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**SLAVERY IN PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE: ALAIN BADIOU,
JACQUES RANCIÈRE, AND THE MILITANT INTELLECTUAL FROM
THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

WHAT IS ALLEGORIZED IN PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE?

In this article I argue that Plato's allegory of the cave dramatizes democracy's dependency on slavery. Plato's cave forces the theatre, the political space of ancient Greek representation, to confront its material dependency upon a space from which it is otherwise visually and territorially separated: the mines where intensive use was made of slave labor. As many have argued, the most salient aspects of Plato's allegory of the cave are the complete absence of *lexis* (speech) and *praxis* (action), the evacuation of the acoustic and the distortion of the visual.¹ These are also the most decisive features when delimiting the border between the free and the unfree in Greek antiquity:

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Slavery in Plato's Allegory of the Cave

Do you think these prisoners have ever seen anything of themselves and one another besides the shadows that the fire casts on the wall of the cave in front of them? . . . And if they could engage in discussion with one another, don't you think they would assume that the words they used applied to the things they see passing in front of them?²

Socrates asks these questions of Glaucon, dramatizing the audiovisual impairment that governs life in the cave. Glaucon can only respond affirmatively, as those he characterizes as “strange prisoners” have remained absolutely immobile for their whole lives, after having their legs and necks chained and fixed, since childhood, in the same place. According to the allegory, only an undefined force of compulsion could free these strange prisoners from their bondage, and compel them to stand up, turn their heads, and look up toward the light, where truth is to be found.³ The philosopher is born by means of this journey, by leaving the obscurity of the cave and reaching the light outside. Plato certainly intended the allegory as a short biographical account of the philosopher.⁴ But the philosopher must descend again, as the individual soul is ultimately dependent on the sociopolitical one. In other words, the philosopher emerges not in a vacuum but in a historical context, one from which the living soul can never be fully excised. It is this context that Plato brings together in one image, refusing the spatial separation that allows Athenian democracy to portray its public sphere as the site of freedom by relegating labor to the presumably depoliticized space of the cave. Hence, the philosopher carries a practical mission when forced to undertake the opposite journey, that of liberating his fellow prisoners from their bondage. Back in the cave, however, philosophical persuasion proves limited in its capacity to convince others that what they see are but the shadows of real freedom, difficult as it is for them to confront the material conditions of enslavement upon which their freedom rests. Knowing theatre to be more suitable to the task, Plato invents what Martin Puchner has called a “drama of ideas,” a theatre in which philosophical ideas are dramatized by conceptual characters.⁵

The allegory of the cave is Plato's most powerful idea, his critique of Greek democracy, and, I argue, his way of dramatizing the material dependency of “freedom” in the polis upon slavery in the mines of Greek antiquity. It is in the mines, after all, where slave labor was extensively used and where prisoners—quite often acquired through war waged far away (i.e., “strange prisoners”)—were literally chained, working invisibly and unheard by the society for whom they labored. It is the wealth produced by such “strange prisoners” that allows free (able-bodied adult male) Athenians to build their public spaces and enjoy sufficient leisure to attend the city's religious ceremonies, including the theatre. Such is the context from which the newborn philosopher seeks emancipation. Plato would claim the same material dependency upon institutionalized injustice for philosophy itself. The allegory does not open with the description of Socrates's first city in Book II of *The Republic*, the sort of self-sufficient polis that exhausts the activity of its members in the collective satisfaction of their most basic needs. Philosophy is absent from that city. The allegory opens with the second, unhealthy—feverish—city, in which some are enslaved for others to be able to enjoy their leisure.⁶

This is the tragedy of Plato's text, to have placed philosophy not in the first but in the second city, because injustice had already been institutionalized and intellectuals were needed to repair the damaged soul of the polis. Plato was a materialist philosopher from the beginning; philosophy springs from the material injustice of the system in need of redress. Guardians were needed to invade other countries in order to appropriate their products and their producers, so as to provide for the luxurious city. These workers were, then, literally chained in order to work in the real caves of the democratic polis, the mines where metals were extracted, just as philosophy would be entrusted with the mission of extracting the particular metal in the soul of the individual member of the polis. Plato not only makes philosophy emerge as a consequence of the material conditions that govern the feverish city, he gives to philosophy the same extractive structure as the imperial polis, reproducing an intellectual hierarchy that severely limited its emancipatory potential.

Read exclusively as an allegory of the mind, Plato's cave is often portrayed as an antipolitical space, one that does no justice to the centrality of lexis and praxis as the distinctive features of public life in the Greek polis, because it ends up privileging the rule of the expert against the deliberation of the plurality.⁷ A more troubling conception of the political emerges if one focuses, rather, on these other features of Plato's allegory. If one takes Plato at his most emancipatory, as I suggest in this article one might, Plato's allegory of the cave criticizes a romantic celebration of the Greek polis as the site of freedom by confronting the dependency of such a space upon the unfree labor that materially sustained it from those cavernous spaces, but which was decisively displaced to the nonpolitical margins.

Reinterpreting Plato's allegory of the cave as dramatizing democracy's dependency on slave labor, I speak not of the birth of the philosopher, as in the dominant readings of the allegory, but of the birth of the militant intellectual. In the world of the militant intellectual the political refers primarily to the axiom of equality and to the problem of emancipation. Equality, emancipation, intellectual militancy, and the meaning of Plato's dramatic allegories are the main attributes of Alain Badiou's and Jacques Rancière's long investments in Plato's Socratic plays, which explains why they are my main interlocutors in this article. Badiou and Rancière are, arguably, the two most important Marxist philosophers to have engaged in these issues through both the figure of Plato and the relationship between the theatrical and the political. And yet, as I argue below, they do so in ways that actually undermine their own commitments to the axiom of equality.

PLATO'S JOURNEYS IN THE CAVE AS AN ALLEGORY OF THE MILITANT INTELLECTUAL IN THE WORKS OF ALAIN BADIOU AND JACQUES RANCIÈRE

Plato embodies, for Badiou, the emancipatory ideal of a "proletarian aristocracy."⁸ For Rancière he represents the complete opposite to any ideal of emancipation; he is the archetypal philosopher of the police order. Despite the radical opposition in their reception of Plato's drama, both Rancière and Badiou depart

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from the same political premise: a radical and resolute commitment to the axiom of equality and the project of emancipation.⁹ The solution to this paradox lies in understanding Plato's political philosophy as fulfilling two very different functions for them, in their rethinking of emancipatory praxis after May 1968. Both Badiou and Rancière interpret Plato's allegory of the cave as an allegory of the intellectual. One might even conceive of Rancière's own intellectual trajectory as if matching the two journeys undertaken by the philosopher in Plato's allegory. Here is Rancière:

I belong to a generation that found itself pulled between two opposite requirements. According to the first, those who possessed an understanding of the social system had to teach it to those who suffered because of that system so as to arm them for struggle. According to the second supposed scholars were in fact ignoramuses who knew nothing about what exploitation and rebellion meant and had to educate themselves among the workers whom they treated as ignoramuses.¹⁰

