

Articulation as Speaking-Embodied Appearance

With Rancière to Spivak and Butler

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“Will you listen now?”

With this question, written on posters, Iranian migrants protested the destruction of their camp in Calais in 2016. What is surprising is not the question, but the fact that it was articulated by migrants whose lips were sewn shut. They were unable to utter a word; unable to speak, so they performed this non-speaking with their bodies.

In the last few decades, we have seen many forms of protest all over the world, in which people articulate their protest through their bodies—from Ni Una Menos to Occupy Wall Street (Ullrich 2026).¹ In these protests, bodies appear and try to reclaim political space from which they have been excluded. I am not interested here in evaluating the success or non-success of these kinds of protest. This always depends on the contingent historical constellations in which such protests arise. Moreover, maybe even the supposed ‘failures’ can also hide learning processes, as Jule Govrin would argue (Govrin 2025: 376).

This article rather begins with the observation that these protests and movements are taking place at all. Furthermore, in these protests something *appears*—a bodily something—that not only speaks with a clear goal or message but articulates itself through the body. In other words, these embodied beings appear on the streets and in public places not because they are united by one specific political demand (e.g., to call for a party to be banned), but as a result of a more general criticism of the society they live in. Political theory has long been concerned with linking the notion of the political to notions of appearance or visibility, without always clearly distinguishing between the two. For something to be political, it has to appear, to be visible, to speak and articulate itself, to be represented. As a consequence,

1 There is a multiplicity of movements that a pure enumeration cannot grasp; nevertheless we could also think about the Arab Spring, the demonstrations on Puerta del Sol in Madrid from 2011 to 2015, or the Gezi Park protests in Turkey (Butler 2015: 10; Rancière 2022a: 13, 139). But this list should be considered as open and ongoing.

marginalized groups that are struggling to be included in the political order need to pass through the stage of visibility to articulate their positions and to become representable. This representation usually takes the form of an ascribed identity, which appears to be fixed and stable. Spivak calls this a “roll-call concept”, noting that such identity claims can be used for political purposes, but also observing that they deform people by grouping them together under supposedly specific characteristics (Spivak 1996: 294). This view has been challenged by Black, postcolonial, and (queer-)feminist theories, among others. They point to the danger of essentializing identity positions, of not being able to look at how exclusions take place, of not considering that for some positions it is crucial not to appear, to remain silent, that other spaces have different logics or that some positions also reappear or disappear (Butler 2015; Emejulu 2022; Hammonds 2001; Spivak 1988, among others). In this context, Evelyn Hammonds speaks also of “politics of silence,” problematizing a mere focus on visibility and calling for a “politics of articulation” (Hammonds 2001: 390).

If we want to look at articulations as appearances, we must take these criticisms into account. This means moving beyond an idea of visibility that leaves little room for nuance between the categories of “visible” and “invisible” and arguing for a more complex notion of appearance that allows for grey areas and transitional zones. This also implies a more nuanced view of articulation. Articulations are understood in this article as *speaking-embodied appearances*, emphasizing that we must never consider articulation as embodied speech practices and acts in isolation, but always in relation to social structures and other subjects: Articulation always intertwines body and speech. By combining articulation with appearance my focus is therefore on the *political* dimension of the former.

What we observe in protests such as the one in Calais is that articulation can go beyond words, challenging the demarcation between speaking and non-speaking, raising questions of being heard and listened to, which are always linked to power structures. In these kinds of protest, the body is more than just an instrument for uttering words, and ultimately what is uttered is not a direct demand, initiating a relatively linear process of political representation, but is linked to a more general critique of social and political exclusion. Articulations can thus take very ambivalent forms and intersect with questions of race, class, gender, (dis-)ability etc. Furthermore, articulations are contingent, uncertain, never-ending processes of forming subjects while being formed by subjects. They can appear, disappear, and (re-)appear. In that sense, articulation transcends visibility, which is caught in a dualism focusing primarily on the here and now. Appearance offers a more nuanced view of the aforementioned in-betweens of (re-)appearance through contingent times.

