

**'command that does not
command': reconsidering
rancièrè's opposition of
politics and policing**

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1. POLITICS THAT DOES NOT COMMAND

Since the publication of his last book-length political polemic, *Hatred of Democracy* (2005), the work of Jacques Rancièrè has generally focused on developing the conceptual and historical features of his account of aesthetics. With the recent publication of his 2009 debate with Axel Honneth, *Recognition or Disagreement?* (2016), we have good reason to return to his political thought as it is outlined in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1995) and related texts such as his “Ten Theses on Politics” (1998). Programmatically speaking, Rancièrè conceives of politics as a practice of dissensus enacted in the name of equality. But in examining the debate between Rancièrè and Honneth, Jean-Philippe Deranty and Katia Genel have recently sought to reframe Rancièrè’s account of dissensus in the terms of Honneth’s theory of recognition. Drawing on the subtitle of *Disagreement*, it is necessary to critique Deranty and Genel both at the level of politics and how this politics implicates philosophy. Elsewhere, I have already indicated how reframing dissensus as a form of the politics of recognition blunts the radicality of Rancièrè’s methodological commitments.¹ I will not revisit these claims here. Instead, I would like to dispel the assumption that makes this “recognition” reading—as one variant of a generally liberal reading of Rancièrè—possible. On this assumption, Rancièrè holds that dissensual speech *is* political action. As Deranty writes,

“politics in *Disagreement* is a battle of justifications, mainly a battle about what counts as justification and who is entitled to proffer and expect justifications.”² But Rancière’s work isn’t about how to distribute social goods and allocate duties and entitlements to such a degree that we will willingly accept inequalities in our societies. So I will argue, by contrast, that for Rancière speech functions as a metonymy for a broader praxis of egalitarian, dissensual politics. More specifically, I will contend that Rancière’s egalitarian politics entails two forms of praxis: the symbolization of equality through dissensus *and* the subversion or elimination of relationships of command, coercion, or force implemented by regimes of policing.³

Were it merely an issue concerning interpretations of Rancière, I would not argue in the somewhat polemical terms that follow. However, I reject the recognition reading because it depoliticizes forms of policing—capital accumulation and the state—that have a stake in political conflict, a stake in maintaining inequalities that abet accumulation and control. This criticism applies to both, in Nancy Fraser’s terms, “affirmative” models of recognition and “transformative” models. On her definition, affirmative models “aim to correct inequitable outcomes of social arrangement without disturbing the underlying social structures that generate them.”⁴ Honneth’s theory is on this definition an affirmative form of recognition. In his debate with Rancière, Honneth—unwilling, metaphorically speaking, to leave the sphere of circulation and commodity exchange—concedes that the “freedom of contract in the labor market” is integral to his model of recognition,⁵ thus depoliticizing capital accumulation. Moreover, when Rancière argues that Honneth’s theory of recognition emphasizes a relationship between already existing entities and identities, this not only echoes Rancière’s earlier critique of Jürgen Habermas (which is discussed below), it also bears a striking resemblance to Fraser’s critique of affirmative remedies for misrecognition.⁶

Perhaps then Rancière’s politics would be closer to what Fraser calls a transformative politics, which aims “to correct unjust outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework.”⁷ In what follows, I will argue that Rancière’s account of dissensus involves both practices of symbolizing new names and meanings of equality, and practices of combatting and eliminating the forms of command that implement apparatuses of inequality that are similar to what Fraser calls “status subordination.” For example, Fraser argues that the status subordination of women encompasses both maldistribution (the division between so-called productive and reproductive labor and between higher-paid

male-dominated manufacturing and professional occupations and lower-paying, lower-prestige domestic service occupations) and misrecognition (the androcentrism that is “an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as ‘feminine,’ paradigmatically—but not only—women”).⁸ Redressing status subordination, for Fraser, would entail both redistribution (she proposes, as one possibility, a universal basic income) and a form of recognition (in the case of gender inequalities) that would deconstruct the “symbolic oppositions that underlie currently institutionalized patterns of cultural value,” such as those codings that differentiate between men’s and women’s work.⁹

Despite the similarities between them, Rancière’s politics differs in important ways from Fraser’s transformative paradigm of redistribution/recognition. In his landmark *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glen Sean Coulthard criticizes the recognition paradigm vis-à-vis Indigenous struggles for self-determination, concluding that her own transformative theory of recognition nonetheless depoliticizes the settler state. He writes: “Fraser’s status model rests on the problematic background assumption that the settler state constitutes a legitimate framework within which Indigenous peoples might be more justly included.”¹⁰ Indeed, the full recognition of Indigenous nationhoods would encompass the full recognition of Indigenous title *against* settler sovereignty and throw into question the normative status of the settler state-form of governance. Thus, he argues, when Fraser claims that her status model seeks to address political demands in “polyethnic” polities like the United States, her contention is “premised on a misrecognition of its own... as a state founded on the dispossessed territories of previously self-determining but now colonized Indigenous nations.”¹¹ Coulthard’s critique demonstrates how Fraser’s work assumes the normative status of the state as mediator of competing claims, while Rancière’s politics explicitly frames the state as a form of policing. Hence, for Rancière, the state—among the other institutions of policing—cannot play the role of neutral arbiter of political, even democratic, consensus.

For Rancière, politics is dissensus and disagreement. Here I aim to demonstrate how Rancière’s account of policing has the conceptual tools to show the coercive and latent violence in apparatuses of policing such as the state (manifest for example in the judicial system, the penal system, and police enforcement), institutional political representation, and work under capitalism. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but these examples are often routine fixtures of many of our everyday lives, and cops and bosses happen to enforce lines of command which

carry punitive consequences. But there is a second sense in which this list is not exhaustive. I would argue, given more space, that the way that these apparatuses of command impinge on our lives varies according to social norms that, whether or not they are also to a degree latently coercive, guide, direct or legitimate how cops or work or pedagogy impinge more frequently and/or more intensively on some bodies rather than others. Thus I will assume that the reader takes it for granted that in the United States or Canada (among other settler-colonial states, obviously) we cannot provide a complete analysis—and more importantly, we cannot organize effectively against oppression and domination—of a legal system, political representation, or work, without addressing how the norms of heteropatriarchy, anti-black racism, settlerism, and ableism privilege some bodies and marginalize others.

I will restrict my focus here, though, to Rancière's analysis of the problem of command and coercion. I intend this analysis to provide textual evidence from *Dis-agreement* and "Ten Theses on Politics" to establish that command and coercion are important problems for Rancière.¹² Rancière, in fact, argues that command and coercion need not be legitimated by prior forms of oppression, but rather that the very form of command or an order *produces* or *institutes* relations of inequality where they may not already be present. In this regard, Rancière's thought bears a strong similarity to the anarchistic anthropology of Pierre Clastres. To my knowledge, Rancière has never cited Clastres. However, I am not the first to notice the similarity. Miguel Abensour's opposition between what he calls "insurgent democracy" and the state, for example, draws upon both Rancière's discussions of *democracy* and Clastres' account of *societies against the state*.¹³ And Arash Joudaki uses Rancière's concept of equality to reconsider some of the ethnographic data gathered by Clastres, though I would argue that it would be more productive for a non-Eurocentric political discourse to have used Rancière's critique of the epistemological biases of the social sciences to undermine the way that Clastres lapses into a variation of "salvage ethnography".¹⁴ While examining the ways that Abensour or Joudaki have put Rancière and Clastres to productive use, I noticed that neither of the former had highlighted latter's emphasis of the productive dimension of command. For Clastres the point is explicit. In *Society Against the State*, he attempts to isolate the origin of alienated labor in the formation of state power, that is, in the implementation of relations of command and coercion.

