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## World Literature and the Problem of Postcolonialism Aesthetics and Dissent

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay identifies in the materialist strand of world literature theory, especially Pascale Casanova and the Warwick Research Collective, a reliance upon a priori structures (the world-system) and prioritisation of the literary registration of inequality. By contrast, I contend, world-literary critics who wish to maintain the dissident spirit of postcolonialism ought to demonstrate a shared equality. By reference to the philosophies of Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière, this essay sets out the case for an alternative to world-systems critique: one that maintains literature's potential for creating new forms of resistance, dissent, and, crucially, equality.

**KEYWORDS:** world literature; postcolonialism; Bruno Latour; Jacques Rancière; Warwick Research Collective; Pascale Casanova; dissent; equality

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# World Literature and the Problem of Postcolonialism

## Aesthetics and Dissent

LORNA BURNS

Despite their shared ambition to expand the canon beyond narrowly nationalist boundaries, the critical fields of postcolonial and world literary criticism, Robert Young argues, pull in different directions when it comes to their political ambitions. For Young, while world literature must always make at least some claim to the attainment of universal standards of aesthetic value, ‘postcolonial literature makes no such assertion, and indeed insofar as it involves resistance, [it] will always in some sense be partial, locked into a particular problematic of power.’<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, he continues, aspiring ‘to expose and challenge imbalances of power,

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1 Robert J. C. Young, ‘World Literature and Postcolonialism’, in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, Djelal Kadir (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 213–22 (p. 216).

and the different forms of injustice that follow from such factors [...] postcolonial literature will always seek to go beyond itself to impact upon the world which it represents.<sup>2</sup> Evident in Young's claims is a view of postcolonial literature that identifies it primarily as a literature of resistance — literature that will aim to make a discernible impact on situations of injustice, exploitation, and oppression within the world that it represents. By this token, postcolonial literature, Young argues, is specific and particular, and thus opposed to the universal values of world literature; postcolonial literature often moves 'beyond itself' to make an engagement with the actual world behind mere representation, whereas world literature can conceive of an aesthetic realm apart. This view, however, obscures one of the most prominent debates in the field of postcolonialism: one which Graham Huggan has referred to as 'the overdrawn, often tedious debate between (post-)Marxists and poststructuralists [...] that continues to some extent to split the postcolonial field today'.<sup>3</sup> By raising the problem of literature in relation to representation, political action, and dissent, Young's initial foray into the 'virtually unmarked territory' of postcolonialism and world literature reanimates this debate.<sup>4</sup>

What is known as second-wave or Marxist postcolonial critique was a sharp criticism of the poststructuralist theories of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and, to a lesser extent, Edward Said. And we can see in Young's assumption that postcolonial literature must, necessarily, go beyond itself to impact on the world that

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2 Ibid., p. 217.

3 Graham Huggan, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 11.

4 Young, 'World Literature and Postcolonialism', p. 213.

it represents an echo of Benita Parry's second-wave critique of Bhabha and Spivak for their disinterest in social praxis and their elevation of discourse.<sup>5</sup> At issue remains the question of the relationship between literature and the world: the degree to which a text represents a more fundamental reality or structure and how far its influence upon that world can be measured. World literature scholarship, to some extent, has overlooked the poststructuralist/Marxist division within the field of postcolonialism: Pascale Casanova, for example, argues that postcolonialism in all its forms 'posits a direct link between literature and history, one that is exclusively political',<sup>6</sup> while Franco Moretti observes that with postcolonialism 'a whole generation began to concentrate directly on historical materials, shifting the critical focus from the analysis of form to that of content.'<sup>7</sup> This elision, I argue, obscures the divisions within the field of postcolonialism between Marxists and poststructuralists, but it also serves to mask the extent to which world literature theory itself has reproduced aspects of this debate, most notably in the ideal of an autonomous world republic of letters as argued for in the work of Pascale Casanova.

In tension with this conceptualization of an autonomous literary realm, recent interventions into the field of world literature (including that of Casanova) have pursued a strongly materialist approach which views the text primarily as a product of the various factors that condition the literary field. For David Damrosch, literature becomes

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5 Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004).

