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Abstract:

This paper focuses on Jacques Rancière's reflections on Alfredo Jaar's *The Rwanda Project*, in the context of wider discussions of the politics of naming the dead.

Against the claim that his reflections reveal a depoliticizing, universalist commitment to naming all the dead, it contends that foregrounding the relation between naming and counting in this discussion shows Rancière's focus to be the policing and politics of naming. In an original argument, it focuses specifically on how, for Rancière, in this context, individualized proper names function politically and dissensually. To do so it explores (i) Rancière's analysis of the role of the mainstream media during the Rwandan genocide in perpetuating the police order (or order of grievability) that divided nameable individuals from anonymous masses, thereby constituting living and dead Rwandans as of little or no account, and (ii) his account of how Jaar's art is able to disrupt the 'partition of the sensible' underpinning this count. The paper concludes by considering how Rancière's ideas about the relationship between naming and counting and between politics and police serve as a useful supplement to and extension of existing discussions of grievability.

Key words: Jacques Rancière, grievability, naming, politics, Alfredo Jaar, Rwanda

## Whose names count? Rancière on Jaar on Rwanda

‘We live in an age of necronominalism’, writes Thomas Lacquer, where we ‘record and gather the names of the dead in ways, and in places, and in numbers as never before’ (2015, p. 366). They form the ‘substance’ (Hass, 1998, p. 39) of national memorials, are read out at commemorative events, captured in song, sanctified in lists, and printed in newspapers. In this age, the sacralization (Hass, 1998, p. 39) of the names of the dead is so powerful that, as, Laqueur notes, ‘bodies bereft of names ... are unbearable’ (2015, p. 13). No wonder, then, the efforts made to identify nameless dead or missing – think here of the resources devoted to naming those killed in New York on 9/11 or of the continuing endeavours to identify the military dead of the two world wars. And, yet, not all the dead provoke such determined nominalist labour. What are we to make of those who do *not* qualify for public mourning or memorialization? Those whose deaths remain publically unmarked and unacknowledged?

Alongside historical work tracing the emergence of contemporary practices of naming and memorializing the dead, other scholars, many of them critical theorists, have begun to interrogate why certain of the dead are not named publically and what that non-naming portends. Perhaps the most well known of them is Judith Butler (2004, 2009). Her idea of ‘grievability’, as that which ‘precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living’ (Butler, 2009, p. 15), has become an influential framing device in such discussions, tied as it is to questions about which lives matter and which are ‘unliveable’: unsupported, devalued, or discounted socially, politically, and/or economically. Indeed, I too will draw on this frame later in this paper.

The thinker at the centre of my discussion, however, is not Butler but Jacques Rancière, who in a series of reflections on Alfredo Jaar's *The Rwanda Project*, takes up the topic of naming, including naming the dead, but does so in a highly distinctive manner. He links naming to 'counting' or the 'count', and thence to politics (*politicit *) (Rancière, 2009a, 2013). There are two features of this discussion that are particularly important for this essay. First, some critics, most notably Bonnie Honig, have suggested that Rancière's treatment of naming in relation to Rwanda entails a 'mortalist humanism' grounded in a commitment to memorialize the dead; where preserving their names is regarded as a 'universal and uncontroversial' good (2015, p. 23). As I demonstrate, a closer reading of Rancière's considerations of Jaar reveals that his is not a depoliticizing engagement with naming focused on venerating the dead at all. If anything, Rancière is just as much, if not more, interested in the invisibility and anonymity of the living, and the 'distribution of the sensible' that produces and upholds that invisibility and anonymity; hence his emphasis on the names of persons (living and dead) *and* places. Allied to his stress on counting, this broader understanding of naming sheds important empirical and theoretical light onto how the differential valuation of human life – grievability – is actively produced in specific contexts (Rwanda), through the operations, in this case, of the news media or what Rancière calls 'the system of information' (2009b, p. 96).<sup>1</sup>

The second reason I turn to Rancière is because often the question of what is political about naming is not clearly defined by those debating it. But Rancière's analysis of Jaar's art reveals explicitly how he understands such a politics. Interestingly, as I show below, the account he advances of politics in this analysis of naming does not simply replicate that set out in *Disagreement* (Rancière, 1999; see

also Rancière, 1995) but extends and supplements it in a number of ways. Before I move on, however, a clarification is in order.

Those familiar with Rancière's work might be forgiven for assuming that my reference to the politics of naming must be a reference explicitly to the role that so-called 'litigious' or 'political' (Rancière 1992, 2004) names – names such as 'human being', 'citizen', 'French women', 'plebeian' – play in subjectivation,<sup>2</sup> apprehended as the 'enactment of equality' that occasions a 'crossing of identities' dependent on 'a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or a not-yet-being' (1992, p. 61). How, to employ an oft-cited example, during the nineteenth century the name 'proletarian' was redeployed to designate not manual workers or labourers but 'the class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration in which they are counted as those of no account' (Rancière, 1999 p. 38; see also 1992, p. 61 and 1994, p. 93). As is well known, Rancière construes this type of naming central to politics, with politics equating to the operation of "'wrong" names – misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong' (1992, p. 62). It thus occurs when 'nameless' beings (those of 'no *ac/count*' who 'cannot speak'), nevertheless 'conduct themselves like beings with names' and speak anyway. In giving 'themselves names' (Rancière, 1999, pp. 23-5) – heretical, quarrelsome, polemical, or democratic names – they transgress and reconfigure dominant police logic and with it the partition of the sensible that supports and is supported by that logic.

