simple answer: "everyone." Bourdieu's observations and Illich's networks could help us to fill out Rancière's insight with the empirical weight of how far we have to go and the utopian promise of a pedagogy to come. Much is yet to be done.

¹ Plato, "Meno," *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton & Huntington Cairns (New Jersey: Princeton university Press, 1999), 370.

² Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1991), 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

- ⁴ See, as the latest particularly egregious example, Bruce Charlton's claim that "higher so-cial classes have a significantly higher average IQ than lower social classes" in Rebecca Attwood, "Elite institutions' class bias simply reflects 'meritocracy,'" *THE*, May 22, 2008.
- ⁵ See, for example, Mary Evans's claim that "The surveillance between teachers and pupils is, of course, mutual. Teachers are expected to record the presence of their students, while students are asked to record comments on their teachers." *Killing Thinking: The Death of the universities* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 59. See also her claim that "[t]he spectre of the student who attends no lectures or seminars and yet emerges with an outstanding degree in final examinations is clearly a terror to the QAA [Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education]." *Ibid.*, 117.
- ⁶ See, for example, John Gill, "Keep it Stupid, Simple," *THE*, October 23, 2008.
- ⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), 228.
- ⁸ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.
- ⁹ This summary of Bourdieu's position can be found in Roy Nash, "Bourdieu on Education and Social and Cultural Reproduction," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 11. 4 (1990): 436.
- ¹⁰ Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.
- ¹¹ Félix and Victor Ratier, "Enseignement universel: Emancipation intellectuelle," *Journal de philosophie pancécastique*, 5 (1838): 155. Quoted in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 4.
- ¹² Peter Hallward, "Staging Equality: On Rancière's Theatrocracy," *New Left Review* 37 (January–February 2006): 114.
- ¹³ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 16.
- ¹⁴ See Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito & Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004).
- ¹⁵ It should of course be noted that "immaterial labour" refers, in the context of education, to the kinds of general skills seemingly inculcated in and "desired" from contemporary graduates, not as a general claim about global labour, which remains overwhelmingly ma-terial. There is no doubt, however, that the student produced by contemporary British universities is primarily a creature with no skills other than "transferable" ones that lack content, as well as being entirely in hock to debt.
- ¹⁶ Massimo De Angelis and David Harvie, "Cognitive Capital and the Rat Race: How Capital Measures Ideas and Effects in UK Higher Education," *Historical Materialism* (2009).
- ¹⁷ Paolo Virno, "General Intellect," trans. Arianna Bove, *Generation–Online*, www.generation–online.org.
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