One could see the two journeys that Plato describes in the allegory at work in this short biographical account of Rancière's praxis as representative of the intellectual after May 1968. The first requirement corresponds to Plato's description of the journey upward, the invention of the intellectual as the vanguard of the class consciousness of the proletariat, as the spokesperson of their exploited condition. The intellectual leaves the cave, searching for the scientific knowledge that allows her/him/them to decipher the "theological niceties" of capital,¹¹ the complicated mechanisms by which cheap labor is metamorphosed into profit, and the institutional apparatuses that support the reproduction of that system. The second requirement corresponds to Plato's description of the journey downward, the search for the truth not in a theoretical realm outside the political—that is, in scientific expertise—but in the concrete everyday life experience of workers laboring under conditions of exploitation inside the cave. Rancière takes both journeys, as does Plato's philosopher, but what he encounters is less the dark history of democratic freedom and equality in class exploitation than a more threatening axiom of equality. Interpreting the correspondence between two workers in the 1830s, Rancière gathers no sociological information about their working conditions to diagnose the history of their class subordination; rather, he witnesses a radical demonstration of equality, a form of equality that threatened the organizational structure of the cave allegory as a whole, of darkness below and lightness above.¹² In reference to the allegory, what Rancière found is that those working inside the cave had already engaged in the activities from which they were excluded, either by the assumption that they had no intellectual faculties to engage in them "properly," or by the other assumption that something truer was to be found in the exclusive labor of their hands. He discovered that workers enjoyed, although obviously in conditions of severe inequality, the individuality and leisure ostensibly reserved for those free from that very same labor. This is what Rancière identifies as the "an-arch[ic]" principle of democracy, and Badiou names the "communist hypothesis," a radical (in the sense of root) departure from the

principle of equality in which everyone is equal to everyone else, against the conditions of inequality that govern what some bodies can do and others are denied.¹³ The journey back into the cave is not, truly, a journey down, as the axiom of equality collapses the vertical structure that separates knowledge from ignorance and flattens it into a horizontal plane of equal positionality in a shared capacity to act, to appear, and to be. A different figure of the intellectual emerges from this standpoint, one in which the intellectual “designates those who work to assert everyone’s intellectual capacity,”¹⁴ undoing the very hierarchical structure that separates them as intellectuals from all other intelligent beings. To dramatize a little, the death of the philosopher is a necessary condition for the birth of the militant intellectual.

But this is only half of the story. Placed on the other side of the dialectic, once the structure of the allegory is flattened and no longer separates theory from praxis, the two journeys now describe a different understanding of intellectual militancy. From the point of view of those who have traversed the hierarchical fantasy of the allegory, which is no longer that of the philosopher in the conventional sense, the journey upward no longer corresponds to the acquisition of the necessary intellectual skills in order to speak for the multitude, for those who supposedly lack the consciousness and theoretical sophistication to articulate the conditions of their own exploitation. Similarly, the journey downward no longer exoticizes the poor as the placeholders of a deeper truth about their oppression. Within the universe of the militant, that is, of the one who inhabits the axiom of equality, the split journey of Plato’s allegory refers to two different ways of securing the subject’s commitment to that axiom. I interpret the first journey as corresponding to Badiou’s conception of philosophy as an ethical form of binding the subject to a notion of the good, another way of understanding, in his language, the philosopher’s fidelity to the truth of the revolutionary event.¹⁵ The second journey I link to Rancière’s conception of the political as the verification of equality in conditions of inequality through the enactment of a disagreement with the count of the parts that constitute the community. In the first journey the subject gets incorporated into the truth, the very idea of the equality of all. In the second the subject verifies the axiom of equality by means of an action that troubles who counts and who is uncounted for in the established order that contradicts that truth. The first journey is ethical, the second political. The first seeks mastery and aristocracy in the knowledge of the good; the second revalues ignorance and rejoins the commons in conditions of equality. The true philosopher, as Badiou continues to name this figure, is born in the first journey but must die in the second so that the militant intellectual may fully emerge.

Though it would be comforting if we could endorse the story I have just articulated and thus overcome the traditional problems in interpreting Plato’s allegory, this narrative is ultimately insufficient. Such a neat distribution of interpretive labor in the emancipatory horizon of the allegory depends on a problematic, prior depoliticization of Plato’s text, a reading common to Rancière and Badiou. Plato’s philosophy is animated in the present by overlooking political dimensions of the text’s contemporaneity that emerge once it is properly placed in its specific historical past.¹⁶ Understood in relation to the caves of Greek antiquity, and

specifically to the mines in which slave labor was overexploited, the silenced voices in the cave are now seen as the consequence of Athenian democracy's commitment to an imperial form of labor exploitation that is never thematized by either Badiou or Rancière.

As many classicists have argued, the allegory of the cave is both epistemological and political.¹⁷ Even where it is recognized as a core element of the status quo of Greek antiquity, the centrality of slavery to Plato's critique of the Greek polis in the allegory of the cave is frequently dismissed. In marginalizing the subject of slavery, critics often relate the two main characters of the allegory, prisoners and puppeteers, respectively, to common citizens and a mix of legislators, politicians, and poets.¹⁸ Others invert that association.¹⁹ Unlike many interpretations, however, I argue that Plato ultimately links democracy to slavery, collapsing the representational domain of politics (puppeteers) to its material conditions of production, slave labor in the Greek mines (prisoners). Following Tina Chanter's critique of the marginalization of slavery in the study of ancient theatre, and Cynthia Patterson's most recent attempt to recenter the question of slavery in Plato's *Phaedo*, I argue that the cave allegory portrays the Greek polis as a space of confinement, replete with the *mise-en-scène* of enslavement: shackles, bondage, darkness, imprisonment, and the extraction of gold, silver, and bronze from the collective soul of the city.²⁰

Given Plato's general endorsement of slavery, such an emancipatory interpretation of Plato's text depends on a reading of the allegorical image that exceeds his intentional authorship, but which is still informed by his historical context.²¹ I here invoke Rancière's own understanding of the politics of literature, in which the semantic excess of the text goes beyond the boundaries of intentionality, in order to argue against Rancière's understanding of Plato as harboring antitheatrical prejudice.²² My interpretation will also challenge the transhistorical transparency with which Badiou's hypertranslation renders Plato's allegories active in the present. What I later develop as a diachronic translation seeks to respond to both interpretations by seeking more ambivalence in Plato's text, against Rancière, and more literarity in the allegory, against Badiou. Like Badiou, I think that Plato's allegory is useful for questioning the emancipatory limits of the democratic regime. Like Rancière, however, I attend to the fact that Plato's criticisms conclude not in an emancipatory project of radical equality but in a profoundly hierarchical regime. Somewhere in between, I claim that Plato's allegory works as a short circuit for the historical experience of slavery in democracy, a dramatic strategy that demands rethinking Plato's own investments in the power of theatre to effectuate interruptions, in order to facilitate an alternative trajectory for the classical text in our times.