The political relation of power precedes and founds the economic relation of exploitation. Alienation is political before it is economic; power precedes labor; the

economic derives from the political; the emergence of the State determines the advent of classes.¹⁵

It is not my intent here to evaluate this ‘origin’ story of political power or the role it plays in his polemic against Marxist anthropology. I only want to note that Clastres viewed command as the institution of hierarchical power over what would otherwise be egalitarian societies; what destroys the egalitarian relations of indigenous societies against the state is “the power to compel; it is the power of coercion; it is political power.”¹⁶ While the point is explicit for Clastres, we have not yet adequately theorized the problem of command in the work of Rancière. As I will argue below, the problem of command plays a central role in his descriptions of how policing produces and reproduces stratifications of social relations in a given society, how policing distinguishes and organizes the roles of those whose task it is to rule and those who must be ruled, and those whose task it is to think and those whose task it is to work. What marks a significant advance of Rancière beyond Clastres’ analyses is that, for Rancière, command is not just imposed, as if from above, by the state, but can be deployed in practices and norms that are much more diffuse.

I have divided my argument into three parts. Before proceeding, though, I would like to address how we might understand the relationship between command and coercion (which I discuss here), and violence (of which command and coercion are but one form). Rancière does not have a theory of political violence, though he does write about command in policing. A liberal reading of Rancière might suggest, as we reconstruct a theory of political violence in his work, that Rancière’s opposition of politics and policing is analogous to Hannah Arendt’s opposition of political power and violence. I believe such an analogy to be superficial. On the one hand, Arendt defines power broadly as “the human ability...to act in concert,” whereas for Rancière politics is strictly egalitarian, a dynamic of subjectivation that begins from the supposition of the equality.¹⁷ His politics is much more narrow, relegating much of what Arendt would consider political power to policing. On the other hand, though I cannot consider it here, in *On the Shores of Politics*, Rancière argues that the demands made during the workers’ strikes in France in 1833 were based on the possibility of outright revolutionary violence.¹⁸ Elsewhere, I argue, on the basis of *On the Shores of Politics* and other texts, that Rancière rejects the strict opposition of politics and violence.¹⁹

Having made these interpretive decisions explicit, we can now proceed. In Section 2, I outline Rancière's opposition between politics and the police. While doing so, I propose that we can interpret Samuel Chambers' and Todd May's differences concerning Rancière—aside from the obvious fact that Chambers isn't an anarchist and May is—as rooted in the respective weight each gives to the role of symbolization and the role of combating coercion in Rancière's politics. In Section 3, I show how the problem of coercion is outlined in Rancière's *Disagreement* within what other critics have analyzed as his polemic with Habermas. Finally, in Section 4, I will argue that, by emphasizing the way that egalitarian politics combats reified structures of command, coercion, or force, we can have done with the objection—raised by Jodi Dean—that Rancière's politics is, at best, *merely symbolic*, that is, *merely* dissensual speech. I have titled this section “Why Fascism Isn't Politics” because I conclude by showing how Rancière's work demonstrates that fascist or quasi-fascist movements of the extreme right are not *political*, but rather contemporary parapolitical modes of social policing.²⁰

2. POLITICS AGAINST THE POLICE

Rancière draws a sharp distinction between politics and the police. For those of us involved in political organizing, his terminology vividly evokes the opposition in the streets between demonstrators and cops. But just as we acknowledge that cops enforce order when the broader forms and institutions of domination and exploitation are challenged by mass movements, Rancière argues policing is not just what uniformed cops do, but also includes much of what passes as politics in our discourses (including the features of consensual democracy or parliamentarianism such as elections, representative government, or governance). All of these practices and institutions share a common assumption: that society necessitates an inegalitarian and stratified distribution of roles and places in society.²¹ By contrast, Rancière contends that politics is the enactment of the supposition of the intellectual equality of any and all human beings.

Thus, while we might begin with the vivid image of people in the street resisting cops, there's also a degree of abstraction in Rancière's conceptual distinction between politics and the police. He refers, for example, to the subject of politics as “the part of those who have no part” rather than specific sociological groups. Such abstraction, in this case, is deliberate on Rancière's part, for it forestalls delimiting *a priori* conditions of political agency concerning who this part *is*, since this ontologizing move risks excluding political subjects who have yet to emerge (or have

yet to enter into sociological description) and who we political theorists cannot foresee.²² However, in drawing the opposition between politics and police, there remains a degree of ambiguity in their relation. At some points, Rancière highlights their heterogeneity: “Politics stands in distinct opposition to the police,”²³ or “politics occurs when there is a place and a way for two heterogeneous processes [i.e. policing and equality] to meet” (Rancière, 30).²⁴ At other points, as already indicated in the latter quotation, he underlines that despite their heterogeneity, politics takes place when practices of equality confront policing; at various points, he defines dissensus as two worlds—one where the part of those who have no part are visible or counted by virtue of their self-empowerment and one where they remain invisible or uncounted—in a single world.²⁵

This paradoxical politics has been a point of contention in Rancière scholarship. Slavoj Žižek and Dean, for example, accuse Rancière of proposing a “pure”—and thus always already impractical—politics, a form of politics that is absolutely heterogeneous to policing and thus ineffective.²⁶ We will address Dean’s critique below. But a similar line of critique has been advanced by Samuel Chambers against Todd May. According to Chambers, May advocates an “pure” anarchistic politics that departs from what Chambers sees to be a crucial feature of Rancière’s thought: that politics is by definition impure, that is, politics is always a supplement to the distribution of a given order of policing. While I will grant Chambers’ criticisms in part, I will also emphasize how May remains attentive to the antiauthoritarian features of Rancière’s politics that are overlooked by Chambers’ loosely liberal interpretation of Rancière. May is correct to point out that politics and policing must be heterogeneous practices of organizing social relations, for these practices can be either egalitarian or inegalitarian, but cannot be both. Maintaining this point is hardly purist.

At this point, I will begin mustering textual evidence for my reading of Rancière. In *Disagreement*, he defines the police as

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 that another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (Rancière, 29)

Policing is a stratified form of organizing what Rancière calls a “distribution of the sensible” (*partage du sensible*). As Rancière notes, distribution or partition (*partage*) is to be understood, first, as both sharing and division of the sensible (*aisthesis*), and then, second, as an account or count of how this *aisthesis* is shared or divided. A distribution of the sensible orients socially lived experience; it defines the roles, actions, places, and meanings of those within a given community. Policing involves distributing bodies and roles, but it also symbolizes these relations in a specific manner; as an apparatus of symbolization, policing allots ways of speaking, acting, and being and delimits speech and noise, visibility and invisibility, existence and inexistence.²⁷ Rancière characterizes a policed symbolization of social order in two ways. He holds that it naturalizes distinctions so they are understood as immediate and objective rather than historically mediated.²⁸ And, then, as we will see below, he also characterizes policing as a form of symbolizing social space as saturated space. In the Seventh Thesis of “Ten Theses on Politics” Rancière argues that policing symbolizes the community without remainder or supplement:

Politics stands in distinct opposition to the police. The police is a distribution of the sensible whose principle is the absence of void and supplement. The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police lies neither in repression nor even control over the living. Its essence lies in a certain way of dividing up the sensible...Political dispute brings politics into being by separating it from the police, which causes it to disappear continually either by purely and simply denying it or claiming political logic as its own.²⁹

According to the logic of policing, all parts of the community are accounted for; this count precludes—via symbolization—the possibility that there is part of the community that is not counted, what Rancière calls a “part of those who have no part” or the “part with no part” (*part des sans-part*). In, for example, contemporary systems of consensus, demonstrations against the wrongs produced by that system are often symbolized as pathology, delinquency, criminality, or terror.³⁰

For our purposes, Thesis Seven appears to undermine my claim that policing entails both symbolization *and* coercion—as Rancière notes, policing is neither repression nor control over the living; it is a “symbolic constitution of the social.” However, there are two ways to respond to this problem. First, I take such a remark to mean, as Chambers argues that when we’re talking about policing, “there can be no clear-cut difference between distribution and its enforcement.”³¹ By conceptualizing the police as a regime of distributing the sensible, Rancière seeks

to avoid two unilateral models of police power: the first, which he associates with the concept of an ideological state apparatus, is that a given distribution of the social order is imposed from above by the powers that be and *then* subsequently enforced by the police order (Rancière, 29); the second is that of Lacanian political critique—as we will see with Dean—in which policing is *first* a repressive force, and *then* a force that subsequently distorts all attempts to symbolize the social order.