To sharpen this view of articulation and its ambivalences, I will examine three authors representing different currents of thought: Jacques Rancière, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Butler. The order of names does not reflect a hierarchy but is useful

for the argument I want to develop. Therefore, I start with Rancière's concept of speaking as a moment of interruption, which is crucial if we want to understand articulations as appearances but does not go far enough. For that reason, I will confront and extend his thought with critiques inspired by Spivak and Butler, which make it possible to talk about the structural impossibility of being heard and questions of embodiment. Thus, radical democratic, postcolonial, and queer-feminist theories will be combined under the label of critical theories with a small c, which is linked to Critical Theory with a big C, the so-called Frankfurt School, but goes beyond it. The focus is on questioning and criticizing society, especially dominant power structures, as well as on the self-critique of theory, science, and philosophy, with an emphasis on transformative praxis that points beyond existing structures (Dhawan 2024: 29; Loick 2024: 10). This perspective adopts the Frankfurt School's critique, while simultaneously highlighting its omissions, such as gender, race or (post-)coloniality, and expanding the scope of critical theories beyond the Frankfurt School's horizon, and introducing a plurality and divergence of theoretical perspectives (Bohmann/Sörensen 2019: 30). The distinction between critical theory with a small and a capital C has emerged primarily within the last few years in the German academic literature (Bohmann/Sörensen 2019; Dhawan 2024; Loick 2024). While the English-language literature does usually distinguish between the narrow and broader sense, it is not consistent in using capitalization to mark this distinction (Bonner 2011; Fuchs 2021). Here, I use this distinction as methodological frame to show that it can help to navigate and expand the field of critical theories, as well as to highlight gaps within theories and to facilitate interaction among them (Loick 2024: 13). This article is thus based on the framework of critical theories with a small c, which are understood as comprehensive social critiques with a perspective on emancipation and transformation. Consequently, the authors examined here should be read critically, both against and with each other, to illustrate articulation as a speaking-embodied appearance.

The first part of my article will focus on Rancière's notion of speaking as a moment of rupture in the distribution of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*). The second part will argue, with Spivak, for a more nuanced vision of speaking, taking into consideration structural forms of domination and emphasizing the necessity of being heard when we speak. The final part of the article will examine the importance of the body in the speaking process to be able to understand articulation as a speaking-embodied appearance.

1. Rancière: Articulation as Spoken Inquiry

One of the focal points of Rancière's work is understanding politics as an act of questioning and criticizing current regulatory orders. In *Disagreement* (1999), he distin-

guishes between police and politics. For him, police is not a state apparatus, but rather

an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (Rancière 1999: 29)

So, police is not what we may understand it to be in our everyday language but an ordering of the visible and sayable, structuring our perception and holding bodies and subjects in place and assigning them functions. Police thus establishes a specific distribution of the sensible, excluding what Rancière refers to as “the part of those who have no part” (*la part des sans-part*) and determining who and what can participate in politics, what can be expressed and said, and whose voices are considered to be noise (Rancière 1999: 9, 15). However, this order of distribution can be challenged by politics, creating a moment of dissent where the police order is disturbed and broken by the appearance of the “part of those who have no part,” which claims a place on the political scene (ibid.: 29). As Rancière does not strictly separate his notion of democracy from the notion of the political, this moment of appearance is also a central part of his understanding of democracy (ibid.: 99f). Furthermore, for him, this process of a break in the order is a practice of equality because the excluded group claims its equality which so far has been neglected. At the same time, it is also a process of subjectivation, i.e., disidentification with the ascribed function, role, and place of the subject in question (Rancière 1998: 119). Rancière writes that, for him, subjectivation is

the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. (Rancière 1999: 35)

In this process, the field of perception is reorganized and recreated by subjects. For Rancière, this is emancipatory and transformative. The field of the possible is reshaped by the break that points to something other and as yet indefinable. In this context, fiction and dreaming are important notions in Rancière’s theory. Fictions are not opposed to reality, but permeate it, form our field of perception and are part of the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2022b: 95). Fictions can therefore assign us our place in the sense of the policing order, but can also transcend this place and provoke a break with it.