6 Pascale Casanova, 'Literature as a World', *New Left Review*, 31 (2005), pp. 71–90 (p. 71).

7 Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), p. xiii.

world literature only when it circulates beyond its originating national borders;<sup>8</sup> for Casanova, it is part of a world literary field unequal in its distribution of capital;<sup>9</sup> for Rebecca Walkowitz, it betrays its global internationalism through its translatability.<sup>10</sup> Literature by this account, as Ben Etherington has argued, is studied 'as a special encoder of those conditions' which structure the global literary field and, in turn, the objective of critique is to uncover 'the material base through the superstructure of literature.'<sup>11</sup> World literature, following postcolonialism in its materialist, second wave articulation, can be read as a manifestation of the more fundamental modern global capitalist and imperialist world-system.

This is an approach that finds its clearest articulation to date in the recent manifesto by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, in which it is argued that the world-literary text will 'register' the capitalist world-system.<sup>12</sup> The influence of Franco Moretti can be traced in this latest development in world-literary critical theory, for it is his structural premise of a world literary system that is '[o]ne, and unequal' that, alongside Casanova's contemporaneous *The World Republic of Letters*, underpins

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8 David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

9 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

10 Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

11 Ben Etherington, 'What Is Materialism's Material? Thoughts toward (Actually against) a Materialism for "World Literature"', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48.5 (2012), pp. 539–51 (p. 539).

12 Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

WReC's case for the literary registration of inequality.<sup>13</sup> And yet, at the same time, both Casanova and Moretti continue to make the case for the specific work of language and discourse, an aesthetic sphere that cannot be reduced to its material conditions. And so the poststructuralist–Marxist debate rages on.

I do not seek to finally resolve this debate, but rather to highlight that both tend to begin with a structural premise (language or an aesthetic sphere, for one faction; capitalism, for the other) that will explain not only the production and circulation of a text, but also the workings of plot, character, genre, and style, and, crucially, it will prefigure our interpretation of such elements. Indeed, Damrosch acknowledges as much when he notes the tendency in world literature scholarship to focus on 'deep structures' at the expense of particularity and individual literary effects, and, as such, 'systemic approaches need to be counter-balanced with close attention to particular languages, specific texts: we need to see both the forest and the trees.'<sup>14</sup> I would add, however, that the systemic approach has generated another set of conceptual problems, one that can be summarized by WReC's definition of 'world-literature' as 'the literature of the world-system', 'as the literary registration of modernity under the sign of combined and uneven development.'<sup>15</sup> World literature and its critical analysis, by this definition, will register the signs of globalized capitalism but, crucially, WReC adds, such an endeavour 'does not (necessarily) involve criticality or dissent.'<sup>16</sup> My counterargument to this claim is not that, by contrast, a text

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13 Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 46.

14 Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, p. 26.

15 Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development*, pp. 8 and 17.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

must (necessarily) be defined by its resistance but, rather, to suggest that just as there is no ontologically valid position to argue that a text will involve criticality or dissent (the assumption WReC resists), the reverse position is also true: there is no validity to the claim that it will not involve criticality or dissent. As this essay will go on to discuss with brief reference to the work of three philosophers — Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rancière — the departure from a priori structures as the guiding principle of interpretation results in an ontology in which the world is understood as an assemblage of forces and actors, none of which can be said to be either reducible or irreducible to anything other.<sup>17</sup> In turn, world literature is reframed as an assemblage of actors (world, text, and reader together) by which we might trace the processes by which structures of dominance or inequality can emerge but never as the a priori conditions or teleological ends to which all actors are fated to be governed by. This processual philosophy holds that we cannot predict in advance what form an assemblage of world, text, and reader might take; or, in Latour's words, '[w]e cannot say that an actant follows rules, laws, or structures, but neither can we say that it acts without these'.<sup>18</sup> It

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17 These three philosophers inform the argument throughout *Postcolonialism After World Literature*, shaping my approach to the materialist critique of WReC, Casanova and Moretti, and informing my approach to dissent and equality, most notably drawing on the ways in which each philosopher employs a concept of otherness (the virtual for Deleuze; plasma for Latour; and for Rancière the hitherto obscured actors made visible through the work of dissensus) in their conceptualization of the destabilizing force of newness. For a more detailed account of this argument, see Burns, *Postcolonialism After World Literature* — the Introduction and Chapter One (a response to the materialist critique of WReC, Casanova and Moretti), Chapter 2 (on Latour), Chapter 3 (on Deleuze and minor literature), and Chapter 4 (on Rancière's concept of equality).