PLATO'S THEATRICAL INTERRUPTION: THE THEATRICAL AND THE POLITICAL

There are, according to Rancière, two main critiques of theatre indebted to Plato.²³ The first critique presents theatre as the site of illusion, a sort of fabric of

fictions that needs to be contested with the philosophical antidote of true knowledge. The second critique refers to the separation between activity and passivity in the theatre, the difference between actors and spectators. Rancière considers Brecht as the contemporary heir of Plato with regard to the first critique, challenging Aristotle's catharsis as the dominant feature of tragic theatre by means of a dialectical form of theatre that turns the stage into a laboratory of truth. He considers Artaud the advocate of the second critique, radicalizing Aristotle's emphasis on affects against Plato's logocentrism, by blurring the boundary between actor and spectator in his theatre of cruelty. However, beyond the ostensible difference between the greater degree of distance in Brecht's defamiliarization and the collapse of distance in Artaud's vitalistic theatre, there lies, for Rancière the same Platonic presupposition and the same reformist impulse that wants to turn theatre into a figure of the commons: "the active body of a community enacting its living principle."²⁴ In other words, the distance that both Brecht and Artaud would like to eliminate is reproduced by the very presupposition that works as the engine fueling their mutual desire to surpass it. Brecht wants knowledge to triumph against the self-absorption of the spectator in the cathartic seduction of the performance. Artaud wants to shatter spectators from their passivity in order for them to realize their coconstitutive role as coproducers of the scene, through their own affective engagement with the performance. In both cases, theatre is designed to do something to someone, a deed that already excludes its recipients from its field of action, as they must be either enlightened by Brecht or mobilized by Artaud. Just as politics appears in pedagogy, whenever the claim to equal intelligence breaks the policing logic that differentiates the ignorant from the possessor of knowledge,²⁵ politics appears, too, in the theatre, whenever the claim to equality breaks with the gap that separates the actor from the spectator.²⁶

Badiou, likewise, conceives politics and theatre isomorphically,²⁷ yet he endorses the very assumption that Rancière criticizes, claiming that "the point from which a politics can be thought—which permits, even after the event, the seizure of its truth—is that of its actors, and not of its spectators."²⁸ Privileging the actor over the spectator, it is important to notice that both Rancière and Badiou share a political conception of the theatre as redistributing the sensible through interruption and reject the political conception of the theatre as assembling the community. Neither Badiou nor Rancière believes in the old republican conception of the theatre as recreating the conditions of possibility for the community to come together in its artificial space. Nothing holds the community together. There is no shared identity with which to repair the conflicts of the Real on the artificial stage of the Imaginary. Politics and theatre are both about disidentifications, about refusing the principles of identity that govern one's location in the structure of perception/production. This much they share, and as much as the "common" in communism grounds neither a principle of collective identity nor some kind of human essence, equality in democracy is also not a principle of unification, but a contingent act of verification by which an order gets denaturalized and is replaced "with the controversial figures of division."²⁹

The difference between their respective approaches to the politics of aesthetics, and between the isomorphic relationships they both establish between theatre

and politics, lies elsewhere. For Rancière, the nonidentity of the actor on the stage, which allows for one actor to play multiple roles, refers to the impropriety of the demos, that can “be ‘elsewhere’ than at their ‘own workplace,’”³⁰ to cite Hallward’s persuasive interpretation. As roles are supplementary to their performative closure in the politics of theatre, and words are supplementary to their semantic restriction in the politics of literature, the staging of the people refers to this inexhaustible excess that can never be closed off by the count of the parts that constitute the community in Rancière’s theory of the political. Politics is just the creation of a stage for the appearance of such a supplementary part to perform its dissensual interruption of the otherwise fully naturalized count.³¹ The stage of the people makes visible that other stage, whose hegemony depends on not being seen as a stage at all. The confrontation between the “nonstage” of the police, which seeks to naturalize its rule by hiding its representational deficit, and the stage of the people, which verifies the equality of everyone in the exposure of the uncounted, inevitably results in the public delegitimization of those in positions of power and relegitimization of those unrecognized speaking positions. In other words, the stage is always a conflictual stage. But Rancière sees in theatrical performance the very same process of verification at work that he sees in politics and in literature: the verification of an equal capacity among anonymous people to make sense of the performance, the text, and the event.³²

On the contrary, Badiou’s disidentification depends, more concretely, on a particular feature of the theatre, the intermission:

This number in my rhapsody is of capital importance: here I propose a practical measure, not so much a reform (I have two reforms with enormous consequences up my sleeve, see below) as much as a conservative or preservative measure. A “do not touch!” that is all the more intensely felt insofar as what is at stake has already been affected a lot. Everything I have just said indeed comes down to a plea for *maintaining the intermission*.³³

Do not touch the intermission! The imperative guarantees the temporal gap by which the audience is divided, makes room for the artificiality of the performance to appear, for the unaccounted to take place in the interval that separates one act from the next. Whatever happens during this interval cannot be scripted in the text, as the event can never be absorbed by the symbolic order. In such a way, the intermission guarantees, for Badiou, the public function of the theatre, understanding, as he does, “publicity” in its ancient sense, as defining the space of equal exposure to contingency that belongs to nobody. This public function should not be understood as if providing a pedagogical service for civic training, as theatre is sometimes understood in certain romanticized accounts of Greek tragedy. The public function of the theatre is that of undoing the separation between its two spaces of collective being, as something of one space travels into the other and acts upon it with unexpected consequences.

If Rancière is not committed to this specific feature of the theatre it is because the ability of the performance to interrupt a prior distribution of spaces lies instead in the theatre’s capacity to confront its own pedagogical myths. For

Rancière, theatre can verify the axiom of equality by undoing the presuppositions that govern all attempts to recreate artificially the community in the theatre, a feature it shares with all other aesthetic forms. For Badiou, theatre engages in a political function rather obliquely, by fulfilling an ethical imperative while facilitating the audience to address their lives in unhabitual ways, destabilizing the border that separates the world of work from the work of leisure, the world of acting from the world of the intermission.

Unlike Rancière's dismissal of Plato's drama as a policing laboratory, Badiou wants to reconcile its egalitarian maxims with its inegalitarian aesthetics in a sort of dialectic solution. In consequence, he challenges two dramatic features of the Socratic dialogue in his hypertranslation of Plato's *Republic*: first, the substitution of the Chorus by the philosophic hero; second, the numerical restriction of the audience, probably the most elitist aspect of Plato's drama. In relation to the first challenge, Badiou wants to retain the heroic dimension of the philosophical type, in the form of a disciplined militancy, but he also wants to universalize it in the oxymoronic form of the "proletarian aristocracy." As regards the second transformation, Badiou resolves the tension between the semantic and the phonetic, the policing distribution that separates *logos* (speech) from *phone* (voice), and the proper from improper body of knowledge, by breaking with the homosociality of the audience and including a woman, Amantha, in the dialogue—in lieu of Adeimantus of Collytus—as well as by making Socrates's interlocutors something more than mere yes-men in response to his questions.