Rancière considers the moment of Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat on a bus, which was reserved for white people, to be an example of subjectivation. Poli-

tics emerge as a dissenting and conflictual element during the moment of subjectivation or disidentification. Parks disturbs the distribution of the sensible and breaks with her perceived role and assigned identity as defined by the police order. She is expected to give up her seat because it is reserved for white people, but she refuses. However, Rancière rarely provides examples in his work, and when he does, he uses the same ones (which points to their singularity and non-transferability). These examples range from Jeanne Deroin and Olympe de Gouges to the proletarians of the 1830s, such as Gabriel Gauny (Rancière/Honneth 2016: 120).

In this binary separation between police and politics, Rancière also separates speech from noise. For politics to occur and subjects to emerge, they must be perceived as speakers and not as noisy entities (*bruit*). Dissensual disagreement (*dissensus*) arises over the speaking position itself, rather than the content or intention of what is said; it is therefore a disagreement about appearing on the political scene at all (Rancière 1999: 27). Rancière writes that “it [the disagreement] is less concerned with arguing than with what can be argued” (ibid.: xii). He uses Ballanche’s interpretation of Agrippa’s fable of the secession of the plebs to the Aventine Hill to emphasize this point: The plebeians are nameless beings to the patricians, unable to speak and capable only of making noise. However, when one of the patricians addresses them and they understand what is being said, they become speaking beings, equal to the patricians (ibid.: 23, 33). This is the moment at which the break with the current police order occurs and politics begins to take place.

Three aspects of Rancière’s thought are interesting for the argument of this article: First, he places speaking as a dissensual form of articulation at the center of his conception of politics; second, he attributes agency to subjects by means of the possibility of disidentification; and, finally, he considers the question of who and what can appear on the political stage. Reflecting on the Iranian migrants in Calais, we can learn with Rancière that they are disturbing the established police order of the sensible by emphasizing their status as speaking beings, beings with a voice, while staying silent, because their lips are sewn shut. By this means, they assert their equality and highlight their previous non-appearance within the policing order.

However, Rancière’s thoughts also have their flaws. Firstly, politics always involves appearance on a scene for him; otherwise, no disagreement or dissensus can arise and no distribution of the sensible can be disturbed. Though he uses the term “appearance,” it is mostly understood as referring to visibility, to sensory perception. So for him, there can be no invisible political speech act. For something to be political, it has to appear here and now, and thus be visible. This is an angle that political theory and philosophy have classically focused on when theorizing on politics, democracy, and the political.

But it can be argued that Rancière overlooks multiple extreme forms of violence and extremely violent police orders (Sonderegger 2016: 32), such as the experiences of enslaved people or those in concentration or extermination camps. From Ran-

cière's perspective, the writings of Salman Gradowski, who wrote about his experiences in Auschwitz while he was still in the camp and hid his writings in jars all over the camp, are not to be considered a political act, because they are not directly visible. But doesn't Rancière realize that appearing here and now would have meant death for Gradowski? Couldn't we also argue that, as some of his writings were found and published, his actions did become apparent, albeit indirectly and in the aftermath?

Similarly, Rancière does not consider the multiple entanglements that exist among power structures and forms of domination. According to Ruth Sonderegger, in doing this he generalizes the ability to speak for oneself, failing to consider the complexities of power structures (Sonderegger 2016: 31; Sonderegger 2018: 13). He assumes that subjects can always appear and speak without any difficulty. Reflecting on Rosa Parks, we might consider how questions of race and gender intersect to create various forms of impossibility and difficulty for subjects to appear. He thereby fails to recognize the many difficulties of the speaking position, such as being exposed to violence and threats. Not everyone can appear in public equally, make their demands heard, or act (Ullrich/Flügel-Martinsen 2024: 176). We might think of other Black people who remained seated in places where they were not permitted to sit, such as Claudette Colvin, who did not achieve the same level of visibility as did Park's act. Does the fact that these acts were not recognized or remembered, that they did not appear, make them non-political?