These forms of collective political or litigious names are not my primary concern in this paper, however. For in his discussion of Jaar's artwork it is individual *proper names* that Rancière focuses on, particularly the given names of those who, to borrow from Hayden White in his Foreword to *The Names of History* (Rancière

1994), might be described as having ‘left their *anonymous* mark, their *unidentifiable* trace on the world’ (White in Rancière, 1994, p. ix); those whose history has been effaced. There are two points to note here. First, according to White, Rancière regards retrieving the history of such ‘nameless mass[es]’ as a ‘political duty’. It is a way to substantiate their claim to a ‘place in history’ (White in Rancière, 1994, p. ix; for an alternative view see also Nikulin 2012.). If White is right, then Rancière’s interest in Jaar’s naming practices in terms of both individual Rwandans and of the forgotten locations where they left marks and traces should come as no surprise.<sup>3</sup> Second, and more germane to this paper, although some readers might assume, given other remarks he makes concerning individualism and the post-democratic order, that Rancière would reject the idea of individual proper names operating as political names, in contexts such as the one under examination, this, for him, is precisely what they do. They function litigiously. They contest police logic. And, they do so in a manner similar to, though not exactly identical with, the sorts of litigious names referred to previously (viz., plebeian, citizen, and so on).<sup>4</sup>

My essay is divided into five parts. In the first section, I offer some brief introductory remarks on *The Rwanda Project*. This is the series of works, produced by Chilean-born conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar in response to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which prompted the remarks by Rancière on names examined in this paper. I then turn to these remarks themselves in section two, concentrating in particular on the essay ‘Theater of Images/ Le Théâtre des images’ (Rancière, 2007a). Here I have dual aims: first, to show that, *contra* Honig, the names that interest Rancière here are not just those of decedents but rather, following Jaar, focus more on the living and places, specifically the locations of mass killings, than on the dead. Second, to demonstrate that, for Rancière, the Western news media’s collective failure to name

the living, the dead, and genocide sites is how Rwandan anonymity and invisibility were constituted, a process predicated on and made possible by the fact that Rwandan lives had already been rendered meaningless prior to the genocide.

Rancière interprets Jaar's art as political; art that contests a particular 'count', a term that holds a very specific place in Rancière's wider deliberations on politics. The third section of the paper, therefore, focuses on these deliberations. It sets out Rancière's distinction between politics and the police, before highlighting, firstly, the separate modes of counting he associates with each term respectively and, secondly, the main characteristics of the activities he describes as politics. In the fourth section, I draw on this discussion to consider Rancière's analysis of the specific relation between naming and counting at play during the genocide and that Jaar's art subverts. I end by offering some concluding remarks on what Rancière's reflections on Jaar suggest about the politics of grievability, the politics, that is, regulating liveability.

My argument, in short, is that by reading Jaar's art through the optic of counting, so central to his own discussions of police and politics, Rancière demonstrates how practices of naming are not just policed but also political. He does so, to my mind, both when he (rather than Jaar) identifies the mechanisms through which the Western news media constitutes Rwandans as nameless statistics and when he explains how Jaar's art disrupts the particular partition of the sensible that secures their devaluation. In doing so he provides insight into the role of the news media in producing Rwandans as disposable; offers insights into the role of counting/the count in the distribution of (un)liveability within a specific context; and extends further existing discussions of the role that naming *but not just naming the dead* plays in this distribution.

*Alfredo Jaar and The Rwanda Project*

Concerned by the ‘criminal indifference from the world community’ towards the genocide in which ‘*in one hundred days up to one million people were hacked, shot, strangled, clubbed and burned to death*’ (Keane, 1996, p. 29) by Hutu militia, in August 1994 Alfredo Jaar travelled to Rwanda. While he was there, he and his assistant Carlos Vásquez met with survivors, interviewing and filming them in an effort to record their stories. Jaar also took approximately three and a half thousand photographs of ‘the most horrific things’ (Jaar in Art21, 2007) – refugee camps, mass graves, and scenes of slaughter (Chau, 2014). The visit marked the beginning of *The Rwanda Project*, a series of twenty-one pieces, comprising installations and interventions that Jaar was to work on over the next six years (1994-2000).

From a visual art perspective, Jaar’s project defies ‘the conventions of documentary photography’ (Chau, 2014) by refusing to show images of the slaughter. Instead, responding to what art historian Griselda Pollock describes as the ‘complex relays of visibility and invisibility, knowing and denial’ (2014) that surrounded the ethnic conflict in Rwanda, and indeed responses to Africa in general (Mirzoeff, 2005, p. 87), Jaar experimented with alternative ways of representing the genocide.

His first intervention, *Signs of Life* (1994), was performed while he was still in Rwanda. It involved sending some two hundred Rwandan Office of Tourism postcards, bearing the slogan ‘Rwanda – Découvrez 1000 merveilles, au pays des 1000 collines’ (‘Rwanda – Discover 1000 wonders in the land of the 1000 hills’), and depicting clichéd ‘African’ images (including pictures of zebras, impalas, eagles and lions, traditional dancers and Rwandan landscapes), to unsuspecting friends and colleagues around the world naming individual survivors of the massacres.<sup>5</sup> *Rwanda*,

*Rwanda* (1994), produced on his return for an exhibition in Malmö, Sweden, consists of four hundred prints of a photolithograph depicting the word 'Rwanda' (repeated over and over), which were then displayed at different public locations around the city (Strauss, 1998; Museum of Modern Art, 2007, p. 146). *The Silence of Nduwayezu* (1997) comprises a light table, slide magnifiers, and a million duplicates of a slide picturing the eyes of a five-year-old orphan of the genocide who retreated into silence for weeks after witnessing the Interhamwe murder his family.