At the heart of this troubling of the spatial border between production and performance, labor and action, there is an undertheorized link between Plato and Marx. In Rancière's articulation, Marx repeats Plato's critique of democracy. Behind a political fiction, the citizen of the bourgeoisie, real human essence hides, communism as a classless society. For Marx, too, democracy reduces every human endeavor to an exchangeable enterprise in the marketplace, and Badiou and Rancière both agree with Marx and Engel's diagnosis of the present, in *The Communist Manifesto*, according to which all relations of authority have been dissolved "in the icy waters of egotistical calculation."³⁴ This aspect of Marx's thought does not trouble Badiou, who celebrates it and seeks to strengthen it. For Rancière, however, this hatred of democracy is symptomatic of an oversight on the part of both Plato and Marx, in which they miss democracy's political scandal: the axiom of equality of all with everyone. The "everyone" that Rancière seeks in the *demos* of Greek antiquity, however, was never a realization of democracy. Democracy, understood as the rule of the *demos*—that is, in Rancière's language, the rule of the supplementary part, of those improperly suited to rule—also had its supplement: women, slaves, foreigners, and *metics* (resident aliens) were never a part, nor were they ever "the part of those who had no part"³⁵ in the Greek polis. This part who had no part, according to Rancière, governed in Athens on the basis of their sole improper property, that is, the freedom that belonged to the totality of the community. Women, slaves, foreigners, and *metics*, nevertheless, were not free, yet they also troubled the border that rendered the polis unaccountable to them, and that disqualified their speech as mere noise.

If Badiou's blindness to this supplementary part comes from a too sympathetic interpretation of Plato, Rancière's blindness comes from an antagonism that delivers itself too easily to the demos of antiquity. Yet it is the rule of that very supplement, of those both improperly suited to rule and not free, that, I claim, is at the center of the allegory of the cave. Badiou and Rancière both miss it, but it can be recovered if Plato's text is properly placed in its historical moment. As I mentioned earlier, the institutionalization of injustice was not just a problem of class exploitation. More concretely, the problem figures first as a problem of imperial conquest. Neither Rancière nor Badiou focuses on this Plato, the one who makes colonization the birthplace of injustice and the founding soil for the need of philosophy, the one who at one point in the *Republic* proposes to abolish slavery, a measure carefully restricted only to the Greeks, but who also designs the first philosophical eugenic project through the "noble lie."³⁶

Plato's recourse to the plasticity of drama—as particularly suitable to persuade the audience into an unhabitual turning of their gaze toward the material conditions of their enjoyment of freedom—makes room for this interpretation, but it also produces a paradox. Why would Plato have recourse to the dramatic form that he also disparaged as the greatest depository of poetic lies? Alexander Nehamas claims that he did so because drama "was the established form of Socratic literature at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century BC."³⁷ Such an explanation, however, is insufficient to the extent that Plato's text, unlike other established forms of Socratic literature, engages in a political contestation over the literary form itself, throwing such normalcy into crisis. Interested in the politics of aesthetics as much as in the aesthetic of politics, Plato—himself a poet before he became a philosopher—granted that in the effort to persuade the masses to shift their sight in a particular direction, the techniques of the Sophists and the poets were more suitable than those of the philosopher. Poets had the ability to "approach and handle the beast,"³⁸ to understand its passions and pleasures, as he claims pejoratively in the *Republic*, it is almost as though he is conceding to one of Gorgias' paradoxes regarding tragedy's deceptive superiority over philosophy's nondeceptive truth:

Tragedy, by means of legends and emotions, creates a deception in which the deceiver is more honest than the non-deceiver and the deceived is wiser than the non-deceived.³⁹

The gap that separates fiction from reality is troubled, in Plato's *Republic*, by the very invention of a truth told in fiction. Plato's legacy is not just that of the distance that separates, the distance that, Rancière suggests, is mimicked in the theatres of Brecht and Artaud. Plato's legacy is also that of the confusion of aesthetic forms, of their mélange, that Rancière celebrates elsewhere as the signature of the politics of aesthetics.⁴⁰ Having questioned theatrical allegories on the basis of the literal meanings articulated in them, the crimes that they glorified, and the forms of violence that they heroized, Plato tests the ability of his theatre to convey a reality whose nonmediated visibility might be too blinding to reveal without poetic mediation. Knowing that the sun can easily blind a soul unprepared to receive its light,

Plato employs an allegorical language, one that circumvents the potential rejection of too immediate a link between the freedom of the *demos* and the slavery of the *nondemos* in the caves, yet inscribed precisely in a narrative that calls for the vulgarity of such literal translation. At its most emancipatory, Plato's text refuses the separation of the assembly and the space of appearances from the caves of the polis, from the mines in which slaves were exploited in order to provide for its enlightened minority. When the philosopher returns to the marketplace of opinions he sees people in chains, and those chains are not just some allegorical subtext but the very material conditions supporting the speech that circulates "freely" in the marketplace. The deceived, those who look for the chains, as they are fully absorbed in the allegory of the cave, are wiser than the nondeceived, because they have a greater chance of reaching those enslaved in the mines that support the material prosperity of the Greek polis and its presumable "freedom" of speech.

Plato's dramatic playfulness troubles not only Rancière's interpretation but also Badiou's. The interplay of fiction and reality, of act and intermission, is inverted in the allegory. As synecdoche, the allegory of the cave becomes the "intermission" of the polis that brings its Real in the form of an Imaginary, its theatrical interruption. It is by means of this allegory that fictional time gives room to historical time, that the mines of the Greek polis morph into the caves of the allegory and, as Socrates tells Glaucon, the "strange prisoners" of the allegory appear "just like us."⁴¹ This is a mimesis that interrupts its mimetic impulse, as it no longer reproduces greater distance from the historical reality through its very efforts at reaching closer resemblance to it, but does the opposite. The allegory facilitates a short circuit to the reality of slavery by means of the greater distance that it takes from it. Borrowing from Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster's interpretation of Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, which they read as the intrusion of historical time into mythical time through the lenses of Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt's interpretations,⁴² I claim a similar political function for Plato's allegory. The allegory of the cave effectuates a similar temporal disjunction, one in which the foreignness of antiquity becomes more troubling than its ahistorical fixation in the Western canon for what it might offer toward an understanding of the global dependency of immaterial labor in the Global North upon material labor in the Global South.⁴³

THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF PLATO'S DRAMA: A SHAKESPEAREAN DETOUR

"The time is out of joint," says Hamlet after learning from his father's ghost of the murder committed by he who now wears his crown. In their *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels, like Shakespeare, portray a haunting specter of the past that continues to live in the present as the means by which to uncover the structural contradiction of the social order. The ghost, this posthumous survival of a dead social order, is the sign of the contemporary as the political "contradiction between a society's archaic conception of itself and the actual dominant forces within it."⁴⁴ The ghost is the gaze of the present from the perspective of the future, as already *passé*, as postmortem. Martin Harries is right when he says that in