18 Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. by Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1993), p. 160.

is in this sense, then, that I challenge WReC's shift away from the registration of criticality or dissent. While we cannot determine in advance what a text is capable of we equally cannot rule out what it is incapable of as it forms a new assemblage with the reader and world. In other words, although each text is, in line with both WReC and Moretti, potentially a rhetoric of innocence that sustains the inequalities of the world system, so too is it potentially a source of resistance. The question then becomes one which asks us to consider what we as readers and critics can do with a text, how it provokes us to think, and, in turn, what opportunities are lost if we choose only to trace the registration, and thus efficacy, of the capitalist world-system without finding in the text an ally in the ongoing contestation and (re)assemblage of the world.<sup>19</sup>

The 'structural' aspect of this problem of contemporary world literary theory is underscored, I suggest, by the arguments advanced by post-critical scholars like Bruno Latour and Rita Felski, for whom the Marxist readings of Fredric Jameson (and by extension, I suggest, the materialism of WReC) seek to uncover unconscious structures that underlie a text and therefore tend to confirm the critic's predetermined expectations.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, the problem with a world-systems approach to world literature is its tendency to situate a primary reality as the unconscious ground of the text: literature as epiphenomenon of the capitalist world economy. Rather than preserving the notion that it is the work of the critic to reveal the hidden structures of economy, society, or history to which the text

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19 For a further exploration of the role that dissent plays in world literary criticism, see the essays collected in *World Literature and Dissent*, ed. by Lorna Burns and Katie Muth (London: Routledge 2019).

20 Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).



is blind, post-criticism asks us to 'place ourselves in front of the text' and reflect 'on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible.'<sup>21</sup> And, of course, what it 'makes possible' can be resistance to the hierarchies that dominate our world as much as those that anesthetize us to their acceptance (a nod to Moretti's rhetoric of innocence, explored in *Modern Epic*).<sup>22</sup>

World literature, I maintain, must be more than a reflection of its contemporary worldly contexts, and while texts need not necessarily, by definition, express 'criticality or dissent', they must always be considered as offering the potential to do so. This is not merely a question addressed to the text, but to how we read it. As Graham Harman notes, 'such questions restore the proper scale of evaluation for intellectual work: demoting the pushy careerist sandbagger who remains within the bounds of the currently plausible and prudent, and promoting the gambler who uncovers new worlds.'<sup>23</sup> This move beyond the status quo is the dissident force of critique in an era of world literature: finding in the literary text not confirmation of the structural permanence of capitalism and related forms of cultural and economic imperialism but, rather, the means to imagine a new society that functions without the opposition of self and other, oppressor and oppressed. Thus, for Harman, the effectiveness of the literary text is not simply a measure of the widest possible circulation or of its literary capital: 'The books that stir us most are not those containing the fewest errors, but those that throw most light on unknown portions of the map.'<sup>24</sup>

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21 Ibid., p. 12.

22 Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez* (London: Verso, 1996).

23 Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re:press, 2009), p. 120.