Discussions of Jaar's work in the field of politics and international relations, usually concentrate on the politics, ethics, and, occasionally, aesthetics of representation; in particular, whether events such as genocide can ever be adequately represented at all or are, rather, fundamentally 'unrepresentable' (Levan, 2011; Möller 2009, 2010; Reinhardt, 2007). Questions centre on whether it is appropriate, or not, for Jaar to employ 'Western-based art practice' to represent 'subaltern culture' (Mirzoeff, 2005, p. 87); what role visual representations of suffering might play in transforming viewers from 'consuming spectators' into self-reflective 'participant witnesses' (Möller, 2010); and the extent to which Jaar's art departs from the 'representational style' typically adopted in photojournalistic accounts of Rwanda (Möller, 2009, p. 792) and thus avoids some of the latter's worst excesses. These concerns raise important questions about depicting victims of slaughter, in a context where, as John Taylor notes, 'the corpses of foreigners' tend, photo-journalistically, to be treated with less 'respect and restraint' than domestic dead (1998, p. 90) and where, as Susan Sontag observes, 'The more remote ... the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying' (2003, p. 63).

Rancière's focus is somewhat different. Although Jaar's work 'can be drawn in the direction of the unrepresentable', Rancière writes, '... I try to draw it in another



direction' (2013, p. 81; on the question of the 'unrepresentable' see Rancière 2007b, Chapter 5). He does so by framing his discussion in terms of the politicity of Jaar's art. A politicity that is 'a matter of counting' (Rancière, 2009b, p. 97): how, specifically, a certain policed way of 'counting' (or the 'count' of a particular police order) constructs the people of Rwanda as invisible and nameless and how Jaar's artwork subverts that construction, in effect reframing the 'distribution of the sensible' that constitutes and supports it. I focus, in this paper, both on what this reveals about Rancière's understanding of both the policing and the politics of naming and namelessness and what it suggests about a wider politics of grievability and which lives matter – or not.

#### *Rancière on Jaar's The Rwanda Project*

In the interview 'Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity' (Baronian and Rosello, 2008), Rancière states that: 'What is not visible, what had to be made visible [in Jaar's art], was that the victims of this mass murder [the Rwandan genocide] were all individuals. They had to be given their names, an inscription in the order of discourse and memorial, because indifference to all these deaths in fact prolongs a certain invisibility, the feeling that these lives are external to the world of discourse' (p. 8).<sup>6</sup> Some critics, Bonnie Honig foremost amongst them, have taken this particular statement to mean that Rancière 'approves of artistic practices of commemoration that focus on naming the dead' (2013, p. 20).<sup>7</sup> But appearances, we know, are often deceptive, and so it proves in relation to Rancière. The names that concern both Jaar and Rancière are not simply those of the dead; in fact, both make relatively little, if any, explicit mention of these names in their work. Rather as Rancière makes clear in the sentence prior to the one just cited, Jaar's Rwandan works proceed 'by picturing

and presenting various words: the names of places and persons' (Rancière in Baronian and Rosello, 2008, p. 8), the latter of which, as both *Signs of Life* and *The Silence of Nduwayezu* demonstrate, involve the names of the living.

In the catalogue essay, 'Theater of Images/Le Théâtre des images' (Rancière, 2007a), Rancière's most extensive discussion of *The Rwanda Project*, he reiterates the point made in his interview with Marie-Aude Baronian and Mireille Rosello that namelessness entails indifference, but here he is far more explicit about the types of names that concern Jaar and himself. He highlights, in particular, the significance of Jaar's naming of certain places, specifically the sites associated with the genocide in Rwanda:

where mass crime is concerned, there is a hierarchy: a hierarchy of names. Everyone knows the name Auschwitz, even those who deny what happened there. Conversely, nobody has thought of denying the Rwandan genocide, but we nonetheless resist giving a meaning to those names that another installation by Alfredo Jaar, *Signs of Light*, forces us to look at [...] Butare, Amahoro, Cyanhinda, Cyangugu (Rancière, 2007a, p. 75).<sup>8</sup>

In order for these names 'to speak to us', he continues, 'they have to be visible' (Rancière, 2007a, p. 75).<sup>9</sup> In that same essay, he reflects on *Signs of Life*, noting the importance, for Jaar, of 'speaking about a few unknown living people' as a means 'to signify the massacre no one wanted to see' with its 'unnoticed mass death' (Rancière, 2007a, p. 74). As Rancière makes clear, therefore, naming for Jaar is not an exercise in memorializing the dead. Rather Jaar's art proposes another way of perceiving and interpreting events in Rwanda (see Rancière 2013, pp. 78-9), one that opens up to

critique what Rancière calls the ‘count’, with its ensuing (in)visibilities, that occluded Rwanda, its people, and the genocide from (‘Western’) public discourse.

The terms of this occlusion become particularly clear in another of Jaar’s works, *Untitled (Newsweek)*. In this installation Jaar matches the covers of *Newsweek* magazine to what was happening during the same week in Rwanda, including to the growing tally of those killed and displaced in the slaughter. The cover for May 16 1994, ‘Men, Women, and Computers’, is thus juxtaposed with information showing that on ‘May 13, 1994 – More than 30,000 bodies wash down the Kagera River’; the cover from 30 May 1994, featuring the death of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, is paired with an entry indicating (amongst other things) ‘400,000 deaths’; while the cover from 25 July 1994, entitled ‘To Walk on Mars’, is accompanied by the following statistics: ‘One million people have been killed and 2 million have fled the country. Another 2 million are displaced within Rwanda’. It is only on 1 August 1994, seventeen weeks after the genocide began and two weeks *after it ended*, that *Newsweek* finally puts Rwanda on its front cover, with the strapline ‘Hell on Earth: Racing Against Death in Rwanda’ and an image of the very massacred corpses Jaar refused to show.<sup>10</sup> This is Rancière’s commentary: ‘every week for the entire duration of the massacre, *Newsweek* had something more interesting to show its readers on its covers’ (2007a, p. 72). Its editors, those responsible for deciding what its readers should see, elected not to focus on the genocide. Instead ‘our media’, he writes, ‘concealed the images of the massacre [...] left them aside as things that did not directly concern us’ (Rancière, 2007a, p. 72). In short, ‘those whose job it is to be informers’ (Pollock, 2014), actively chose not to reveal what was happening in Rwanda.