Also relevant here is the question of how Rancière's process of subjectivation actually works. How does politics arise? Isn't some preparation required beforehand? What happens after the rupture? To what extent is this process collective and not focused solely on one subject? (Sonderegger 2018: 19). In this context, Zieringer and Leonhardt emphasize that we do not have just one identity that we break with, but multiple identities depending on the context, time, and place (Zieringer/Leonhardt 2020: 184). We may disidentify with one identity at a given moment, but not with others at the same time, and we may also revert to certain identities and roles because disidentification is a complex process that does not end after one instance, and identity ascriptions are also very persistent (Zieringer/Leonhardt 2020: 179). Therefore, disagreement must be repeated, reiterated, and rearticulated to slowly change the distribution of the sensible and transform noise into speech. This is also emphasized by Govrin's concept of affective counter-habitualization (*affektive Gegenhabitualisierung*), which draws on Bourdieu, or by Butler's concept of performativity, which will be discussed in more detail later (Govrin 2025: 390–409).

Finally, Rancière's theory of the body—even though the concept is present in his vocabulary when he writes of bodies leaving their place and position in the political process of questioning—is underdeveloped, as is his concept of the speech act itself, which can only be performed by bodies. It seems as though the body merely plays an instrumental role for him (Zieringer/Leonhardt 2020: 181; Quintana 2020), and he overlooks the fact that power structures affect bodies differently. Nevertheless,

his theory provides gateways and starting points for discussing bodily and physical experiences, perceptions, affects, and emotions through the distribution of the sensible (Kappeler 2024: 185; Ullrich/Flügel-Martinsen 2024: 174).

These criticisms will be examined in more detail in the following sections on Spivak and Butler, conceptualizing articulation as speaking-embodied appearance, using Rancière's idea of speaking as questioning and breaking with police orders as a starting point.

2. Spivak: Who Speaks? Who Listens? Articulations Under the Radar

Spivak's analysis of speaking focuses on the issue of being heard or listened to. By taking into consideration the structural impossibilities of speaking and appearing, such as those relating to colonialism, patriarchy, or race, she can deepen our understanding of articulation.

Her best-known examination of the question of speaking is her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), where she asks whether and to what extent subalterns can speak. The term "subaltern" originates from the Subaltern Studies Group (taking up Gramsci's notion), of which she was an active member. The group was interested in rewriting Indian history, which had mostly been narrated from the perspective of the colonizers, from the perspective of the so-called subalterns: people who were denied all forms of political, social, and/or discursive mobility, such as rural workers (Spivak 1996: 288). Retrieving their voices mostly involved archival work. While Spivak largely supports this approach, she also criticizes it for under-theorizing the ways in which structural forms of oppression operate differently on female bodies. She is also critical of the way that the retrieval of subaltern voices from the archives can suggest the existence of "pure" subaltern voices that can always represent and speak for themselves (Spivak 1999: 272, 274). She argues that there is no such thing as a "pure" subaltern, and that any attempt to exemplify this concept is doomed to fail (Spivak 1996: 289).

It follows that, for Spivak, the term "subaltern" is always gendered and entangled in colonial power structures. The subaltern cannot speak for herself (Spivak 1994: 83). This is because speaking involves an interaction between a speaker and a listener, as opposed to merely talking (Spivak 1996: 289f). However, she later softens her stance, claiming that her assertion that the subaltern cannot speak emerged from rhetorical anguish (*ibid.*: 289). Nevertheless, she maintains her fundamental argument, emphasizing the inherent impossibility of speaking within her concept of subalternity (*ibid.*: 290).

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she uses a story to illustrate this point. It concerns Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young woman who hanged herself. A member of a resistance group, she was charged with performing a political assassination, which

she did not want to carry out, and rather than perform this task, she chose to take her own life. To rule out interpretations relating to an unwanted pregnancy or failed romantic relationship, she waited until she was menstruating before taking her life (Spivak 1994: 103f). Spivak interprets this act as an attempt by a subaltern subject to speak, but one that necessarily fails.