Hamlet, “the Ghost in the mine is a spirit of capitalism,” of the emerging future rendering the present past, while serving too as a meeting place for different times to interact.⁴⁵ Echoing though not citing Marx, Agamben also links the contemporary not only with temporal disjunction but also to he (*sic*) “who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness.”⁴⁶

Rancière's hyperhistorical Plato, as the philosophical spokesman for an Athenian oligarchy dressing itself in the robes of aristocratic virtue, becomes the ahistorical Plato behind the curtain of every policing order. Badiou's Plato goes the other way: Plato moves from one historical context to another, from the fourth century BCE of Athens to the twenty-first century CE of Paris, only to be further entrenched in the privileged ahistorical position that *The Republic* continues to occupy as the foundational text of political philosophy. Repeating the classicizing gesture by which the conditions of production of a text are effaced, the unseen darkness of Plato's text in the past is problematically iterated in the present, and the current forms of extractive capitalism displacing the geography of emancipatory praxis under conditions of neoliberal globalization today remain unexamined in Badiou and Rancière's interpretations.

As Marx claimed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), the problem with using old costumes is that it can not only magnify the task but can also mummify it. This is the difference between the tragic and the farcical, the difference between the tragic end of the real French Revolution in the empire of Napoleon, and the farcical end of the imagined July Revolution in the Second Empire of Crapulinski. Having seen how the awakening of the dead that previously served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles was now parodying the old, how that which magnified the task in imagination was now functional to taking a flight from a solution in reality, Marx concluded that

the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. Earlier revolutions required world-historical recollections in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead.⁴⁷

In the absence of a metanarrative of history as progress, such a solution seems less reassuring, as the dead haunt the present not only from the past but also from the apocalyptic scenario now central to the dominant genre of futurity, in the face of ecological devastation wrought by the unstoppable machine of capitalist accumulation. Ghosts visit us not only from the past but also from the future, forcing the new revolutions to come to terms, once again, with their world-historical recollections in ways that undercut their hallucinatory effects.

A broader and more inclusive world-historical recollection might be the necessary antidote, one that, as Agamben suggests, firmly holds the gaze on the time so as to perceive its darkness. This is precisely Buck-Morss's critique of the

problematic contemporaneity of communism, vis-à-vis the work of Badiou. Buck-Morss argues:

Badiou is modern, *au courant*, but he is not contemporary, not *against* the current. By returning to the Western tradition, *yet again* ‘putting on the Mask of St Paul’ (Marx!) in order to speak politically of the rupturing power of the event, the pragmatics of his action reinforces that tradition and obliterates change, weakening the messianic, political power of the present that he intends to affirm.⁴⁸

Buck-Morss criticizes Badiou’s Eurocentrism, which looks archaic after decades of anticolonial struggle, decolonization of knowledge, and production of theory from the Global South. Rather than the French Revolution being the foundational event of modernity, Buck-Morss argues for a different constellation, Hegel and Haiti, to move from the French Jacobins of Michelet’s history to the *Black Jacobins* (1938) of C. L. R. James in Saint-Domingue.⁴⁹ This constitutes a more radical rupture with the collective imaginary, and might be the antidote to the mummifying risks of invoking lethal pasts or delivering oneself to deadly futures.

Badiou understands the ideological operation of communism as “the imaginary projection of the political real into the symbolic fiction of History, including its guise as a representation of the action of innumerable masses via the One of a proper name.”⁵⁰ The One of a proper name, however, does not articulate the innumerable masses evenly, as the imaginary projection of the real into the symbolic continues to leave behind those who relate to Western history not through its field of lightness but through its *minefield* of darkness.⁵¹ Another symbolic order already governs the projection of the political real into the symbolic fiction of history, a history that continues to be glued to Western stories, that continues to “resurrect our own dusty thinkers of the past for a post-secular present defanged of religion’s revolutionary power.”⁵² This is Buck-Morss’s most recent invitation, that we might rescue “the progressive moments in present-day religious writers,” like Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati—“whose political actions we have neglected to see, but who belong objectively to *our* time and who are, in the uncomfortable sense, our *contemporaries*.”⁵³

This is not just a critique of the Eurocentrism of Badiou. Indeed, one could easily defend Badiou against such charges by highlighting his active engagement with Organisation Politique since 1985, an organization that supported undocumented immigrant workers mostly from non-European countries; or by his choice, as a playwright, of Ahmed as the heroic figure of the philosopher, without relapsing into conventional forms of orientalism; or by referring to his uncompromised Maoism. Philosophy, however, in its political history and intellectual genealogy, continues to draw its poetry from a very limited European archive, reproducing the very darkness that supports the unparalleled privilege of Western authors as the providers of light.⁵⁴

Like Badiou, Rancière has also accommodated non-European events and subaltern histories into his theoretical corpus, and the most resonant example of

a democratic action in his *Hatred of Democracy* is no longer May 1968 but the civil rights movement in the United States. Rancière celebrates the Montgomery Bus Boycott as having “really acted politically” in their refusal to accept the policing order, the system that legitimized the distribution of places according to the so-called one-drop rule under the Jim Crow laws.⁵⁵ But how blood was able to organize such a distribution of the sensible in the United States was beyond the scope of Rancière's work. Trained in a Marxist tradition, Rancière was able to translate the language of parts, and the part that has no part (the Athenian demos), into the Marxist language of classes, and the proletariat as the dissolution of all classes—which achieved the very same identification of “‘the count of the uncounted’ with the whole of the community.”⁵⁶ But if the rich in Athens were able to “reduce the natural domination of the nobility, based on the illustrious and ancient nature of their lineage, to their simple domination as wealthy property owners,”⁵⁷ thus subsuming the nobility of the blood into the material wealth of the rich, the opposite trajectory—the trajectory that investigates the racialized origins of social classification—had no place in his theory, a history extensively documented by decolonial theory.⁵⁸

Diachronic translation, which focuses on these subject positions instead, accommodates (rather better than hypertranslation, I argue) this rather more challenging and inclusive contemporaneity of Plato's drama, while being equally committed to the axiom of equality and to an ethical-political view of the militant intellectual. According to Kenneth Reinhard's introduction to Badiou's *The Republic*, “by calling this book . . . a *hypertranslation*, Badiou suggests that it goes above and beyond the usual assumptions about the work of translation, taking its text to what we might call a sublime—*hypselos* (ὕψηλός)—place of new topological proximities, unmappable according to the conventional metrics of history and geography.”⁵⁹ The topological proximities that Badiou maps onto Plato's *Republic*, notwithstanding their unconventional character with regards to the metrics of history and geography, are quite conventional when seen through their symbolic geography. As Buck-Morss suggests, Badiou's *Republic*, if not Badiou's philosophy as a whole—the same cannot be said about his dramatic work—participates in all kinds of Eurocentric erasures, and the Plato of Badiou's work remains the Plato of the Western tradition, the Plato onto whom Europe continues to project a mythical historicity, the Plato who never posited the imperial question at the center of the political project of undoing injustice.