Although Jaar focuses only on the covers of *Newsweek*, not its content, where a small number of short reports on Rwanda did appear (see Cohen, 2007), the volume *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide* confirms the overall point. ‘Confronted by Rwanda’s horrors’, its editor writes, ‘Western news media for the most part turned away’ (Thompson, 2007, p. xi). In the US, as Steven Livingston notes in the same volume, ‘O.J. Simpson’s trial received more American network news coverage than the systematic murder of over 800,000 people’ (2007, p. 194). Anne Chaon talking of France, a country with a strong colonial relationship with Rwanda, observes: ‘What we saw in the media in France was similar to that in North America. There was very little coverage of the genocide’. The French, it seems, were more ‘concerned by the death of Ayrton Seyna (*sic*), the Brazilian formula 1 driver’ than Rwanda (Chaon, 2007, p. 162; see also, for instance, Dowden, 2004, Livingston, 2007; Myers et al, 1996).<sup>11</sup>

For Rancière, Jaar’s art points not merely to the ‘silence of the world community’ (Jaar in Art21, 2007) – or the Western news media, specifically – towards the genocide, a factor that allowed it to proceed unabated. It draws attention to how, prior to the genocide, the anonymity and invisibility of living Rwandans had already been fashioned. It offers a tale of their effacement and abnegation. ‘If it is possible for these crimes to be carried out without affecting us,’ Rancière writes, ‘it is because they related to living beings who already did not affect us, individuals whose names were meaningless to us’ (2007a, p. 75). In the West, even before the genocide, living, breathing, sentient Rwandans, in fact Africans in general, were already, disavowed as ‘people who do not have a name’ (Rancière, 2007a, p. 75). The Western news media already, in other words, treated them as nameless. No surprise then that this anonymization is further amplified and consolidated as the genocide unfolded,

when little to no meaningful information appeared in this media about the living and the dead were reduced to a series of wretched, anonymous statistics.

In his responses to and commentary on Jaar's work, Rancière, in places, recycles the same concepts Jaar himself uses in his own rare elaborations on *The Rwanda Project*, particularly the idea of indifference (see, for instance, Jaar in Art21, 2007 and in Phillips, 2005). But when Rancière comes to explain what is at stake in the constitution of Rwandans as nameless, he speculates that it is the result of a specific way of counting, one that Jaar's art breaks with. And so Rancière describes Jaar, variously, as an artist whose work sits 'at the pivotal interface between the word, the visible, and the count' (2007a, p. 74), explores the 'political count of what is worth counting' (2007a, p. 75) and, in making visible the genocide no one was interested in, actively opposes 'one way of counting to another' (2007a, p. 72; see also Rancière 2009b, pp. 97-8). These are telling interjections, because the lexicon of counting (which includes but is not limited to terms such as 'the count', 'false count', 'miscount', 'the uncounted', 'the count of the uncounted', being of '(no) ac/count', 'countable', and 'counting') is central to Rancière's understanding of politics and police.

To understand why Rancière interprets Jaar as a 'political artist' (Rancière, 2007a, p. 72), therefore, it is first necessary to grasp how the former conceptualizes politics and how this conceptualization relates to counting. I start with how he differentiates politics from police.

#### *Police and politics: Two modes of counting*

According to Rancière police designates 'an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying ... It is an order of the visible

and the sayable' (1999, p. 29. For further discussion of Rancière's thought see, e.g. Chambers, 2010, 2013; Deranty, 2010; May, 2008, 2010, 2012; and Tanke, 2011). It focuses on the rules that regulate corporeal appearance and thus relates to what Rancière calls '*le partage du sensible*'. Translated variously as the 'distribution' or 'partition of the sensible', this is a complex term that denotes both the division of the perceptible (what is knowable, thinkable, visible, intelligible, audible as speech and so on) and, since *partager* also means to share, the basis for participation in political community. (For further discussion see Panagia, 2010.) Police, in Rancière's understanding, is a system of distribution that (amongst other things) establishes hierarchical relations between persons, a specific way of organizing the social order that, according to Samuel Chambers, includes policy-making, 'parliamentary legislation, executive orders, judicial decisions, and the vast array of economic arrangements' (2010, p. 61). Notably, in terms of my argument, it also has its own distinctive mode of counting.

As Rancière states in 'Ten Theses on Politics', a police order 'counts empirical parts only'; that is, 'actual groups defined by differences in birth, and by the different functions, places and interests that make up the social body to the exclusion of every supplement' (2001, ¶19). Police thus divides up the social world in such a way that everyone has a designated part in it, though not all parts are equal. It is an order 'that admits of no remainder' (Chambers, 2013, p. 72). Rancière identifies the first instance of police in Plato's *Republic* with its hierarchical, tripartite social division comprising guardians (rulers or the so-called 'philosopher-kings' and 'queens'), auxiliaries (warriors) and producers (farmers, artisans, and so on). Each of the three classes has its own distinct role (governing, defending, labouring), soul (based on ratiocination, spirit or appetite), characteristics (love of knowledge, honour,

or money), and virtues (wisdom, courage, and moderation), ‘the sensory and intellectual equipment appropriate to that place and duty’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 42). For Plato, justice is served exclusively when each class, and in particular the labouring class, performs only the work for which it is best suited.

Politics, by contrast, is ‘an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 29), focused on ‘whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it ... makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only noise’. It is, in essence, whatever undoes or interrupts the ‘perceptible divisions of the police order’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 30); that, to put it differently, challenges and reconfigures extant ways of doing, being, and saying. Politics also has its own unique way of counting: “‘in addition’” to the empirical parts making up the police, it ‘counts a part of the no-part’ (Rancière, 2001, ¶19) or, as Rancière puts it elsewhere, ‘a part of those who have no part’ (2004, p. 305).