There is additional evidence that Rancière does not view the police as merely an apparatus of symbolizing the distribution of social space. On this point, we can return to the differences between Chambers and May on Rancière’s politics. We have thus far said little about what Rancière’s politics involves, because that is the point at issue in our discussion. However, there are two programmatic claims we can begin with:

“Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination; it makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard [*entendre*] a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood [*entendre*] as discourse what was once only heard [*entendu*] as noise”. (Rancière, 30) Politics involves an “open set of practices driven by the assumption of equality and by the concern to test this equality”. (Rancière, 30)

At issue is *how* politics relates to policing, and I have deliberately chosen two passages that leave this question open. Nevertheless, we can glean that politics involves enacting the supposition of equality and that it involves some form of distributing bodies that subverts the distribution within a given regime of policing. I will argue, in more detail below, that for Rancière, politics (*la politique*) is egalitarian insofar as (a) it symbolizes equality by introducing new ways of relating subjects, places, and objects; and (b) it resists, disrupts, and subverts social relations of command.

Now, Chambers argues that May effects a kind of “Manichean transformation” of Rancière, introducing a pure politics untainted by policing: “May ‘elevates’ politics to a pure form of action, while reducing police to an *anti*-political and implicitly repressive order of domination and injustice.”³² Certainly, there are points where Chambers’ critique is warranted. For example, May at points too readily identifies “distribution” with “policing,” arguing that “distributions are what gov-

ernments do. But they are not what people do.”³³ By contrast, as we see in the first passage on politics above, if we embody egalitarian practices, that too is a mode of distributing the sensible. Nevertheless, I do not think that the distinction between “pure” and “impure” politics isolates the central point of contention between Chambers and May. To situate, as Chambers does, May’s reading against an exegesis of Rancière’s texts neutralizes how Chambers proceeds, like May, to do things with Rancière’s work rather than to merely interpret it. Chambers treats speech and “literarity”—an “excess of words” to defined places—as the emblematic paradigm of Rancière’s politics.³⁴ By contrast, May notes that while speech is often privileged in Rancière’s account of politics, it need not be the metonymy for politics *tout court*—we could also conceptualize politics through metaphors of place, embodiment, and direct action.³⁵ Their difference, then, could be that Chambers emphasizes how politics is symbolized while May emphasizes how relations of egalitarian praxis are by definition opposed—heterogenous—to the inegalitarian distributions of the police order. Thus, when Rancière argues that political conflict “forms an opposition between logics that count the parties and parts of the community in different ways,”³⁶ May emphasizes how these “logics” are embodied through political subjectivation or techniques of policing. And, as I will argue below, if in *Disagreement* command is one of the central problems of policing, then we need take seriously Rancière’s other claim, in “Ten Theses on Politics,” that an egalitarian or democratic politics is, according to the supposition of equality, a practice of “command that does not command (*commandement de ce qui ne commande pas*).”³⁷ May takes politics and policing to be heterogenous because egalitarian praxis must carve new spaces where inequality—command and coercion—are no longer instituted. This is especially evident in his essay, “Rancière and Anarchism,” where May argues that Rancière’s work indicates the possibility of forms of governance that embody the idea that everyone is equally entitled to govern: “at certain points, some might be entitled to give orders to others, who might be obliged to obey them. On the other hand, it would not be a form of governance that presupposes that those giving the orders would be entitled to those orders in the sense of being justified by any quality they possessed.”³⁸ While May strives to consider how relations of equality might be institutionalized—which for Rancière is not possible³⁹—this hardly constitutes a kind of “Manichean transformation” of Rancière, introducing a pure politics untainted by policing.⁴⁰ If the problem is whether, when politics takes place, our politics embodies relations of command *or not*, and relations of coercion *or not*, of violence *or not*, then May’s point is hardly Manichean; it’s a self-reflexive question about whether our practices prefigure the demands we’re fighting for *or not*. This politics divides the com-

mon world into two, but it must also, to some degree, always come into conflict with policing in the common space of the community, both combatting relations of command and coercion and forms of symbolizing, legitimating, and naturalizing the arguments for inequality.

3. DISAGREEMENT AND COMMAND

So far I have argued that Rancière's claim that the police is a symbolic constitution of the social order does not preclude the further claim that policing institutes relations of command and coercion. If policing entails both the stratification of roles and occupations in a given society and the symbolization and normalization of these forms of inequality, then politics must involve resisting and combatting both. Rancière makes this explicit in the third of his "Ten Theses on Politics" during a brief analysis of Plato's *Laws*, where he focuses on how, for Plato, democracy is equivalent to drawing lots to govern; what both share is "the complete absence of any entitlement to govern."⁴¹ In contrast to Plato's attempt to ground social inequality in a foundational principle, title, or *arkhê*, Rancière contends that politics is "a specific break with the logic of the *arkhê*," a form of "command that does not command (*commandement de ce qui ne commande pas*)."⁴² It might be possible to consign such a remark to its circumstances, namely, Rancière's reading of Plato. However, he weaves together the threads of Theses Three and Seven in Thesis Eight. There, he phrases policing as a symbolic constitution of social space, in the form of an order or command: when these modes of constituting social space are disrupted in a scene such as a demonstration, the police instruct the bodies in a given space to "Move along! There's nothing to see here!"⁴³ Indeed, kettling protestors or cordoning off demonstrations is not just a form of containing political action but also an attempt to control the visibility of contested social spaces.

In what follows, I will argue that political mobilization against command and coercion plays an important role in Rancière's account of politics in *Disagreement*—when politics is enacted, it is not merely symbolic, but it also it undermines or combats relations of command and coercion. By focusing on how politics is always "doubled,"⁴⁴ confronting relations of coercion and forms of symbolization, we can also demonstrate the coherence of Rancière's claim that politics is heterogeneous to policing even though it possesses "no objects or issues of its own;" indeed, that "its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political" (Rancière, 31). Politics is heterogenous to policing insofar as it combats relations of command and coercion. But politics also has no objects or issues of its own

because it enacts the supposition of equality in such a way that raises a dissensus about common objects or issues; it takes terms such as *justice* or *democracy* and opens a space for their symbolization that departs from what they mean within a police order. Thus we need not introduce what Chambers has criticized as the “three-term model” of Rancière’s politics: both Jean-Philippe Deranty and Oliver Marchart have argued that Rancière’s opposition between politics and policing, to be coherent, requires the concept of a space that mediates between the two, which they call “the political” (*le politique* as opposed to Rancière’s *la politique*).⁴⁵ While there are texts where Rancière does discuss the difference between *la politique* and *le politique*, Chambers notes that “Rancière’s central works on politics from the 1990s were all produced *after* the 1991 lecture that had suggested three terms (in English), yet Rancière did not bother to fold that terminology into *La Mésentente*.”⁴⁶ And when the term *le politique* appears in *Disagreement*, Rancière generally uses it to signal how critics and ideologues deny the possibility of politics (in which the object or place of politics is a point of dissensus) by positing the political as an already defined, or even originary, object or place of politics.⁴⁷