So, “the subaltern cannot speak,” means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That’s what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot. (Spivak 1996: 292)

Spivak observes that Bhaduri’s death was nonetheless interpreted as the result of a failed romance or an unwanted pregnancy, despite the fact that she was menstruating, and that her activism and the assassination she was asked to perform were never considered. From this we can learn that dead bodies speak but need living bodies to translate their speech; a translation which sometimes fails, as Bhaduri’s case starkly shows.

In certain speech acts, therefore, the appearance of the subaltern is rendered impossible by the structural dimensions of not being listened to. It follows that Spivak’s subaltern is more deeply entangled with structures of invisibilization than Rancière’s “part of those who have no part,” which can theoretically always claim its part and be heard. Rancière seems to forget the importance of being listened to, even though the original French title of his book *La Mésentente* contains the word *entendre* (listening). Furthermore, he generalizes the possibility of speaking on behalf of other subjects. This is a criticism that Spivak also directs at Foucault and Deleuze in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and which, following Sonderegger, can also be directed at Rancière (Sonderegger 2016: 31). Rancière also indirectly implies that there is always an authentic, uniform way of speaking for the subject that just needs to be retrieved by others, such as intellectuals; by historians, for example, in the case of the Subaltern Studies Group (Spivak 1999: 272). Spivak points out that the role of intellectuals is more complex than Foucault and Deleuze suggest when they claim that intellectuals can help subalterns to express themselves. In claiming to retrieve subaltern speech, they forget their own hierarchical involvement in colonial structures of (inter)dependency (Spivak 1994: 67). In a sense, this criticism could also be directed at Spivak herself, given that she does not reflect sufficiently on her role within Indian society. Rancière also fails to address the ambivalent role of intellectuals in *speaking-for*. He never lays bare his own entanglements as a Western, white, male intellectual, and he mostly focuses on France in his research into authors and subjects, without ever reflecting on its colonial past (Sonderegger 2016: 39). Although the question of speaking-for is crucial, it cannot be discussed in detail here. However, it is important to note in the context of this article that Rancière

does not address these aspects of speech. It follows too that, as researchers, we should always think critically about who we might speak for and what our own blind spots are, due to our positionality (König/Erhart 2023).

Finally, Spivak also draws our attention to the embodied aspect of speaking and how structural forms of violence leave their mark on the body. This is illustrated, for example, by the *Breast Stories* of Bengali author Mahasweta Devi, which Spivak translated into English. One story concerns Jashoda, who works as a wet nurse for a wealthier family and ultimately dies of breast cancer. Her body is gendered and subaltern, and is systematically exploited (Spivak 1988: xvi, 248). Spivak also addresses the question of embodiment in the case of Bhaduri. She writes: “She *had* tried to represent herself, through self-representation of the body, but it had not come through.” (Spivak 1996: 306; emphasis in original) In this regard, the body speaks through its actions, without the need to form words. This aspect of speaking through the body is also present in Rancière’s understanding of speech: When Parks refuses to leave her seat on the bus, her bodily action speaks for itself. However, Rancière never directly addresses this question, nor does he ask in what sense it makes any difference to his conceptualization of speaking or to the rupture with the distribution of the sensible. This bodily aspect of articulation will be examined further with Butler because, like Rancière, Spivak recognizes the bodily aspect of speaking, but does not discuss it further.

Nevertheless, Spivak teaches us that when we consider articulation as speaking-embodied appearance, we must consider structural impossibilities, entanglements, and obstacles to speaking and appearing. By focusing on the necessary role of listening for the completion of the speech act, Spivak makes us aware that even though some subjects speak (in Spivak’s sense) or talk (in the sense of speech act theories), they are not necessarily heard. Consequently, some voices and actions remain unheard or unseen; they may (re-)appear under other circumstances or at a different time, and they may disappear again; but this does not render them any less political than those that appear directly here and now. In this way, articulations are more than a direct transmission from speaker to listener; they are always entangled in multiple layers of power structures. These structures are always political, creating forms of invisibility, making it nearly impossible for some voices to appear. Therefore, we must look critically at existing power structures if we want to understand appearance as speaking-embodied appearance.