Who, though, are the ‘uncounted’, those without part, given my earlier remark that in a police order everyone has their assigned place? The answer lies in Rancière’s equation of politics with democratic politics *qua* the politics of the *demos*, those whom Aristotle referred to as men who ‘had no part in anything’ (cited in Rancière, 1999, p. 9; see also Rancière 2010, p. 213), and whom Rancière, referring back to classical Greek usage, describes as ‘men of no position’. The *demos* are those who lacked the necessary attributes for governance, those with ‘no qualification for ruling’ (Rancière, 2004, p. 305; see also May, 2012, p. 120) within an existing police order. And yet who, despite this lack of qualification nevertheless act politically by making a claim to be counted. In so doing, they disrupt, destabilize, and reshape the police order. Politics (which, for Rancière, is always democratic politics) happens when

‘those who have no right to be counted...make themselves of some account’

(Rancière, 1999, p. 27).

There are five further points to note about Rancière’s narrative, which I simply want to stipulate for now. First, against the oligarchic structure of the police, crucially politics asserts the ‘equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 30). Politics, we might say, is the performative demonstration of the radical equality at the heart of democracy. Second, the ‘essence’ of politics is ‘*dissensus*’ (Rancière, 2001, ¶24): a dispute over ‘what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given’ (Rancière, 2004, p. 304); a disagreement, in other words, about the prevailing partition of the sensible, such that a new order of visibility, audibility and intelligibility, a new partition, becomes possible. Third, politics thus requires the identification of a wrong. Simply put, this means a dispute, based on the presupposition of equality, over how the community is presently counted, which in turn exposes and denaturalizes the prevailing inegalitarian social order.

Next, Rancière couples political dissensus with what he calls, somewhat allusively, a ‘miscount’. As he explains in the *Politics of Literature*, a miscount puts ‘into circulation beings in excess of any functional body count’; beings, that is, in excess of the ‘ordered account of social bodies, their places and functions’ prescribed by the police count (Rancière, 2011, p. 41). Politics takes place, in other words, when an existing police count is challenged and found to be a ‘wrong count of the parts of the whole’ (Rancière, 1999, p. 10). The point is not that the uncounted are now counted according to the arithmetic logic governing the police order. They are not included into the existing count. A miscount occurs when the uncounted – those not deemed capable of political speech – speak, when they stage a dissensus. (Another



way to put this is to say that it is when the demos, those who are definitionally unqualified to exercise power, nevertheless exercise it.) At such moments ‘another count’ is introduced, a *supplementary* count, that ‘confuses the right ordering of policy’ (Rancière, 1992, p. 59); the ‘right’ ordering being that which posits that the demos are unqualified to exercise power.

And, so lastly, politics results in subjectivation. In Rancièrian terms, this is a dual process that involves the people/*demos* (those acting politically) both in a ‘disidentification’ from (or rejection of) those identities, capacities, and interests legitimated by the police order and in the constitution ‘through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable’ within the prevailing partition of the sensible (1999, p. 35. For amplification of this idea see pp. 35-42). In short, as Todd May puts it, ‘a *we*’, a new political subject, ‘emerges where there was none before’ (2010, p. 78). To recall our earlier discussion: this where ‘political’ or ‘litigious’ names of the ilk of proletarian and citizen come into operation.

I will return to the substance of these comments towards the end of the paper. For now, I want to go back to Rancière’s discussion of Jaar.

### *Naming as a matter of counting*

Drawing from this vernacular of counting, Rancière asserts in *The Politics of Aesthetics* that Jaar’s artwork breaks, in effect, with a given policed way of counting: that ‘partition between the part of the world that is constituted by individuals and the part of the world that is constituted by the anonymous masses’ where ‘usually the victim is the one who has no name and no individuality’ (2013, p. 79). This is a partition, a way of ‘perceiving and counting’ (Rancière, 2005, pp. 46-7), not limited to Rwanda, that distinguishes between an undifferentiated and nameless multitude, on

one side, a description very similar to the one Rancière gives of the *demos* in *Disagreement* (1999, p. 8), and those who are recognizable as ‘individuals’ on the other: people, that is, who ‘have names and a place in history’ (Rancière, 2013, p. 79). It entails a division, a hierarchical ordering, that treats the deaths of named individuals such as Nixon or Onassis differently to ‘those hundreds of thousands of people we have never heard of, and who have been killed in far-away places with strange-sounding names’ (Rancière, 2007a, p. 74).

Rancière identifies a number of devices the news media deployed during the genocide to bolster this particular partition of the sensible or count. First, it utilized a ‘number system peculiar to victims’ that counted them only ‘in hundreds of thousands’ (2007a, p. 77). This is a metric that treated those of no account simply as abstract statistics. In contrast, it regarded individuals as singular and unique, and their experiences as significant. Secondly, as he reports in *The Emancipated Spectator*, ‘the visual’ is made ‘the lot of multitudes and the verbal the privilege of a few’. In this ‘dominant logic’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 97), Rwandans could only appear, when they appeared at all, as anonymous victims in photographs or footage of mass killings, not as individuals with names whose personal histories could be reported in words.