24 Ibid.

These sentiments are at the core of my work, and specifically the recently published book from which this essay is drawn, *Postcolonialism After World Literature: Relation, Equality, Dissent*.<sup>25</sup> In this essay, I will sketch the argument made in detail in the book that the work of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, and Bruno Latour can be turned toward an interrogation of current world literary criticism. Speaking directly to a concern that he shares with Deleuze and Rancière, Latour articulates a fundamental sense of the world as an assemblage of forces and actors, none of which can be said to be either reducible or irreducible to anything other. It is upon such grounds that Latour has opposed the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (the doctoral supervisor of and clear inspiration to Pascale Casanova and, in particular, her modification of field theory in *The World Republic of Letters*).<sup>26</sup> Where Latour's critique of Bourdieu draws attention to the philosophical problem of a priori structures — a primary social field — in the work of his fellow sociologist, Casanova (and, indeed, Franco Moretti) follows suit by providing an account of literature that relies upon a fixed structural premise. For Moretti, world literature is not an object but the workings of an a priori system subject to analysis and interrogation; a single system structured by 'a relationship of growing inequality' between the core, periphery and semi-periphery.<sup>27</sup> In Casanova's work, we encounter a relatively autonomous field of literary production, structured by the uneven spread of literary capital that

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25 Burns, *Postcolonialism After World Literature*.

26 My critique of Pascale Casanova's theory of world literature can be found in Chapter One of Burns, *Postcolonialism After World Literature*. See also Christian Thorne, 'The Sea Is Not a Place: or, Putting the World Back into World Literature', *boundary2*, 40.2 (2013), pp. 53–79.

27 For further discussion of Moretti's approach to world literature theory, see Burns, *Postcolonialism After World Literature*.

cannot be wholly reduced to the power relations which structure the 'real' world.

Like Deleuze before him, Latour is profoundly suspicious of the transcendentalism of philosophical arguments which posit a priori foundations and teleological processes. But the critique of field theory in Latour runs deeper, since the problem of Bourdieu's a priori social field is not only the 'a priori' nature of that framework, but also its privileging of one, determining factor apart. Modern thinking, Latour argues, has been characterized by the separation of spheres — nature and culture, science and arts, reality and its representation, or to signal its Kantian foundations, noumenon and phenomenon. Bourdieu is as guilty of this as Derrida, Latour argues, as each privileges one structure or sphere within their ontology (society or language) and ignores the fact that 'all of culture and all of nature get churned up again every day'; we cling to the belief that we must 'not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman'.<sup>28</sup> Modern thinkers have sought to separate 'knowledge of things', on the one hand, from 'power and human politics', on the other.<sup>29</sup> To return to literature, for Latour and post-critical scholars like Rita Felski, the implications of this rejection of separate spheres is to render moot the question of whether or not literature can be political: there is no autonomous 'republic of letters', no grounds upon which the work of literature could be extracted from the workings of the world. And this is something which Latour shares with the other thinkers that I use in my work: Deleuze and Rancière. For Latour, as for Deleuze, there is no cogito

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28 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 2–3.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

or transcendental subject that exists first and then enters into relations with others; nor is there any teleological framework or a priori system within which a subject's being unfolds. In this respect, the literary text, understood as one actor among many others, is not simply a material object to be encountered but something continually produced and reproduced through the translations and mediations of other actors in the network.

This snapshot of Latour's understanding of literature is worth pausing over because of its evocation of singularity or newness: each reading of the text produces something new. That in itself is not a surprising conclusion, but it raises an awareness of what is perhaps underplayed in Latour's work: to put it in Deleuzian terms, the role of the virtual. Indeed, some readers of Latour view these two philosophers as antagonistic because of Latour's seeming resistance to virtuality or otherness in his work (a point I find hard to agree with if one looks at Latour's definition of 'plasma').<sup>30</sup> But more broadly, I see this as a problem with post-criticism. Of concern in the post-critical turn is the repudiation of a form of literary theory in which the practitioner is engaged, like the spirit of perpetual negation, in undermining the text — by revealing what it has excluded

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30 See Harman, *Prince of Networks*; and Mitchum Huehls, *After Critique: Twenty-First Century Fiction in a Neoliberal Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). In *Reassembling the Social*, plasma is introduced as a placeholder for that which remains unconnected as a society-network forms. Inspired by Gabriel Tarde's monad, plasma is 'the background necessary for every activity to emerge'; the 'not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialized'; that which is 'in between and not made of social stuff. It is not hidden, simply unknown. It resembles a vast hinterland providing the resources for every single course of action to be fulfilled'; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 243–44. This 'not yet' cannot be reduced to 'the possible' and, as such, it echoes Deleuze's own hesitancy in equating his virtual with the possible.