To claim though, as Rancière does, that politics has “no objects or issues of its own;” that “its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political” seems to point to another three term model: politics, policing, and equality (Rancière, 31). To complicate matters, he not only claims—as we have seen—that politics is the enactment of the supposition of equality, that equality is not particular to politics, but he also states that “inequality is only possible through equality” (Rancière, 17). The latter two claims seem to suggest that equality is a fundamental or original social relation, an ontological substrate that delimits human being-in-common.⁴⁸ However, this would commit Rancière to reinstating the logic of an *arhkê*. Instead, he refuses to ontologize equality; his use is functional, meaning that he focuses on how relations of equality are *enacted*.⁴⁹ First, on the one hand, relations of equality are not exclusive to politics. As the broader work of Rancière has shown, there can be relations of equality in pedagogy, literature, and aesthetics. Furthermore, May has argued that friendship can embody relations of equality. These relations, when enacted, open temporary spaces where the inequalities of policing are resisted or undermined. On the other hand, there are some actions in which no relation of equality, in Rancière’s sense, is operative, such as killing. Thus far I have not discussed violence beyond the scope of command or coercion because I do not think we can outline a Rancièrean concept of violence without first examining the latent violence present in apparatuses of policing, and it is this latent violence of coercion that means that

we are not dealing merely with a discursive or symbolic politics.

We will focus on two points in *Disagreement* where Rancière analyzes the performative contradictions of relations of command. Not only do these passages demonstrate that command and coercion are, for Rancière, part of the police order, but they also echo arguments found in the rich tradition of Francophone anti-colonialism. The first passage appears at the end of Chapter 1, when Rancière contends that all forms of inequality are historically contingent. Though the Western tradition of political philosophy has sought to naturalize these inequalities, all social stratification is premised on a contradiction:

There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must comprehend the order and you must comprehend that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order. (Rancière, 16)

A command institutes the difference between those who command and those whose task it is to obey. And commands are coercive because they carry the implication of retribution if they aren't carried out: unemployment is one tangible result for a worker who does not obey orders at work. And yet all commands imply a performative contradiction. On the one hand, an order indicates a power differential between those who give orders and those who are supposed to follow them. On the other hand, despite this asymmetry, those who command performatively concede that those who obey understand them. Therefore, relations of command and inequality are paradoxical: to command requires dividing humanity into (at least) two categories—those who command and those who obey—but to make this division legible, those who command must assume the intellectual equality of those who command and those who obey.

In the second passage, Rancière analyzes the performative contradiction of the “false interrogative”: “Do you comprehend?” (Rancière, 44) This analysis plays an important role in Chapter 3, “The Rationality of Disagreement,” situated as it is within a broader polemic against Habermas. While this polemic has drawn the attention of numerous scholars, I consider Matheson Russell and Andrew Montin’s analysis to be the most concise and attentive account of their differences.⁵⁰ For Habermas, they write, the theory of communicative action is to provide the nor-

mative foundation for a discourse that aims for the mutual recognition of interlocutors “as equals with respect to their capacity for rational speech and rational evaluation of speech.”⁵¹ Though mutual recognition and the ideals of communicative action are attenuated by concrete circumstances, Habermas believes that partners to a communicative understanding cannot ultimately refuse these ideals while availing themselves of the legitimacy and warrant provided by them. Rancière, then, undermines Habermas’ framework by demonstrating that, for “common understanding” to be reached by interlocutors in an intersubjective setting, “it is not necessary for the speaker to presuppose the equal standing of the hearer as a partner in dialogue. An understanding may just as well be reached on the presupposition of the hearer’s incapacity as on the presupposition of their capacity to participate in rational discourse as an equal.”⁵²

To illustrate this problem, Rancière points toward the speech situation in which the question “Do you comprehend?” functions as a technique for distinguishing between those who command and those who obey. As Russell and Montin point out, the question presumes that the addressee is incapable of rationally contributing to a dialogue about the implicit command framed as an interrogative—it is presumed that the addressee could only disagree on the basis of a misunderstanding or failure to comprehend, but not for good reasons.⁵³ I agree with their gloss on the problem, but I think their conceptual choices are not incisive enough in this case. A command need not assume prior inequality between interlocutors; it *produces* this inequality. As Rancière writes, as a command, “Do you comprehend?” “draws a line of division [*partage*]” between two senses of the word *comprendre* and two categories of speaking beings; it makes it understood to its addressee(s) that there are those who comprehend and those from whom the speaker expects a response and those whose task it is to follow orders (Rancière, 45).

We are, however, not only interested in how command produces inequality, but also how the implicit supposition of the equality of intelligences that is also communicated by a command can be politicized. Rancière notes, while analyzing the meaning of “Do you comprehend?” that the term *comprendre*—like many other expressions concerning comprehension or understanding (*entendre*)—needs to be interpreted nonliterally; instead, it should be understood ironically (Rancière, 44). More specifically, he contends that disagreement can emerge when “Do you comprehend?” is understood (*entendre*) both literally and ironically. He argues that the addressee must understand her relation to the enunciator in order to know whether the question “Do you comprehend?” requires a response to the

problem at hand, or whether the content of the question is “It’s not up to you to comprehend; all you have to do is obey,” but it is precisely this understanding that comes into question when politics enacts the rationality of disagreement (Rancière, 45; xii). Therefore, in what follows, I will examine Rancière’s usage of the terms *disagreement* (*la mésentente*) and *entendre* before returning to the problem of command, for it is through disagreement that politics symbolizes its dissensus with a given police order.

In work subsequent to *Disagreement*, Rancière has noted that the translation of *la mésentente* as *disagreement* loses some connotations of the French.⁵⁴ An Anglophone reader could hear disagreement as a juridical dispute, given that Rancière not only characterizes, throughout *Disagreement*, politics as the litigious demonstration of a wrong, but he also illustrates his account of political subjectivation through a scene drawn from the 1832 trial of Auguste Blanqui (Rancière, 37–38). However, a juridical interpretation carries the connotation that disagreement takes place between “specific parties that can be adjusted through appropriate legal procedures” (Rancière, 39). The rationality—the measure—of politics, then, would be circumscribed within an already existing legal framework, which, on Rancière’s terms, is an apparatus of policing. *La mésentente*, by contrast, is a “polemical knot” that ties together the “different senses of the word ‘to understand’ [*entendre*] (see, comprehend, agree) that sums up the sensible and conflictual dimension of the political community.”⁵⁵ Therefore, the politics of disagreement does not concern already constituted persons, classes, categories, or objects; for Rancière, it enacts practices through which unanticipated subjects, situations, or objects, are made manifest—political subjects are those “whose very existence is the mode of manifestation of the wrong” (Rancière, 39). By Rancière’s definition, disagreement disrupts or reinscribes the received meanings of a given *entendre* (understanding, agreement, and perception) of the social and sensible world; it makes these meanings political and conflictual.