Hypertranslation might bring other metrics to play, but the history and geography that continues to be overlooked in the topological proximities that animate Plato's text in Badiou's work significantly limit its political potential. Something similar happens with Rancière's constant invocation of Plato as the ghostly puppeteer behind every future theatre of shadows, behind every new policing effort to reproduce hierarchy. The diachronic translation that I propose below makes Plato into our contemporary not by turning the cave of antiquity into the movie theatre of modernity, as Badiou does, but by first addressing our historical distance, the gap that renders one epoch untranslatable into another. My diachronic translation seeks those other historical and geographic sites by focusing precisely upon this gap and by being attentive to Plato's own historical context. Borrowing

from Kant's analysis of analogies as invested not in the semantic correspondence between two things but in the "similarity between two relations in wholly dissimilar things,"⁶⁰ I seek in the mine of today's Global South the political relation articulated in Plato's allegory of the cave, that which refuses to separate intellectual from material production and, by extension, the theatre from imperialism and slavery.

The caves of Greek antiquity are certainly not equivalent to the mines of today's transnational capital, yet the reanimation of the allegory from this point of view does attend to the functional equivalent of the allegory, to the "unlived" cave in the text, as the lived mine of its metatext connects it with the Marxist ghost in the mine as the site of critical intellectual labor, thus allowing us to interrogate the material basis of today's dramatic productions. The historical juxtaposition that the allegory facilitates turns, today, toward the intensive use of extractive industries by contemporary forms of capital accumulation and their subsequent legitimation of forms of neocolonial power, which are at the center of the material reproduction of the imperial polis in what Timothy Mitchell has appropriately called today "carbon democracy."⁶¹ According to Saskia Sassen:

More than 200 million hectares of land are estimated to have been acquired from 2006 to 2011 by foreign governments and firms according to Land Matrix, ... the most comprehensive network of researchers on this subject. Much of the purchased land is in Africa, but a growing share is now in Latin America and, a first since the postwar era, in several countries in Asia, notably Russia, Laos, and Vietnam. Finally, the buyers are increasingly diverse, including purchasers from countries of origin that range from China to Sweden, and firms from sectors as different as biotechnology and finance.⁶²

The systemic change represented by these new patterns of acquisition, characteristic of intensive mining particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, has led Sassen to speak no longer of social exclusion but of "expulsions" taking place at the systemic edge of capitalism's new phase of global destruction.⁶³ Such is the present reality alongside which the allegory of the cave acquires an alternative contemporaneity. Unlike Badiou's hypertranslation, my diachronic translation of Plato's allegory, my own effort at making Plato into our contemporary, does not turn the colonial and decolonial question into a footnote to the analysis. It expects a broader constellation of political history to resonate with the text, one in which the Egyptian papyrus on which Plato wrote his Socratic plays breaks with the Eurocentric geography of his drama; one in which the influence of Persian philosophy in Plato's work, too, invites a reassessment of radical political Islam, in response to Buck-Morss's invitation; and one, finally, that makes the allegory operative in a different geography for a more radical critique of the present of global capitalism and its asymmetrical impacts in the South.

A DIACHRONIC TRANSLATION OF PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE: THE SPIRIT IN THE MINE

Unlike wealthy foreigners and metics, and upper-class Athenian women, slaves were almost entirely excluded from the Festival of Dionysus, with the exception of the eight slaves in public service seated, presumably, with the Council.⁶⁴ Yet the labor that made possible the performances at the Festival of Dionysus in Greek antiquity was the labor of those who were enslaved by the polis and its oligarchic class.⁶⁵ A. H. M. Jones claims that Athenian democracy was parasitic neither on the empire nor on slavery, as both were neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for democratic rule. Athens, nonetheless, appropriated the land and labor of foreign territories in order to improve its material conditions, to become luxurious, as Socrates says of the feverish city. The proof that democracy was not parasitic on slavery lies in the class that owned most of the slaves. According to Jones, two-thirds to three-quarters of the citizen population owned no slaves; rather, they were owned by the twelve hundred richest families, which were also the families that funded the theatre during the festivals.⁶⁶ The state also owned slaves, whom it employed largely in the mines, but the slave population was not a material necessity for the demos, for those who were free yet poor. Slavery was, however, a material necessity for the sustainability of Plato's own social class, the Greek oligarchy, the class that funded the work of the tragedians that Plato ultimately subordinated to philosophic supervision in *The Republic*: "In industry, and particularly mining, slaves were employed on a larger scale," says Jones, giving as example the case of "the wealthy Nicias in the fifth century," who is "said to have owned 1,000 slaves, who he let out to a mining contractor at 1 obol a day. . . . In the fourth century another mine concessionaire owned thirty slaves, which was probably a more usual number."⁶⁷

Badiou's communism and Rancière's democracy have yet to come to terms, within their own resolute commitments to equality, with the colonial and decolonial question, with the gendered and racialized history of class exploitation at its origins. The colonial question appears in Plato's *Republic* and reappears in Plato's *Laws*. This is also the question that changes most radically the historical and geographical landscape of emancipatory politics and deepens the axiom of equality to which both of them are committed. The diachronic translation of Plato's allegory for which I advocate makes Plato's text both more foreign and more contemporary. My focus on the mines that sustain the material luxury of the Greek polis invites the allegory to inform our understanding of other historical contexts relevant to the problem of emancipation, such as the historical context of colonial modernity—that is to say, to the mines in which the Spanish and Portuguese empires looked for gold and silver to fund their colonial enterprises. The allegory then serves to interrogate the postcolonial status of today's mines, in which disposable labor in the Global South is employed by transnational extractive industries in order to produce the stages, digital screens, and electric batteries that light today's theatres. Slaves worked in the mines of Greek antiquity in order to produce the capital that subsidized the Festival of Dionysus, where comedies and tragedies were performed for the entertainment of the Athenian elite,

Plato's class. The foundation of philosophy in the feverish city calls attention to the interdependency between the free and equal public speech of the marketplace and the enslavement of the majority in the underworld of the mines, which are taken outside visibility and made into silent spaces of confinement. However critical such an acknowledgment of democracy's exclusion is, Plato's allegory also gives to philosophical discourse the structural form of that which it criticizes, as the metals in the mines also provide Plato with the myth by which he naturalizes hierarchy. As a specialized form of knowledge, philosophy acquires the technical attributes of the excavator, that of extracting the metal from the soul of the individual in order to organize the distribution of bodies according to the degree with which appetites are subordinated to reason. The gold that Socrates rejects, when he proposes the socialization of the means of production, he also celebrates when it performs the function of naturalizing inequality through the first biopolitical project designed by a philosopher, the "noble lie" with which the philosopher guarantees the biological reproduction of the ruling class.⁶⁸ *Basanos*, the Greek word for both truth and torture, betrays Western philosophy's historical dependence upon the violent devices by which free and slave, citizen and noncitizen tried to manage its always-unstable border.⁶⁹