Third, in line with his contention that police orders are inegalitarian, Rancière notes that television news media, in general, is highly selective in what it broadcasts, actively ordering and limiting what it shows by way of images of ‘massacres, massive population transfers and the other horrors that go to make up our planet’s present’; usually preferring instead to show the ‘faces of the rulers, experts and journalists who comment on the images, who tell us what they show and what we should make of them’.<sup>12</sup> It acts thus, he suggests, because it assumes that ‘not just anyone is capable of seeing and speaking’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 96; see also 2007a, p. 75); that it alone

has the capacity to choose authoritative images. Consequently, in relation to Rwanda, the few anonymous bodies that were shown were presented as objects rather than subjects of speech and as spoken about rather than as (capable of) speaking themselves; they were represented, we might say, as passive victims not political agents.<sup>13</sup>

Rancière's analysis reveals that counting and naming are connected in a very specific way in the prevailing police order. Those of account, 'individuals' or more specifically the 'individuals of advanced societies' (Rancière, 2005, p. 48), are publically nameable in death and life, and their (hi)stories relatable, while those of no account, the 'masses', and especially non-Western 'victims', must remain anonymous for the 'count is not the same' for them: the life of an individual' and the lives of the 'multiple' (Rancière, 2009b, 98) are not of equal value. As he puts it in 'The Nameless War', discussing a different context: American versus Serbian and Albanian lives during the war in Kosovo, they simply 'do not compare' (Rancière, 2005, p. 47).

When, therefore, Jaar in his art provides a proper name and some form of 'singular history' (Rancière, 2009c, p. 130) for those affected by the Rwandan genocide, those living and dead members of the indistinguishable, interchangeable *demos*; when he writes about them, identifying who they are and what happened to them (as he does in *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*);<sup>14</sup> when he names the sites of genocide; when he produces installations in which words 'take the place of photographs because the latter would still be the photographs of anonymous victims of mass violence' (Rancière, 2009b, p. 97);<sup>15</sup> and when he selects his own images to 'set against' those of the 'dominating information system' (Rancière, 2007a, p. 75), the eyes of Nduwayezu, for instance, who saw the genocide first hand, Rancière

adjudges his work to be ‘political, if politics in the first instance consists in the changing of places and the counting of bodies’ (2009b, p. 97). At such moments, Rancière notes in ‘Do Pictures Really Want to Live?’, Jaar’s ‘words tell us the identity and the story of the absent bodies, that is to say they give them another body, a [named] body endowed with a singular history in the place of the anonymous body of the victim of mass slaughter’ (Rancière, 2009c, p. 130).

Recalling the discussion in the previous section, when *The Rwanda Project* does all of the above, when, in particular, it names living Rwandans, it performatively demonstrates – in Rancière’s vocabulary, verifies and assumes – the equality at the core of democracy (see Rancière, 1991, p. 137; 1999, p. 33). When Jaar’s art disputes aspects of the present partition of the sensible it identifies a wrong. When it upsets the naturalized order of the governing information system, rearranging both the prevailing policed relation between the masses and singular individuals, and that between the verbal and the visual, it stages a dissensus, albeit in a form particular to art (see Rancière, 2009b, p. 66). When it counts the uncounted, those Rancière describes in *Disagreement* not just as ‘beings of no ac/count’, the phrase usually invoked in discussions of his politics, but also as ‘nameless beings’ (1999, p. 24), it involves a miscount.

Bearing in mind Rancière’s conceptualization of politics, what Jaar’s art does not – indeed cannot – do directly is generate a new collective political subject, what the former refers to in the language of counting as a ‘supernumerary subject’ (Rancière, 2013, p. 47). In large part, this is because the art in question, and the specific practice of naming and so forth that takes place via it, is not initiated by the *demos* themselves. It does not, that is, result from an act of politics by the uncounted. The political potency of Jaar’s art – its politicicity – rests rather in its capacity to alter

our sense of what is thinkable and possible, its ‘reframing of the sensory community’ (Rancière, 2008, p. 180; see also 2009a, p. 25), in what that makes possible. (On the distinction in Rancière’s work between politics and ‘politicalness’ or politicity see also Chambers, 2016. On the relationship between art/aesthetics and politics see Rancière 2009a, 2009b, and 2013; and also Rockhill 2009; and Ross 2010.)

Art is not political, for Rancière, then, because it communicates a political message about the world, represents ‘society’s structure, or social groups, their conflict or identities’ (Rancière, 2009a, p. 23), or conceives of itself as a form of activism (Rancière, 2013). As he notes, in *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, it is by ‘bringing about a reframing of material and symbolic space... that art bears upon politics’ (Rancière, 2009a, p. 24). Dissensual art, in other words, is art that unsettles what is obvious, ordinary, or taken-for-granted, what is thinkable, feasible, or perceptible; art that produces experiences that denaturalize the existing partition of the sensible by interrupting the ‘normal’ association between elements, as well as by expanding the parameters of what is audible and visible through the generation of what Tanke calls a ‘sensorium antagonistic to the dominant order’ (2011, p. 105). It is art that alters ‘the field of the possible’ (Rancière, 2009a, p. 49), generating ‘new possibilities of collective enunciation’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 72) and creating opportunities for dis-identification, all of which have the potential to ‘corroborate the action undertaken by political subjects to reconfigure what are given to be facts’ (Rancière, 2013, p. 60).

Art’s politicacy, thus, resides not in subjectivation *per se* but in its capacity to open up ‘new passages *towards* new forms of political subjectivation’ (Rancière, 2009b, p. 82, my emphasis) and to free ‘political possibilities’ (Rancière, 2013, p. 61), though it is not possible to anticipate these effects in advance. They are, at best,

uncertain, ‘undecidable’ (Rancière, 2009a, p. 60; 2013, p. 60). Hence, Rancière’s refusal to endorse a normative – or criteria-based – idea(l) of what art ‘has to do’ to be political (2013, p. 79; see also 2013, p. 60).<sup>16</sup>

When Rancière approves of Jaar’s ‘artistic practice’, therefore, it is not, as has been surmised (Honig, 2013, p. 20), because he supports a universal practice of commemorating all unknown dead by naming them. Far from it: the issue for Rancière is not one of humanism. It is a matter of politics. By invoking his own analytical framework of the count in explanation, Rancière makes clear that he understands Jaar’s art to be political; political in that, in contesting certain mediated naming practices, it disrupts the particular partition of the sensible, the count, that distributes naming and namelessness in inegalitarian and hierarchical ways such that Rwandan lives (and life-events) are constituted as less important, less valuable than those of other populations; but political also, it seems to me, in its staging of equality when it treats Rwandans as nameable individuals with a ‘place in history’ (White in Rancière, 1994, p. ix), and in its opening up of new sensible possibilities.