It is unsurprising, then, that in a polemical text such as *Disagreement*, Rancière’s use of the term *entendre* and its cognates is performative and self-reflexive, illustrating how common and contentious ideals such as *justice* and *democracy* become focal points of disagreement. Rancière uses *entendre* to signal disagreement between terms when they are politicized in contrast their received meanings; this doubling and opposition of understandings of a given term appears in the definition of *la mésentente* itself: disagreement is “a determined kind of speech situation in which one of the interlocutors at once understands and does not understand

what the other is saying [où l'un des interlocuteurs à la fois entend et n'entend pas ce que dit l'autre]" (Rancière, x). Furthermore, the frequent use of *entendre* in Chapter 3, "The Rationality of Disagreement," serves to emphasize how the politics of disagreement practices the interruption and subversion of relations of command.

Before returning to "The Rationality of Disagreement," where *entendre* is frequently used, we will examine two other usages of *entendre*. When he defines concepts such as equality, subjectivation, or democracy, he uses *entendre* or its cognates to signal that his definition displaces received meanings of the terms or the genealogies of these terms (see Rancière, 30; 35; 99). As I have argued elsewhere, when Rancière evokes Descartes in his definition of *subjectivation*, for example, this signals a subtle critique of Heideggerian and Marxist understandings of the history of modern philosophy:

By *subjectivation* I mean [on entendra] 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. Descartes's *ego sum, ego existo* is the prototype of such indissoluble subjects of a series of operations implying the production of a new field of experience. Any political subjectivation holds to this formula. It is a *nos sumus, nos existimus*. (Rancière, 35–36tm)

By linking political subjectivation to Descartes, Rancière shifts our attention from received interpretations—of Descartes as the modern epitome of technicity⁵⁶ or of 17th century bourgeois ideology⁵⁷—to a current of Cartesian egalitarianism that takes the supposition of "good sense" (*bon sens*) at the beginning of the *Discourse on Method* as its point of departure.⁵⁸

In contrast to the first three chapters of *Disagreement*, the use of *entendre* is infrequent in chapters four through six; it most often signals the way that political philosophy suppresses the possibility of politics. In Chapter 4, for example, Rancière contends that "parapolitics" is a form of political philosophy that reduces political conflict to a conflict of interests among different parts of the community. He contends that Hobbes' modern parapolitics reinterprets politics, as the conflict between the part with no part and the police, as the threshold between the state of nature and the state of sovereignty. While human beings are by nature intellectually equal, this equality gives rise to the equality of competing interests:

this “equality of hope in attaining of our Ends” provokes the enmity of those who desire the same things, leading to the war of all against all.⁵⁹ Therefore, in the state of nature, according to Hobbes, nobody is able to meet and secure their respective needs; in order to do so, individuals alienate their natural freedom to a sovereign and thus enter into a commonwealth. To suppress the possibility of politics within the commonwealth, Hobbes subsequently reinterprets disagreement as the conflict between public and private life. Rancière writes: “The truly calamitous evil, says Hobbes, is that ‘private persons’ take it upon themselves to decide what is just and unjust. But what Hobbes understands [*entend*] by ‘private persons’ is nothing other than those who...‘have no part’ in the government of the common sphere” (Rancière, 76–77). Hobbes, on Rancière’s account, suppresses the possibility of disagreement by excluding equality—including that capacity to disagree over what counts as justice and injustice—from society.

To return to “The Rationality of a Wrong,” to return to the problem of how to politicize and undermine the coercion of command, Rancière argues that disagreement is possible insofar as those who (are supposed to) obey can simultaneously understand and not understand the command. By instituting the division between those who command and those who obey, an order also falls into a performative paradox that cannot eliminate the possibility of disagreement. That is, it is possible for those who obey to accept both the received meaning of what command entails (the distribution of command and obedience) and how command subverts itself by both presupposing and disavowing equality. In other words, an order cannot eliminate the gap between “the capacity to speak and the account of the words spoken” (Rancière, 46). Rancière argues that there is a supposition of capacity—the supposition of equality—that must be assumed for an order to work. However, the supposition of equality can be *politicized* and *symbolized* by contesting the paradox between the performative and symbolic functions of an order. Rancière illustrates how disagreement can arise when those who obey receive an order:

We comprehend that you wish to signify to us that there are two languages and that we cannot comprehend you. *We perceive that you are doing this in order to divide the world into those who command and those who obey.* We say on the contrary that there is a single language common to us and that consequently we comprehend you even if you don’t want us to. In a word, we comprehend that you are lying by denying there is a common language. (Rancière, 46; my emphasis)

We see in this passage evidence of the claims I made at the outset: first, while a command can reproduce the inequalities already instituted within a given police order, this passage also demonstrates that, for Rancière, in a situation where no prior relation of inequality is instituted, a command *produces* relations of inequality. Then, we also see the ambiguity of inequality: for an order to be obeyed, the addressee must comprehend the order and that it must be obeyed. However, to understand this order, the addressee must already be the equal of the enunciator. This is, he states, how equality “gnaws away at any natural order” (Rancière, 17).

Through this analysis of the problem of command, it is now possible to interpret what Rancière means when he states that equality is not particular to politics—and that equality is also supposed once an order has been given. In conceptualizing the problem in this way, we adhere to a practical interpretation of equality without having to substantiate it as the ontological foundation of social order. When Rancière states that politics and policing are heterogeneous, he means that politics and policing involve different practices of relating to equality. While policing suppresses equality by imposing the division of those who command and those who obey, politics works to disrupt, undermine, and eliminate relations of command. Though politics and policing are heterogeneous, this heterogeneity must still be staged between them. By differentiating between political symbolization and practice, Rancière can paradoxically hold that politics and policing are heterogeneous while maintaining that “politics runs up against the police everywhere” (Rancière, 32). It is through symbolization that a place emerges for these two heterogeneous dynamics to meet, and it is because symbolization is historically situated that Rancière needs not search out political claims that explicitly take equality as their object. Instead, he argues that politics “has much more to do with literary heterology, with its utterances stolen and tossed back at their authors...than [*contra* Habermas] with the allegedly ideal situation of dialogue” (Rancière, 59).

Rancière illustrates this point about heterology through Pierre-Simon Ballanche’s retelling of the plebeian secession on Aventine Hill—which advances our discussion of the problem of command because the secession opened a space where previous relations of inequality were temporarily eliminated. The Roman Republic at that time was structured through a division between patricians—the elite who commanded political and economic power and possessed religious status—and plebeians, who did not. The “plebs,” as Martin Breugh points out, lacked civil and religious status; the term initially “referred to individuals who had nei-

ther names nor the right to speak in public.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, they were “heterogeneous” in composition and in relation to the patricians: their plebeian status initially referred to their exclusion from political life rather than any positive, shared characteristics.⁶¹ In 494 BCE, facing destitution and debt that could cost them their status as free men, the plebs withdrew to Aventine Hill. When Menenius Agrippa went to Aventine Hill, he saw that the plebs were acting *as if* they enjoyed the same status as patricians. The plebs, Rancière writes, were executing

a series of speech acts that mimic those of the patricians: they pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of their number to go and consult *their* oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them. In a word, they conduct themselves as beings with names. Through transgression, they find that they too, as speaking beings, are endowed with speech that does not simply express want, suffering, or rage, but intelligence. (Rancière, 24–25tm)

On the one hand, these practices symbolized the politics of disagreement, in which plebeians acted as if they were equals to the patricians.⁶² As Clare Woodford phrases it, the plebs disrupted the “existing police order because rather than relating to the dominant order in the expected subservient manner the subjects take the rights before they are given them, asserting the equal status they should have been accorded straightaway.”⁶³ On the other hand, Rancière also argues that the Aventine secession undermined previous relations of command. By appropriating the practices of the patricians, the plebs symbolized their equality. However, Rancière—via Ballanche—argues that their secession makes it possible for them to stage the intersection of two distributions of speech, not only of *what* is spoken, but *who* has a claim to speech. The plebs stage a new distribution of the sensible, in which plebs and patricians become equal as speaking beings, upsetting the already constituted social order in which the plebs are merely at the command of the patricians. Menenius concedes, performatively speaking, when he gives an egalitarian argument that the patricians are the belly of the Republic and the plebs the extremities, that the plebs must be reasoned with, that they must come to understand, that they, too, are equals as speaking beings. For Rancière, “from the moment the plebs could comprehend Menenius’ apologia—the apologia of the necessary inequality between the vital patrician principle and the plebeian members carrying it out—they were already, just as necessarily, equals” (Rancière, 25).