Since Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*, the mine continues to be a powerful topographical site for rethinking the axiom of equality beyond its conventional geographies and academic texts. Even as I wrote this essay, we heard of the latest aggressions (intimidation of the community, disregard of their rights, etc.) committed by the Colombian state against black autonomous organizations in La Toma, Cauca, organizations primarily led by courageous black women who continue to struggle against the exploitation of gold on their land by transnational industries and the government. Incidents like this are not isolated, but rather are constant. For just one other example among many, one could look to South Africa where, in August 2012, the police killed thirty-four miners and wounded seventy-eight more workers who were protesting against their labor conditions in the mine owned by the British company Lonmin, an incident that took place on the twenty-fifth anniversary of a nationwide South African miner's strike during the apartheid period. As Plato's drama travels, and students all over the world continue to read the text in their own contexts, coming from other historical backgrounds and facing other forms of violence as part of their everyday lives, including that of Eurocentrism itself, the topographical proximities mapped onto Plato's allegory need to accommodate a more challenging geopolitical world and a more contentious contemporaneity. After years of decolonial criticism, working toward the active manifestation of the equality of intelligences in the dynamic search for those voices, contexts, and events that have been pushed to the margins of the European canon, if included at all, Plato's contemporaneity might paradoxically lie in a more literal reading of his allegories. Might it be possible, then, to read the foreign legislator of the *Laws*—the only character to have replaced Socrates as Plato's main conceptual character in his dialogues—as the *sans-papiers* in France, as the undocumented immigrant in the United States, as the migrant worker for whose inclusion Badiou's own activist organization, Organisation Politique, fought? The wager of this text is that such a vulgar literalization of

Plato's allegories might be politically and ethically more radical for a renewed investment in the communist figure of the militant intellectual than either the full condemnation or endorsement of Plato's text in Rancière and Badiou's defense of the axiom of equality. Ultimately, my reading makes use of Badiou and Rancière's investments in Plato's drama as occasions for a productive interrogation of the relationship between ethics and politics in the figure of the militant intellectual, but it seeks to displace this figure into a different geography, a different world-historical reality, centered around the experiences of the Global South. The provocation of this text is to reinvest the allegorical fictions with facts that have been ghosted, so that maybe we can start listening to the stories that speak in the caves of the Global South.

ENDNOTES

1. See Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research* 57 (1990): 73–103, at 96; Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1999), 91; Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 40; and Freddie Rokem, "Voices and Visions in Fingal's Cave: Plato and Strindberg," in *The International Strindberg*, ed. Anna Westerstahl Stenport (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 127–44, at 133.
2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 208 (515a5–515b5).
3. *Ibid.*, 209 (515c5).
4. See Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth* (New York: Continuum, 2002).
5. See Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
6. Plato, 52–5 (373b1–376b1).
7. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 221–30; and *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 91–141.
8. Alain Badiou, "The Lessons of Jacques Rancière: Knowledge and Power after the Storm," trans. Tzuchien Tho, in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 30–54, at 37–8.
9. In fact, one could even argue that Plato works, for the various disagreements between Badiou and Rancière apropos the relationship between philosophy and politics, as some kind of aggregative metaphor. Nowhere is this more visible than in their mutual disagreement vis-à-vis the reading of their more direct intellectual father figure, Louis Althusser. As happens with Plato, whereas Badiou praises Althusser for having arrived at a conception of subjectivity without a subject (Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker [New York: Verso, 2011], 64), which is at the heart of Althusser's theory of interpellation, Rancière criticizes, since the publication of *La Leçon d'Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), the authoritarian character of Althusser's theoreticism, which he links to the reactionary political authority of the French Communist Party, and even dismisses Althusser's theory of interpellation for its metaphysical assumptions (Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran [New York: Bloomsbury, 2013], 37). In synthesis, Rancière's break with the Schoolmaster leaves no substitute standing; Badiou's break delivers him from one schoolmaster to another, from Althusser to Lacan in a metonymic substitution of schoolmaster Plato.
10. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2011), 17–18.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, pt. 1: *The Process of Production of Capital* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 163.

12. In Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth Century France*, trans. John Drury (New York: Verso, 2012), Rancière explores the correspondence among locksmiths, tailors, shoemakers, and typographers from the nineteenth century. From the joiner/floor layer Gabriel Gauny to the Christian Socialists of *L'Ateleier* and the Icarian communities in the United States, Rancière follows the workers' dreams of a fraternal community, their discussions of poetry, art, and their imagination of a communist utopia, expressing their irreducibility to a working class in socioeconomic terms. In their nightly correspondence, Rancière found that workers already engaged in the kind of activities that were presumably reserved for those who did not "belong" to the cave.

13. See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2015). (For "an-archy," see Rancière, *Dissensus*, 34.) Badiou's resignification of communism and Rancière's resignification of democracy are driven by the same commitment to equality as the defining feature of the emancipatory horizon that I call here the axiom of equality. Hence, Badiou conceives of communism in the sense of Babeuf's mid-1790s Society of Equals, and cites Rancière favorably, claiming that "emancipatory politics is essentially the politics of the anonymous masses; it is the victory of those with no names, of those who are held in a state of colossal insignificance by the State"; Alain Badiou, "The Idea of Communism," In *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 2010), 1–14, at 9–10. Rancière also agrees with Badiou's definition of communism in *L'Humanité* as "a form of universality constructed by those practices [of emancipation]"; Jacques Rancière, "Communists without Communism?," in *Idea of Communism*, 167–78, at 167. And yet, for Rancière's "attempt to salvage the word 'democracy,'" Badiou interjects, "a detour through the Idea of communism is unavoidable" (Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis*, 249 n. 10). This is a detour to which Rancière seems to have conceded when he claimed that "the future of emancipation"—understood as "the autonomous growth of the space of the common created by the free association of men and women implementing the egalitarian principle"—should probably be called communism and not democracy (Rancière, "Communists without Communism?," 176).

14. Jacques Rancière, *Moments Politiques*, trans. Mary Foster (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2014), 145.

15. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 141–2.

16. My reading is influenced by Bonnie Honig's reception of James Porter's distinction between classicism—an empty aesthetic claim to universality—and classicization—an interpretative technique that, while focused on the present, "turns for understanding to ancient circumstances, scripts, or images for analogies that might illuminate our condition or even mirror our circumstances"; Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 32. See James Porter, "Feeling Classical: Classicism and Ancient Literary Criticism," in *Classical Pasts: The Classical Tradition of Greece and Rome*, ed. James Porter (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 301–52. According to Honig, "classicization that treats the classical past as alien and resistant to appropriation may prove "more instructive . . . than the sort that seeks and finds our stammering selves in the mirror" (32). I want to keep the conditions of production of Plato's text alive because another mirror—what Pierre Macherey adequately calls a "broken mirror" (*A Theory of Literary Production* [New York: Routledge, 2006], 134–50; quote at 135)—survives in this very different appropriation of the text's foreignness for a more troubling contemporaneity of Plato's allegories.