3. Butler: Articulation as Embodied Interrogation

As previously mentioned, Butler helps us reconsider the role of the body in the speech act. They emphasize that speech acts are both bodily and linguistic (Butler 1997a: 141). We need our bodies to express ourselves verbally, to form words in our

mouths and to speak them aloud, as well as to listen to them with our ears. However, this does not mean that our bodies merely function as instruments. Rather, they are intertwined with the speech act, exceeding and performing it simultaneously (Butler 1997a: 155). Butler writes: “Speech is bodily, but the body exceeds the speech it occasions; and speech remains irreducible to the bodily means of enunciation.” (ibid.: 155f). The body is thus linked to the act of speaking in a non-deterministic and multifaceted way.

As embodied subjects, we are formed by speech acts and simultaneously form them. Bodies are productive and performative—an argument that Butler partly draws from Foucault (Butler 1997a: 28, 132; Butler 2015: 84). Butler emphasizes that language and speech always come to us through contingent and historical processes that we neither fully understand nor are aware of. Nevertheless, these processes form us as subjects (Butler 1997a: 28) and exceed us at the same time (Butler 2015: 97), though their contingent nature means they also create possibilities of change. At this point, Butler emphasizes the importance of iteration to explain how norms become inscribed in bodies. This is what gives rise to the performative aspect of the acts through which subjects are formed (Butler 1997b: 99; Butler 1997a: 158f). And yet subjects perform these acts by repeating them over and over again. These ongoing repetitions can also contain flaws and moments of failure. It is precisely at this point that the possibility of change arises, enabling shifts and ruptures. These ruptures are also a core element in Rancière’s theory. However, he does not consider the aspect of repetition in policing orders or in the moments of ruptures.² With Butler, we comprehend that the way we speak and what we can speak about depend on historical power structures—an aspect that we have already discussed with Spivak but which is only briefly mentioned in Rancière’s concept of the police order (Butler 2000: 270). He rather suggests an autonomous, uniform speech act initiated by a subject and capable of creating a rupture.

Nevertheless, by distinguishing between speech and noise, he creates a distinction between what can be said and what cannot, even if he overlooks the interconnected and relational nature of the linguistic realm of speech itself (Butler 1997a: 92). By contrast, Butler writes:

Although the subject surely speaks, and there is no speaking without a subject, the subject does not exercise sovereign power over what it says. (Butler 1997a: 34)

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- 2 To talk about the horizon of possibilities, Butler reverses the concept of fantasy, understanding it not as the opposite of reality, but as that which is excluded by reality, as “part of the articulation of the possible” (Butler 2004: 15, 28f). In this context, Butler also refers to the psychoanalytic concept of the *fantasma*, which cannot be explained in detail here. Similar to Butler’s concept of fantasy, Rancière talks about fiction not as being separate from reality, but as forming our perceived reality and shaping it in such a way that it can shift towards something new (Rancière 2004: 37f).

Butler therefore proposes an alternative conception of the subject, criticizing the image of the autonomous, atomistic subject prevalent in mainstream Western philosophy (naming René Descartes as one starting point of this). This subject seems to possess a deterministic agency that it reveals via speech acts and articulations, expressed in a linear and intentional way (Butler 1997a: 49). However, this conception overlooks, for Butler, the fundamental dependency of the speaking subject on other bodies and the environment, on all that precedes and surrounds us, and on the relationality and embodiment of subjects, while simultaneously attempting to essentialize and harmonize them (Butler 2015: 84, 209f). For Butler, dependency is something that cannot be wished or willed away, and it never leaves us. From the moment we are born, we are vulnerable and exposed to others, to their touch and to their gaze (Butler 2004: 24, 150). Consequently, we cannot exist without others, though this does not imply that interdependency points to social harmony (Butler 2015: 151). It always remains ambiguous and conflictual. According to Butler, we are born into a world of already-formed structures, language, objects, and subjects that we did not choose and which influence us, just as we can influence them. Therefore, “bodily autonomy [...] is a lively paradox” (Butler 2004: 21); the body implies “mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence.” (Ibid.)