— or in undermining the reader — by exposing what they are blind to. In its place, Latour proposes a new critical approach in which the object of study is instead treated as an assemblage of actors and forces. For Latour, every state of affairs is an assemblage of translations and connections produced via their relation to other actors within the network, and the work of the analyst becomes one of tracing these connections, mapping the network as it registers them, without, however, attempting to trace them back to a single, systemic cause. What is missing from this picture, and what I am suggesting that post-criticism and indeed world-literary criticism needs, is a term which accounts for that which is in excess of our everyday, empirical reality. We need a concept that gestures towards an immanent alterity to account for how newness enters the world. And we see this in the philosophers I mention: each, when accounting for creativity and newness, finds it necessary to introduce an aspect of otherness into their thought, an otherness that is understood not as an inaccessible sphere apart (as it would be for Kant, according to Latour), but as one side of a dual reality. Each philosopher uses this ‘other’ as the basis for theorizing the emergence of newness, creativity, and dissident alternatives to the existing hegemony. When viewed from this perspective, the work of literature and, indeed, literary criticism, postcolonial or otherwise, can become a process of creating new associations, new alliances between actors, imagining new forms of belonging and of a society freed from current forms of oppression as a co-production between the reader and the text.

The dissident capacity immanent to all works of world literature, then, lies in a reading which brings to light those hidden dimensions which, for Deleuze, is the work

of 'minor literature' or, for Rancière, 'dissensus'.<sup>31</sup> I want, in this final part, to turn more directly to Rancière, for through his work we can gain a further refinement of a world literary critique that retains the dissident impetus of postcolonial thought. Above, we encountered arguments which will provoke a world literary criticism that, while rejecting separate spheres and a priori structures, will be sensitive to that which escapes comprehension: deterritorializations and dissensus as the immanent capacity of the literary text. But I want to add to this discussion a further element drawn from contemporary world literary theory: the question of inequality. Because if we agree with Robert Young's characterization of postcolonial literature as literature of resistance — in other words, as literature that will aim to make a discernible impact on situations of injustice, exploitation, and oppression in the world — then we should be encouraged by recent world literary criticism and its focus on global capitalism and its attendant forms of inequality. In the hands of WReC, this critical shift offers an alternative to traditional forms of postcolonial critique which have been restricted by a focus on difference and diversity. Thus, for WReC, the work of Moretti promises to offer an alternative, promoting world-literature as a 'system [that] is structured not on difference but on inequality'.<sup>32</sup> Postcolonialism, thus, can learn from contemporary world literature theory to focus on inequality rather than difference, and in doing so address potentialities for comparison and cosmopolitan commonalities rather than divergence

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31 See, for instance Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), or Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010).

32 Warwick Research Collective (WReC), *Combined and Uneven Development*, p. 7.

and diversity. But I want to push this enquiry further and, following Rancière, ask what if rather than starting from the premise of inequality we assume first the equality of all actors? What if, rather than posing a theory that hopes to explain inequality, that, in the words of Moretti, focuses on 'examples [which] confirm the inequality of the world literary system' that is 'internal to the unequal system' of global, economic capitalism,<sup>33</sup> we instead turn our attention to that which stages the primary equality of actors within the world-literary assemblage? This is precisely the challenge that Rancière posed to philosophy, aesthetics, and political thought, and furthermore it is the basis of his contention that the work of politics and literature alike is a form of resistance he dubs 'dissensus'.

Rancière's philosophy, like that of Latour and Deleuze, is a rejection of a priori structures as the foundation of being. Just as inequality has no transcendental justification, so equality is not treated as a natural given or essential quality, but simply as 'a mere assumption that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it'.<sup>34</sup> He prioritizes, crucially, an assumed equality as the baseline of his thinking, and he does so because of the contingency of inequality: 'In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality' because experience tells us that

there is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey [...] you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order.<sup>35</sup>

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33 Moretti, *Distant Reading*, p. 115.

34 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 33.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 17 and 16.