We must pause here to establish the political meaning of this moment on Aventine Hill. To claim that the patricians and plebs are equals remains ambiguous. Deranty has recently discussed Rancière's different readings of this scene in order to claim that the secession results in a moment of recognition. While recounting Ballanche's narrative of the secession in an earlier essay, "Heretical Knowledge and the Emancipation of the Poor" (1985), Rancière writes: "this rebellion was characterized by the fact that it recognized itself as a speaking subject and gave itself a name."⁶⁴ But the use of the term recognition does not a theory of recognition make. Rancière continues: "Roman patrician power refused to accept that the sounds uttered from the mouths of the plebeians were speech, and that the offspring of their unions should be given the name of a lineage."⁶⁵ The passage in full indicates, instead, that these plebeian practices were a form of self-empowerment rather than a dialectic of mutual recognition between patricians and plebs. It is also telling that Rancière's narrative never indicates the subsequent changes to Roman governance that followed from the plebs returning to Rome.⁶⁶ The *political* moment of the Aventine secession is neither that of a possible mutual recognition or of institutional transformation. There is, in the politics of disagreement, both an *aisthesis* in which the plebs emerge as speaking, intelligent beings, but also the enactment of a scene in which the two groups are situated as equals rather than divided as rulers and the ruled. But we must be more specific. The two groups are situated as equals, not in Rome, but in the division of a common world enacted by the secession. Thus the plebs *become* equals of the patricians at the moment of dissensus, when they symbolize themselves as speaking beings and when they refuse, through seceding from Rome, the latent coercion that treats them as those who merely work and not as those who act, speak, and have names.

To summarize: politics enacts both the symbolization of equality and the disruption of relations of command through the introduction of practices of equality. When, to return to one of the claims discussed above, Rancière argues the following, we should interpret these claims as entailing both a process of symbolizing an unprecedented *aisthesis* (distribution of the sensible) of socially lived experience and as the reconfiguration of social space that disrupts, reduces, or eliminates relations of command.

Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination; it makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard [*entendre*] a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood [*entendre*] as discourse what was once

only heard [*entendu*] as noise. (Rancière, 30tm)

By tracing the ways that politics is doubled, operating against the policing of discourses and spaces, I have shown how, for Rancière, the same command that produces inequality also presupposes the supposition of equality that undermines the very stratified order in which these commands function. I have also argued that while symbolizing equality provides the discursive space in which politics and policing meet and conflict, the respective ways that politics and policing relate to equality (as a logic, praxis, and *aisthesis*) remain heterogeneous. Thus, I have shown how that politics and the police intersect while remaining heterogeneous without introducing a concept of “the political” (*le politique*) as a neutral meeting ground for politics (*la politique*) and the police. In addition, by emphasizing how politics involves both discursive and practical opposition to command and coercion, I have reinterpreted the central point of contention between Todd May and Samuel Chambers; May focuses on the enactment—in his words, the “activation”—of equality against command, while Chambers interprets May as giving an account of political *symbolization*. Finally, by emphasizing how Rancière’s work challenges the latent violence and coercion of command within the stratified order of policing, we are able to distinguish his work from the various theories of recognition current in critical theory. The primary flaw of these theories is that each one presumes some historically situated social institution—the market or the state—as the neutral background or adjudicator of political agonism and recognition, whereas Rancière’s attention to command shows how the state and the so-called free market (that is, capital accumulation) are—when it comes to asymmetries of power, wealth, and governance—never neutral.

4. WHY FASCISM ISN’T POLITICS

Now that I have made the case that Rancière’s politics involves both the symbolization of equality and the struggle against coercion, I would like to address Jodi Dean’s Leninist-Lacanian interpretation of his work.⁶⁷ Woodford has already responded to Dean’s critique in detail. As she points out, Dean takes what Chambers intends to be a virtue of Rancière’s work—that politics can never be pure because politics takes place within spaces that are also policed—as its main failing: “politics’ is weak and ineffective because it is always *infected* by the ordering it wishes to challenge and can never therefore overturn that ordering in a *meaningful* way.”⁶⁸ Woodford rebuts two problematic aspects of Dean’s interpretation that rest upon terminological equivocations. First, Dean equivocates between two

meanings of *politics*, assuming that any meaningful politics must be a politics of taking power, while for Rancière, politics takes place through the enactment of the supposition of equality. Woodford rephrases their differences to show that Rancière's politics focuses on how the supposition of equality can be employed to undermine the stratified ordering of the police while Dean defines effective politics, in Rancière's terms, as building "better police orders."⁶⁹

Then, Dean also equivocates between two distinct definitions of *democracy*. For Rancière, democracy is a synonym for politics: not a "set of institutions", but the "forms of expression that confront the logic of equality with the logic of the police order" (Rancière, 101). By contrast, Dean argues that democracy an institution:

If the dominant order presents itself as democratic, if the order of the police is the order of democracy, then only non-democratic stagings of disagreement can be political since only they set up a contrast with the conditions of their utterance. Far from exclusively democratic, politics can be fascist, anarchist, imperial, communist.⁷⁰

As Woodford notes, politics in Rancière's sense cannot be fascist, anarchist, communistic, or democratic in the way we refer to these terms as forms of instituting political practices; instead, "politics is exclusively democratic (in Rancière's new usage of the term) because it is based on the universal claim to equality in a way that none of these ideologies are."⁷¹

Given the very public re-emergence of the extreme right in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, I would like to dedicate my own analysis to Dean's claim that politics, in Rancière's sense, could be fascist. I think she can only arrive at this possibility through substituting a psychoanalytic concept of policing for Rancière's own. As we have seen, for Rancière, policing is both the institutionalization and symbolization of inequality. By contrast, as I suggested above, the Lacanian model conceptualizes policing *first* as a repressive force, and *then* as a force that subsequently distorts all attempts to symbolize the social order. Or, in Lacanian terms, Dean argues that democratic politics—by attempting to outflank the limited form of democracy implemented by the dominant order—plays out at the level of the imaginary or the symbolic order and thus cannot challenge the real: the inequalities produced by the socio-economic system of capitalism and imperialism. Thus, *for Dean*, while Rancière's appeals to democratic politics are already captured within the symbolic co-ordinates of the dominant order, fascists break

the symbolic deadlock by articulating demands that undermine the conditions of their utterance. Following Rancière's terms, we would draw a different conclusion. He argues that politics is a dynamic of political subjectivation whereby the part of those who have no part asserts that what was once heard as noise is speech, or what was once invisible is visible. Though the extreme right has become more visible (in terms of its public relations and media profile), it does not follow that its mobilization is politics. No matter how many posters they put up saying "It's okay to be white," as if their voice has been suppressed, whiteness designates *having a part* in the settler-colonial societies such as the United States and Canada.⁷²