This complexity of embodiment means that, although we all share a vulnerability, it is experienced and distributed unevenly (Butler 2015: 119). At the same time, Butler’s conception of embodiment does not leave us entirely alone and at the mercy of others, but implies that we also possess agency, that we can influence, change and resist structures, ideas and the ways in which we live together (ibid.: 84, 139). Butler thus provides us with a multifaceted concept of embodiment that includes vulnerability, dependency, and relationality. The body is not a rigid, closed entity, but exists in a constant state of flux in relation to others (ibid.: 130). Embodied subjects are “beside oneself, [...] a porous boundary, given over to others” (Butler 2004: 25).

This processual perspective and resistant questioning are also evident in Rancière’s discussion of subjectivation (as opposed to the subject). However, although he incorporates a bodily perspective, he does not elaborate on its implications in the same way that Butler does in their conceptualization of vulnerability and relationality. With Butler, we can think of the body as an ambivalent figure of the speech act through which speech can reach others in multiple ways, some of which are unintentional. But where speech or effects of speech can also be experienced emotionally and affectively, they sometimes go beyond words. Thus, the body appears less instrumental. The affect that Butler focuses on is grief: Asking which bodies are grieved in our societies sheds light on how exclusions take place, and which embodied subjects are considered as living beings and therefore ‘worthy’ of grief (Butler 2015: 197). However, going beyond Butler, we can also consider other affects, such as rage or pain, to understand how and why embodied subjects appear and how they feel. Grief can

thus be understood as one component in a more complex ambivalent mosaic of different emotions and affects.

This also implies that, for Butler, ‘speaking’ can be performed without uttering a word: “When the body ‘speaks’ politically, it is not only in vocal or written language.” (Butler 2015: 83) Consequently, a performative dimension emerges when bodies assemble in public spaces (ibid.: 137).³ In their *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler discusses how these vulnerable bodies expose themselves to violence while simultaneously articulating their needs and desires and criticizing current orders, without necessarily having a pre-fixed agenda or political demands (ibid.: 182). For Butler, these bodies demand the necessary infrastructure, such as shelter, food, and medical care, to live a livable life and be considered equal (ibid.: 81, 96, 182). This assumed lack of concrete political demands is also evident in Rancière’s portrayal of occupational and social movements, particularly in his writings on May 68 (Rancière 2022a: 135). In *Disagreement*, he also emphasizes that the conflictual conception of the political cannot be fixed around a subject or topic—he never talks about a conflict of interests—but rather revolves around the question of speaker position and rupture with the police order, as discussed above (Rancière 1999: 27). Butler observes that, during political occupation actions, bodily needs are organized differently. This implicitly criticizes police orders, while performing/demonstrating how life could be organized differently in the present moment. In this way, the body acts as a vector, enabling disruptions and occasioning “radical rearticulation” (Butler 1993: 23). Rancière and Butler thus have some conceptual similarities regarding appearance. Butler writes:

The claim of equality is not only spoken or written, but is made precisely when bodies appear together, or, rather, when, through their action, they bring the space of appearance into being. (Butler 2015: 88f)

Similar to Rancière’s embodied subjects in the moment of appearing, Butler’s bodies claim their equality. In doing so, they acknowledge their previous non-appearance and exclusion. This focus on appearing is similar to Rancière’s and can be criticized in the same way: that Butler too strongly links the political with the question of visibility. Like Rancière, Butler does not consider the ways in which articulations can be political without appearing directly in the public sphere.

3 Performativity holds a central place for Butler: They describe it as “renewable action without clear origin or end” (Butler 1997a: 40). It is impossible to retrieve the speaker or the context in which it arose. It draws power from repetition, but it is also possible to break free from its power through repetition in an unforeseen way. “It’s a girl” is thus a performative act for Butler, being repeated, forming the subject but holding within it the possibility of being formed by the subject through breaks in the repetition (ibid.: 49).

However, Butler engages not only with the embodied aspect, but also with the possibilities of alliances and relationalities more than Rancière, for whom subjectivation seems to revolve around a more singular subject. For Butler, this relationality also extends beyond the bodies assembled at a specific time and place, as there are always other bodies involved, whether they are elsewhere, existed before, or will exist afterward (Butler 2015: 177). In this way, we may conclude that Butler offers a more nuanced perspective on the emergence of bodies in public, providing a clearer understanding of the ways in which embodied subjects are intertwined and dependent on each other.