Here we see, as one might with Latour and Deleuze, that the philosopher is not denying that order, hierarchies, or structures can exist within society, but he asks us to approach them as constructed via relational processes rather than fixed a priori foundations. And, as with Latour and Deleuze, because they are constructed, they are open to change — they might make a future, cosmopolitan society possible by confronting an unequal society with its equality.

For Rancière, this is the activity of politics. Order and hierarchy are created through mechanisms he names the police. Politics is the confrontation of that order or world with an alternative account:

Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, [...] the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something ‘between’ them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count [a difference, an inequality, or imbalance of qualities] and the world where there is nothing.<sup>36</sup>

As such, a social world ordered by difference or inequality is always the site of a possible contestation or dispute by those who seek to demonstrate the equality that must first be assumed by any enactment of inequality.

Politics takes the form of ‘dissensus’ for Rancière in that its opposite, the police, is concerned with ‘the distribution of places and roles, and of the systems for legitimizing this distribution.’<sup>37</sup> Politics, then, is that which breaks, disrupts and disassembles that sensible order by ‘mak[ing]

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36 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 28.



visible what had no business being seen, and mak[ing] heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise'.<sup>38</sup> The affinities with Spivak's subaltern are striking for the postcolonial scholar: Spivak's contention that the racial, gendered subaltern figure 'cannot speak' insofar as the historical colonial archive affords them no space within which they can make their voices heard or their agency visible finds its counterpart in Rancière's philosophy of politics as dissensus.<sup>39</sup> The work of the intellectual, then, concerns not representation as Spivak's original essay argued, but rather an activity of tracing moments of dissensus in which previously silenced or hidden subaltern actors are registered. Such acts, we can add after Rancière, are not an expression of the subaltern's difference but of their equality. Dissensus is the act of staging one's equality, of demonstrating that the definition of the common good extends to those who were not 'counted' as equals by the police order. Rancière's example is the Parisian tailors' strike of 1833 in which better working conditions and pay were sought by means of a demonstration of the universal applicability of the 1830 Charter which claimed all French citizens to be equal under the law.<sup>40</sup> From a postcolonial perspective, the Haitian Revolution repeats this dissensus: the black slaves of Saint-Domingue looked to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which pronounced all men free and equal, and demonstrated that they too belonged to the category of man. On both counts

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38 Ibid., p. 30.

39 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. by Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 21–78 (p. 41).

40 Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 45–72.

the 'lie' of democracy is laid bare: a claim to freedom and of a common good is pronounced as if it extends to all citizens, and those who find themselves discounted and excluded by the practice of that common good demonstrate their equal share in it.

The assumption of this enactment is, as I have noted, equality rather than difference, but that does not make of Rancière a philosopher for whom the 'otherness' I've suggested is prominent in Deleuze (the virtual) and necessary in Latour's post-criticism is redundant. Indeed, as far as dissensus marks a rupture in the police order it involves a supplement or difference that cannot be measured. Moreover, it is because of the presence of this 'otherness' that what returns from this rupturing is not the same but a newly configured space with new possibilities for 'what is to be done, to be seen and to be named in it.'<sup>41</sup> Call it what you will, a concept of absolute otherness is vital to any philosophical account of newness, creativity, and radical dissent as the reimagining of a community. In other words, with Rancière we can find a means to rethink post-colonialism after world literature not as an articulation of difference but as an enactment of equality. This affords an approach to world literature that does not abandon but rather invigorates the dissident, future-orientated work of postcolonial literature and literary critique. Freed from a priori structures or unconscious motives and desires, Rancière's philosophy asks us to assemble and verify moments of dissensus insofar as they enact an assumed fundamental equality between actors. Hierarchical structures can, of course, emerge, but if they do so they are produced through the relational network that is the actual world, rather than

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41 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 37.

structural givens that prefigure its contents. As a process, any structure is open to change and reconfiguration: this is a basic premise that unites the philosophies of Latour, Deleuze, and Rancière, and which reveals their potential for a postcolonial world literature scholarship concerned with the ongoing challenge to the neocolonial present as well as the possibilities of a postcolonial future yet-to-come.

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