Arguing that fascism is not already part of the dominant order, especially given that the ongoing history of nation-building in the United States readily involves the ideology and institutions of white supremacy and settlerism, is a really bad take. Rancière would not draw this conclusion; nor does Žižek in a discussion of fascism that is embedded in his own critique of Rancière.⁷³ So how does Dean get there? In my view, at this particular point in her argument, in attempting to show how Rancière's politics is merely symbolic, she attempts to refute his work by discursive, symbolic means. Therefore, on her terms, given that the symbolic co-ordinates of American political discourse are always couched in democratic terms, only political movements that symbolize their politics in anti-democratic terms do so in terms not already included in the system—hence Rancière should be led to the conclusion that fascism is, on his account, *politics*. Yet when Dean claims that fascism, especially since she seems to imply its American variants, articulates its demands in terms that cannot be accommodated by the system, I ask: which part of the system? She cannot be referring to the parts of policing in the United States that are imbricated in structures of heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism, and anti-black racism. The only way she can draw this conclusion is by reducing politics, at that point in the argument, to its symbolic and discursive elements. In other words, when Dean treats Rancière's work as abstract and symbolic it is her account of politics that becomes abstract and symbolic. Given that we are diametrically opposed to everything that these fascists, the alt-right, and their alt-light cronies stand for, the stakes are too high to concede the point on the status of their attempts at protest and social mobilization. Any kind of social mobilization that implements, or aims to implement, coercive and unequalitarian social relations cannot be politics, *nor should it be respected as such*. And, as the leading antifascist critic of the alt-right Matthew N. Lyons shows, the fundamental goals of the alt-right include retrenching the coercive and hierarchical practices of white nationalism and patriarchy.⁷⁴ Thus on Rancière's terms the alt-right is not

political; it's a form of policing. In fact, we can phrase this more stringently—the alt-right movement cannot be political, it can only be a parapolitical social mobilization aimed at policing others.

But the problems raised by the re-emergence of a very public fascist, white supremacist social movement in North America extend beyond conceptualizing how they are parapolitical forms of policing. They also bear on our left politics. Hence, I cannot accept Dean's assumption that any politics that does not aim at taking power is not politics. In Dean's defence, I would note that the terrain of both what the left counts as politics and what the left counts as policing has shifted since "Politics without Politics" was published. And I would note that I recognize the so-called crisis of the left as Dean articulates it; it stems from a frustration with how the anti-globalization movement that shut down the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999 was unable to relay that victory into a broader social movement, and with how the antiwar movement following 9/11 was largely phrased as registering dissent against the Bush administration's version of American imperialism.

Today, however, I would hardly say that the left (as broadly speaking as possible, as either organizers or accomplices) is in a crisis of praxis—as numerous movements such as #blacklivesmatter, #idlenomore, #NoDAPL, the prison abolitionist movement, and antifascism, among others, take aim at the forms of latent state and capitalist violence that I have discussed above—while also situating the injustices of the state or the police as they are operative within a broader system of imperialist, antiblack, heteropatriarchal, settlerist norms. My point isn't that any of these movements or the motives of their organizers are 'Rancièrian,' but rather that they are guided by a similar discontent with the status quo *and* with prominent reformist frameworks such as the politics of recognition. And that it would inimical to the way these movements are organized and to their goals (combatting forms of state and capitalist coercion and violence) to suggest that taking power is immediately more *political* than combatting the kinds of violence and injustice enacted by both the state, capital accumulation, and the parapolitical mobilization of the alt-right. And given that many of the movements that I've mentioned have roots in decades of political practices in North America, it seems that any discussion of the 'crisis of the left' must always self-reflexively implicate the way that our perceptions of politics—what, precisely, has *value* and what doesn't; what makes the antiglobalization movement a synecdoche of the left rather than some other movement; or what leads authors, as even I claimed above, to claim that

the terrain of politics has shifted without stipulating *for whom*, when often the *for whom* is in question—are often shaped by our own positions in academia and society in general. When Dean contends that the left has played into its own victimization, and when she suggests the metonymic chain “We protest. We talk. We complain. We undercut our every assertion, criticizing its exclusivity, partiality and fallibility in advance as if some kind of purity were possible” epitomizes leftist criticism, she’s not sensitive to the way that this characterization can be used, has been used, and could continue to be used *by leftists* to forestall direct action from marginalized groups and their accomplices, and silence leftist criticism from marginalized voices within our often tenuous communities of solidarity.⁷⁵

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NOTES

1. Devin Zane Shaw, “Disagreement and Recognition between Rancière and Honneth,” *Boundary2 Online* (March 13th, 2017): <https://www.boundary2.org/2017/03/devin-zane-shaw-disagreement-and-recognition-between-ranciere-and-honneth/>
 2. Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Between Honneth and Rancière: Problems and Potentials of a Contemporary Critical Theory of Society,” in Axel Honneth and Jacques Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and Identity*, eds Katia Genel and Jean-Philippe Deranty (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016): 54.
 3. Given that he does not use “symbolization” as a technical term in *Disagreement*, I have adopted this usage following Rancière’s remarks in his book *The Method of Equality*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 119–121.
 4. Nancy Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation,” in Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 74.
 5. Axel Honneth, “Of the Poverty of Our Liberty: The Greatness and Limits of Hegel’s Doctrine of Ethical Life,” in Honneth and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 157.
 6. Rancière, “Critical Questions on the Theory of Recognition,” in Honneth and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 83. As Fraser writes, affirmative remedies propose “to redress disrespect by revaluing unjustly devalued group identities, while leaving intact both the contents of those identities and the group differentiations that underlie them.” Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics,” 75.
 7. Fraser, “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics,” 74.
 8. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
 9. *Ibid.*, 75.
 10. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 36.
 11. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 37.
 12. However, I do not intend to propose a ‘theory’ of command and coercion. I only intend to show that Rancière’s analysis of command tells us something about his account of politics, namely, that politics entails some degree of action that contests or undermines apparatuses of command and coercion implemented by policing.
 13. See Miguel Abensour, *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Movement*, trans. Max Blechman and Martin Breugh, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).
 14. See Arash Joudaki, *La politique selon l’égalité: Essai sur Rancière, Gauchet, Clastres et Lefort*, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2016), 200–223.
- Philip J. Deloria writes: “Salvage ethnography—the capturing of an authentic culture thought to be rapidly and inevitably disappearing—has from the beginning been haunted by fractures of logic.” A salvage ethnographer has accepted the colonial bias that indigenous or non-Western modes of life are *destined* to disappear, and if they do not, they must be inauthentic. What bothers me about Clastres is that he argues that all indigenous communities must inevitably face the forced choice of ethnocide (assimilation) or genocide. There is no concept, in Clastres’ work, of what Gerald Vizenor calls survivance. See Deloria, *Playing Indian*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 90–91; Clastres, *Archaeology of Violence*, trans. Jeanine Herman (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 101–113.
15. Clastres, *Society Against the State*, trans. Robert Hurley with Abe Stein, (New York: Zone, 1987),