When we think about the Iranian migrants speaking with their lips sewn shut, we can, with Butler, understand that they are speaking with their bodies as embodied beings, and that their bodies are claiming the necessary infrastructure to enable them to live a livable life. At the same time, we can view their act as a collective one, in the sense that these bodies depend on others and join forces with those in a similar situation who cannot be present at that precise moment. These bodies reveal their vulnerability through the violent act of sewing their lips shut and exposing themselves. In this way, their bodies act as vectors of interrogation of current norms, or, in Rancière's terms, of policing orders. They demand to be listened to, while criticizing at the same time hegemonic ways of listening organized around power structures, as Spivak pointed out. They challenge, again with Rancière, the distribution of the sensible, by articulating themselves through speech and body, thereby indicating an openness to other possible articulations.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed how articulation can be understood in its political dimension as a speaking-embodied appearance with respect to the writings of Rancière, Spivak, and Butler. The article used critical theories with a small *c* as a methodological framework to read the authors against and with each other. We have shown that articulations are not formulated by homogeneous, atomistic subjects with clear identities; rather they are always intertwined with speech and the body, forming subjects and themselves being formed by them. Speech and bodies are gendered and racialized and embedded in structural power relations that precede and follow them. In that sense, articulations do not arise in a vacuum but in relation to society and to other subjects. These relations determine who appears as a speaking subject. Thinking with Spivak, they also determine who is heard. In this way, power structures exercise the aforementioned “politics of silence” (Hammonds 2001: 384), producing supposedly silent subjects—subjects “under the radar”—who nevertheless articulate themselves, as the dead body of Bhaduri has shown.

In this context, bodies are not merely instrumental; they feel and experience emotions such as anger, rage, and grief when they articulate themselves. According to Butler, we feel ourselves and others, we are vulnerable, and have in common with each other our dependency, which we can shape in different ways. We speak through these affects but also with our bodies, without necessarily uttering a word. Compared to speaking, articulations are less focused on pure vocalization, although speaking can be part of an articulation.

Articulations therefore do not need to convey a clear, fixed message. The content of articulations cannot be predetermined, as they depend on constantly changing historical contexts. Rather than content, their focus is, in Rancière's terms, on questioning prevailing police orders and changing the distribution of the sensible by pointing beyond existing orders and prefiguring possible futures. Articulations draw attention to exclusions, showing how they take place and how noise can be turned into speech.

However, it is important to note that articulations are not directly linked to visibility. We must consider this connection in a more complex and multilayered way than Rancière suggests. Articulations are not fixed acts; they are uncertain, volatile, and embodied. They can appear, disappear, and reappear at different times, in different places and go beyond the dualism of visibility and invisibility. Ruptures are therefore not clear cuts, but rather fine tears in the fabric of the possible. As Butler observes, there is always something that exceeds. We must consider this multiplicity of appearances and avoid directly linking the political to a momentary visibility (with the question of representation lying behind it) without examining what happens around it—before, afterward, in-between. Furthermore, we should not underestimate the persistence of policing orders and power structures. We need to consider small shifts, which may even be invisible at the time they happen.

This understanding can already be found in Evelyn Hammonds's writings about the articulation of Black queer women, and it can also be applied to other non-appearing, nevertheless articulating subjects:

In overturning the "politics of silence" the goal cannot be merely to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a "politics of articulation." This politics would build on the interrogation of what makes it possible for Black women to speak and act. (Hammonds 2001: 390)

Bringing Hammonds' understanding of articulation together with the thoughts of Rancière, Spivak, and Butler, we can see that articulations are a complex, ambivalent process involving both speech—meaning, speaking, and listening—and the body. Consequently, articulation goes beyond a simple amalgamation of speech and visi-

bility at a certain given moment. As shown by the Iranian migrants in Calais, articulation is an interrogation that manifests as both speech and embodiment.

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