17. See Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII," in *Companions to Ancient Thought I: Epistemology*, ed. Steven Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 85–115; and Rachel Barney, "Eros and Necessity in the Ascent from the Cave," *Ancient Philosophy* 28.2 (2008): 357–72.

18. See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Myles Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 20 (1999): 215–324.

Slavery in Plato's Allegory of the Cave

19. See James Wilderbing, "Prisoners and Puppets in the Cave," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 117–39.
20. See Tina Chanter, *Whose Antigone? The Tragic Marginalization of Slavery* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011); and Cynthia Patterson, "Metaphors of Body and Soul in the *Phaedo*," paper presented at a workshop on Plato's *Phaedo* at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 30–31 October 2015. For alternative associations of the cave to other material sites, see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Women* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
21. See Plato, 119 (433d1); Glenn R. Morrow, *Plato's Law of Slavery in Its Relation to Greek Law* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1939); and Gregory Vlastos, "Slavery in Plato's Thought," *Philosophical Review* 50.3 (1941): 289–304.
22. See Jacques Rancière, *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
23. Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 4–5.
24. *Ibid.*, 5.
25. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
26. Peter Hallward summarizes this isomorphic relationship between theatre and politics, à la Rancière, as leaving the provisional status of the actor in the same plane of contingency: "every thinking has its stage or *scène*, every thinker 'plays' or acts in the theatrical sense. Every political subject is first and foremost 'a sort of local and provisional theatrical configuration'"; Peter Hallward, "Staging Equality: Rancière's Theatocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality," in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 140–57, at 141. For an analysis of theatricality in Rancière see Andrew Parker, "Mimesis and the Division of Labor," introduction to *The Philosopher and His Poor*, by Jacques Rancière (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), ix–xx. For a critique of the link that Rancière establishes between the theatre and democracy, see Richard Halpern, "Theater and Democratic Thought: Arendt to Rancière," *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (2011): 545–72. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this essay for leading me toward these excellent references.
27. Alain Badiou, "Rhapsody for the Theatre," *Theatre Survey* 49.2 (2008): 187–238.
28. Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 23.
29. Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), 32–3, quote at 33.
30. Hallward, 143.
31. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 36–42.
32. Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 13.
33. Badiou, "Rhapsody for the Theatre," 209. Italics his.
34. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader: Second Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 473–500, at 475; cited in Alain Badiou, *Plato's "Republic": A Dialogue in 16 Chapters*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 275; and Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2014), 17.
35. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.
36. Plato, 99 (414c5). In an excellent essay on the question of slavery in Plato's *Republic*, Gregory Vlastos highlights the passage at 433d (using a different edition than Reeve's shown here) as conclusive evidence that Plato did contemplate slavery as part of the structure of his utopian polis: "Or is what most contributes to making it good the fact that every child, woman, slave, free person, craftsman, ruler, and subject each does his own work and does not meddle with what is not?" (Plato, 119). Gregory Vlastos, "Does Slavery Exist in Plato's Philosophy?," *Classical Philology* 63.4 (1968): 291–5, at 294. It is worth noting that it is the governing logic of this passage, the arithmetic restriction of one body to one role, that runs throughout Rancière's constant invocation of Plato as the mega-architect of the police order. I am, however, less interested in the philological dispute over Plato's

commitments to slavery, in which some participants claim Plato's law of slavery to be harsher than any known slave legislation of classical antiquity (see Morrow, 126). Like Rancière, I am not interested in defending Plato as an emancipatory author. And yet, like Badiou, I am interested in the ways in which his allegories can be mobilized for emancipatory purposes, precisely by attending to those historical contexts (ancient and contemporary) that, despite their strong intertextual resonances with the theatrical images composed in the dialogue, never enter the canonical text.

37. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 35.

38. Plato, 186–7 (493a10–493c3).

39. Gorgias, cited in Simon Critchley and Jamieson Webster, *Stay, Illusion! The Hamlet Doctrine* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 16.

40. Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (New York: Verso, 2013).

41. Plato, 208 (515a4–5).

42. Critchley and Webster, 60.

43. Although the notion of the Global South uses a geographical metaphor to describe a locus of knowledge production, it is ultimately irreducible to definite territorial demarcations. Rather, the Global South should be understood as an epistemological and political project that advocates for equality in the global production of knowledge; a claim to equality that confronts the silent privilege given to the Euro-American academy by drawing from histories and subject positions that trouble and complicate this imaginary circumscription. See Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo, "Introduction: The Global South and World Dis/Order," *Global South* 5.1 (2011): 1–11.

44. Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 91.

45. *Ibid.*, 98.

46. Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 13.

47. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* ([1852] New York: International Publishers, 2004), 16.

48. Susan Buck-Morss, "The Second Time as Farce . . . Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present," in *Idea of Communism*, 67–80, at 78. Italics hers.

49. See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

50. Badiou, "Idea of Communism," 11.

51. See Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

52. Buck-Morss, "Second Time," 79.

53. *Ibid.* Italics hers.

54. Hence, after decades of decolonial critique against the productive and exclusive power of the Eurocentric gaze, the romantic portrayal of the "primitive people," later called "savages" too, in Badiou's *Republic*, passes unchallenged, just to mention one of several examples in that text. Badiou, *Plato's "Republic,"* 68.

55. Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, 61.

56. Rancière, *Dissensus*, 33. On the relationship between the demos and the proletariat see Rancière, *Disagreement*, 18.

57. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 8.

58. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Aníbal Quijano, "Qué tal Raza!," paper presented at the conference organized by the Coloniality Working Group, at SUNY–Binghamton in New York, 2000; and Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257–337.

59. Kenneth Reinhard, "Introduction: Badiou's Sublime Translation of the *Republic*," introduction to Badiou, *Plato's "Republic,"* vii–xxiii, at xi–xii. Italics his.

Slavery in Plato's Allegory of the Cave

60. Immanuel Kant, "Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics" with Selections from the "Critique of Pure Reason," ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), §58 at 108.
61. See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011).
62. Saskia Sassen, "At the Systemic Edge: Expulsions," in *Resisting Biopolitics: Philosophical, Political, and Performative Strategies*, ed. S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė (New York: Routledge, 2015), 219–35, at 227.
63. See Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
64. See Simon Goldhill, "The Audience of Athenian Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54–68, at 60–5.
65. For a sociological analysis of Athenian tragedy see Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); and Edith Hall, "The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy," in *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, 93–126.
66. A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 17.
67. *Ibid.*, 14. For an analysis of slavery in antiquity and the extensive employment of slaves in the mines see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Page Dubois, *Slavery: Antiquity and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
68. See Cinzia Arruzza, "The Private and the Common in Plato's *Republic*," *History of Political Thought* 32.2 (2011): 215–33; quote at 220.
69. See Page Dubois, *Torture and Truth: The New Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 1991).