### *Names, namelessness and the order of grievability*

At the outset of this paper, I intimated that in addition to discussing the politics and policing of naming and namelessness identified by Rancière in his work on Jaar that my aim was also to consider what that discussion might add to an understanding of grievability – apprehended in terms of the conditions that make a life possible as a liveable life. I want to end this paper by returning to this second set of concerns.

Grievability is intrinsically connected with the idea of liveability. It thus relates to ‘the normative conditions that must be fulfilled for a life to become life’ (Butler, 2004, p. 39), by which is meant a bearable, viable, legitimate life. It offers, in

my view, a framework for thinking about two inter-related phenomena. The first are the social and material conditions and norms necessary to sustain a life that is (biopolitically) recognizable as intelligible, valuable, rights-bearing, and worth protecting; that is, one ‘eligible for social and economic support, housing, health care, employment, rights of political expression, forms of social recognition, and conditions of political agency’ (Butler, 2015, p. 198). The second, which is more pertinent to my present concerns, is the production of those different ‘modes of “unlivability”’ (Butler, 2015, p. 201) that constitute the lives of certain persons or populations as ‘dispensable’ or ‘ungrievable’, and ‘*not* worth safeguarding, protecting, and valuing’ (Butler, 2015, p. 197). Taken together, they demonstrate how life is fundamentally political in that it is lived, amongst other things, ‘in relation to power’ (Butler, 2004, p. 226).

First, Rancière’s analytic of counting, understood in its broadest sense, provides a helpful frame for exploring both how society is organized, such that some people’s lives are constituted as being more significant politically than others, and also how it might be dis-organized through the introduction of another count. This frame, as exemplified above, offers insight into what, in other work, I call *orders of grievability* (Lloyd, 2017), a term that self-consciously draws from both Butler and Rancière. Broadly, this idea refers to the social arrangements (policies, institutional practices, media conventions, counting mechanisms and so forth) that determine who, within a particular order, for there may be several in existence at once, might be thought of, in Butler’s sense, as meaningfully human; that is, who has a life that is supported and secured politically, socially and materially. It thus encompasses the (sexed, gendered, and racializing) norms regulating who enjoys ontological status as human (an aspect missing from Rancière’s discussion of Rwanda).<sup>17</sup> It includes but is

not reducible to hierarchies of death or grief, in that each order includes historical, ontological and epistemological assumptions about who qualifies as having a liveable life.

In addition, the term orders of grievability incorporates what Rancière refers to as a partition of the sensible: a temporally and geopolitically specific distribution of bodies and capabilities, designating what in determinate contexts it is possible for people to see, say, do, be, and think. But perhaps what Rancière's work offers, more than anything, by way of understanding how grievability is policed, is a way to think about the metric, the particular 'count', that establishes the hierarchical ranking of different lives in specific societies and how that oligarchic classification might be disrupted politically so as to make possible a reorganization on a more egalitarian basis of the conditions of liveability.

Second, and linked to this, is his analysis of how the lives of Rwandans during the genocide were not just constituted but naturalized as disposable, by the Western news media. Rancière provides politically valuable insight into its role in the partitioning of the sensible that (re)produced Rwandans as anonymous beings whose mass deaths it figured as inconsequential and unexceptional. To recap, this involved highlighting how this mediated order saved its words for individuals while reducing to objects of speech nameless 'African' bodies, bodies whose lives had already been constituted as dispensable; determined the differential status accorded to particular bodies within the prevailing system of visibility and the 'kind of attention they merit[ed]' (Rancière, 2009a, p. 99); and aligned Rwanda's living and dead to a victim-centric fatality metric. All of which, taken together, aided not only actively producing Rwandans as anonymous but also in perpetuating the international indifference that allowed their slaughter and displacement to continue undiminished.



This exploration usefully supplements Butler's own more limited and general discussion of the media's public disavowal of certain deaths and, consequently, their constitution as 'ungrievable'.

Finally, Rancière's reflections on Jaar on Rwanda point towards multiple links between naming and liveability. These links extend beyond which of the dead qualify for public naming, as in most necronominalist accounts, to considerations of which of the living so-qualify. Innovatively, they also point to a geopolitical hierarchy of names that determines which places – and events – are recalled and which are rendered invisible, forgettable and unknowable. In this way, Rancière suggests a more expansive and nuanced account of the policing and politics of naming than is operative, for instance, in the work of Butler. The fact, in particular, that Rancière does not limit himself to questions of naming the dead is crucial here. If proper names matter to Rancière, it is not because they have any intrinsic humanist value *per se*. It is because of the role they play in certain inegalitarian systems of police (ac)counting,

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<sup>1</sup> Rancière does not elaborate precisely what he means by ‘the media’ in these discussions, however, his adjudications refer almost exclusively to the news media, and particularly its broadcast form(s),

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which he treats very generally. This lack of specificity means that his work risks both over-generalizing and treating the media as monolithic in its operations when it is not necessarily so.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the term ‘subjectivation’ follows that established by Samuel Chambers in *The Lessons of Rancière* (2013: 98-101) as the most appropriate rendition for the French word *subjectivation* that Rancière employs.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for reminding me of White’s words.

<sup>4</sup> See the section, ‘Naming as a matter of counting’, for further discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Each of the postcards sent by Jaar includes the wording X (such as Fidel Munyurangabo or Jean Marie Nyawenda) ‘is still alive’. For reproductions of the artworks discussed in this paper see Jaar (1998). For further discussion of them, see Strauss (1998).

<sup>6</sup> Rancière’s use of ‘individual’ in this context does not connote the individual of liberalism, the pre-given, autonomous being present in the state of nature. In fact, he critiques this idea. For him, the individual is the by-product of a specific partition of the sensible, one that renders others invisible as such. I am grateful to Samuel Chambers for suggesting this clarification.

<sup>7</sup> In *Antigone, Interrupted*, Honig casts doubt on whether naming the dead is political or whether, it is the expression of ‘one of humanism’s most fundamental commitments – to memorialize and bury the human and prevent its degradation and erasure’ (2013: 20) and thus constitutes a flight away from politics. She reads Rancière’s reflections on Jaar as evidence that he ‘approves of artistic practices of commemoration that focus on naming the dead’, and thus as evidence of a ‘qualified endorsement’ of humanism (Honig 2013: 20). Her argument rests on interpreting remarks Rancière makes in the interview from which I quote later (Baronian and Rosello 2008) as being exclusively about the dead when, in fact, they are not. The other thinker under discussion at this point, and who is Honig’s main target, is Judith Butler. Elsewhere in *Antigone, Interrupted*, Honig draws extensively from Rancière in developing her own critical position.

<sup>8</sup> Jaar also names Gikongoro, Kigali, Kibungo, Mibirizi, Rukara, and Shangi. Many of the genocidal killings that took place at these locations occurred in churches where people had fled for sanctuary (see Keane 1996).

<sup>9</sup> It is possible from his description – of ‘letters of white light against a black ground’ (Rancière 2008: 75) – that Rancière might be referring to *Let There Be Light*, one element of which is a series of ten black light boxes each displaying the name of a genocide site ‘made of light’ (Strauss 1998 np), rather than to *Signs of Light*, where the names were projected onto various buildings in Lyon. In analytical terms, since the names projected in both cases are the same ones, Rancière’s comments are equally applicable to both.

<sup>10</sup> Other covers featured the death of Richard Nixon, ‘The Myth of Generation X’, ‘The Search for the Magic Pill’, Nelson Mandela and Black Power, the celebration of the D Day landings, a crusade in support of American values, a new treatment for cancer, suicide, and the America’s Cup – ‘Playing host to the world’.

<sup>11</sup> By the time coverage began, nearly three weeks into the violence, ‘some 250,000 Tutsi had already been massacred’ (Kuperman 2007: 256). One of the problems when the genocide was reported was that the news media ‘muddled the story’ (Thompson 2007: xi) by, amongst other things, constructing it as ‘the result of ancient tribal hatreds’ (Melvern 2001: 91). Another was that it focused on the side-effects of the genocide, including the ensuing evacuation of Westerners, problems of population displacement, the refugee camps in Tanzania and later in Zaire, outbreaks of cholera in the Zairean camps, and the deaths of Belgian soldiers.

<sup>12</sup> The backdrop for Rancière’s remarks is the widespread contention, which he rejects, that the media show too many images of suffering bodies, a superfluity alleged to have the dual effect of desensitizing the viewer to pain and distress and to banalizing horror (cf. Sontag 1979 versus Linfield 2010). His argument is that if too much of anything is shown it is ‘too many nameless bodies’ (2009b: 96; see also Rancière 2007: 71 and 2007b, particularly the last chapter).

<sup>13</sup> We might understand the distinction alluded to here by Rancière as that between *logos*, the meaning-defining language of the polity, and *phônê*, unintelligible noise, the point being that the nameless, beings of no ac/count, are not assumed to be capable of logos, that is of meaningful speech (1999: 24, 40).

<sup>14</sup> In this piece, Jaar uses two light boxes side by side. First, ten lines of text are projected in each panel for 45 seconds; they tell what happened to Emerita and her husband, Tito Kahinamura (killed by machete), her sons Muhoza (10) and Matirigari (7), both murdered, and her daughter Marie Louise Unumararunga (12), who managed to escape with Emerita. Then five lines appear in each panel for 30 seconds; they describe her eyes (‘lost and incredulous’) and face (wearing the ‘unbelievable tragedy’ she witnessed). This text disappears to be replaced by two lines in each box, lasting for 15 seconds that

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state 'I remember her eyes. The eyes of Gutete Emerita'. After which, Emerita's eyes appear close up, one in each frame, before swiftly disappearing. Then the whole cycle starts over (Jaar 1998).

<sup>15</sup> The point is actually slightly more complex than it might at first sight appear. It is not that Jaar uses words *instead* of visual images in his art installations. It is rather that his compositions combine photographs and words – both forms of image – in ways that lead to what Rancière depicts as 'forms of redistribution of the elements of representation', where words substitute for visual forms and visual forms substitute for words, and in which the relation between 'small number and large numbers' is reconfigured (2009b: 97; see also Rancière 2008).

<sup>16</sup> In an interview, Rancière suggests that the politicity of visual art consists in its efforts to 'change the landscape of the visible, the modes of presence, the modes of evidence of the visible' whereas literature 'tries to [...] subvert the way in which words usually function, convey meanings, and produce acts' (Rancière 2008: 180).

<sup>17</sup> Vitally, Rancière fails to consider the significance of historically specific norms of race in partitioning the sensible. That is, he identifies a number system peculiar to 'victims' *in general*, which includes 'victims of mass crimes and forced migrations', both in Rwanda and without, the 'million immigrants turned back by the Finnish authorities', as well as victims of Auschwitz (Rancière 2008: 77), and so occludes the 'racialization' of the police count that posits Rwandans, in particular, and indeed black African populations in general, as anonymous statistics rather than individuals with distinctive personal histories. (See also Sparks 2016.)