- 198.
16. *Ibid.*, 197.
17. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 44.
18. Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 49.
19. Devin Zane Shaw, *Philosophy of Antifascism: Punching Nazis and Fighting White Supremacy* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2020), Chapter 4.
20. The terminological choice of “parapolitical” here is deliberate (for reasons explained below), since the white nationalists of the alt-right frame their racism, (hetero-)sexism, and ableism as merely representing the *interests* of their particular interest group, rather than the retrenchment and intensification of forms of oppression and marginalization of all bodies that fail to meet the norms of white, ableist, settlerist, heteropatriarchy as they are articulated by forms of policing in both the United States and Canada.
21. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, stratification involves both hierarchical and horizontal distributions of power. Speaking of the State (which for Rancière, is one form of policing), they write: “it [the State] operates by stratification; in other words, it forms a vertical, hierarchized aggregate that spans the horizontal lines in a dimension of depth.” See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, vol. 2., trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 433.
22. On Rancière’s refusal to ontologize politics and aesthetics, see Rancière, “Jacques Rancière et l’a-disciplinarité” *Et tant pis pour les gens fatigués* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2009), 476–477; Rancière, “The thinking of dissensus: Politics and aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière*, eds Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (London: Continuum, 2011), 11–16; and Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18–21.
23. Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics,” in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 36.
24. This and all parenthetical references refer to Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). When I have modified translations I will signal “tm” in the citation, except in the cases in which I have silently modified the translation, despite the occasional clumsiness it produces in English, so that instances of *comprendre* and its cognates are translated as *to comprehend*, while instances of *entendre* and its cognates are translated as *to understand*.
25. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 27, 42; “Ten Theses,” 37.
26. Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 232–233; Dean, “Politics without Politics,” in *Reading Rancière*, 87.
27. In this discussion, Rancière explicitly cites the work of Michel Foucault, whose work “shows that ‘the police’ may include all vertical relationships between human beings, while also bringing in material relations—links between humans and the world.” Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 70.
28. See, for example, Rancière, *Disagreement*, 16–17.
29. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 36–37.
30. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 152.
31. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 71.
32. *Ibid.*, 83; 76.
33. May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 47; Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 79.
34. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 88–122.

35. May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 58–59.
36. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 35.
37. *Ibid.*, 31.
38. Todd May, “Rancière and Anarchism,” in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*, eds Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross (London: Continuum, 2012), 121. I also believe that May’s work on friendship should be read in light of Rancière’s critique of command. See May, *Friendship in an Age of Economics: Resisting the Forces of Neoliberalism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).
39. See Rancière, 34; “Equality turns into its opposite the moment it aspires to a place in the social or state organization.”
40. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 83.
41. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 31.
42. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 31tm.
43. Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 37.
44. Cf. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 57–74.
45. See Marchart, “The Second Return of the Political,” in *Reading Rancière*, 129–147; Deranty, “Jacques Rancière’s Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition,” in *Political Theory* 31, no. 1 (2003): 144–145; and Deranty, “Rancière and Contemporary Political Ontology,” in *Theory and Event* 6, no. 4 (2003). Similarly, drawing on Deranty’s earlier work, Katia Genel reifies the police as “the social” and politics as “the political,” terminological substitutions that are not found in Rancière’s work. See Genel, “Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth: Two Critical Approaches to the Political,” Honneth and Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 19–20, 25–27, 32.
46. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 56.
47. Since translator Julie Rose renders both “la politique” and “le politique” as politics in the passages in question, the following references to *Disagreement* list the pagination of the English translation followed by that of the French original, *La Mésentente: Politique et philosophie*. Paris: Galilée, 1995. Rancière differentiates between his account of “la politique” and the use of “le politique” by others to signal his differences with Aristotle’s and Hobbes’ parapolitics (72–73, 79/108, 115), Marxist metapolitics (81–83, 85–86/119–120, 123–124) and the general contours of what he calls “consensual democracy” (Chapter 5; especially 99/139).
48. See Deranty, “Between Honneth and Rancière,” 66.
49. I have framed this by analogy to Rancière’s discussion of the “functional” definition of dissensus in *The Method of Equality*. See note 54.
50. See Matheson Russell and Andrew Montin, “The Rationality of Political Disagreement: Rancière’s Critique of Habermas” *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 543–554; Deranty, “Jacques Rancière’s Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition,” *Political Theory* 31, no. 1 (2003): 136–156; Dean, “Politics without Politics,” 89; Paul Patton, “Rancière’s Utopian Politics,” in *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene*, 132–133.
51. Russell and Montin, “The Rationality of Disagreement,” 543.
52. *Ibid.*, 545–546.
53. *Ibid.*, 546.
54. While he states that *la mésentente* is “untranslatable,” he notes that introducing the term *dissensus* in its place opens the “possibility of a functional definition,” of political rationality that, aside from the activation of the supposition of equality, cannot be defined in advance. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 83.
55. Rancière, *The Method of Equality*, 83.

56. Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* trans. W.B. Barton and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967).
57. Antonio Negri, *Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology, and the Bourgeois Project*, trans. Matteo Mandarini and Alberto Toscano (London: Verso, 2007), 295–296.
58. See Devin Zane Shaw, *Egalitarian Moments: From Descartes to Rancière* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 25–49.
59. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, Revised Student Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87. Rancière also notes that Hobbes inadvertently concedes that “there is no natural principle of domination by one person over another” (Rancière, 79).
60. Martin Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience: A Discontinuous History of Political Freedom*, trans. Lazer Lederhendler (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), xix.
61. Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience*, 5.
62. Breaugh notes one feature from Livy’s account of the secession that is not explicitly thematized by Rancière: Aventine Hill was organized as a military camp “without any officer to direct them” (Livy). See *The Plebeian Experience*, 11.
63. Clare Woodford, “‘Reinventing Modes of Dreaming’ and Doing: Jacques Rancière and Strategies for the New Left,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 41, no. 8 (2014): 817–818.
64. Rancière, “Heretical Knowledge and the Emancipation of the Poor,” in *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2011), 37; Deranty, “Between Honneth and Rancière,” 38.
65. Rancière, “Heretical Knowledge and the Emancipation of the Poor,” 37.
66. Cf. Breaugh, *The Plebeian Experience*, 10: “the patricians agreed to create specifically plebeian magistracies. The raison d’être of the plebs’ ‘tribunes’ was to defend against the consuls. The new tribunals were ‘inviolable,’ and patricians could not...hold office there. The two tribunes of the plebs were granted the Sacred Law and thereby became ‘inviolable’ in religious terms. The plebs thus emerged from ‘nonbeing’ and acceded to a double status in Rome: political and religious.”
67. Judging from her comments in *The Communist Horizon*, the formulation “politics without politics” echoes Žižek’s claim that “the key ‘Leninist’ lesson today is: politics without the organizational form of the Party is politics without politics.” See Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012), 9; Slavoj Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates*, (London: Verso, 2002), 297.
68. Woodford, “‘Reinventing Modes of Dreaming’ and Doing,” 823.
69. *Ibid.*, 829.
70. Dean, “Politics without Politics,” 92.
71. Woodford, “‘Reinventing Modes of Dreaming’ and Doing,” 821.
72. As W.E.B. Du Bois noted, whiteness is not phenotype; instead whiteness signifies possession: “‘But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?’ Then, always somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!” W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (London: Verso, 2016), 18.
- The posters said “It’s okay to be white” in black on white 8 1/2” x 11” paper. Some were printed in Comic Sans. They appeared beginning in late October 2017 on campuses across North America, including in Canada at the University of Toronto, the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Native Studies at University of Alberta and the University of Regina’s Office of Indigenization in the Research and Innovation Centre. See Evan Balgord, “Eye on Hate: The White Supremacists Behind Alt-Right Posters, Revealed,” *The Torontoist*, November 8, 2017, <https://torontoist.com/2017/11/revealed-white-supremacists-behind-alt-right-posters-around-city/>; Nathan Fung, “‘It’s ok to be white’ Posters, Offensive Pumpkin Found on Campus,” *The Gateway*, November

1, 2017, <https://www.thegatewayonline.ca/2017/11/posters-offensive-pumpkin/>; “ ‘It’s okay to be white’ posters pop up at U of R; security investigating,” *CBC*, November 17, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/it-s-okay-to-be-white-poster-pops-up-at-u-of-r-security-investigating-1.4415514>. A poster campaign was also mounted after the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on October 27, 2018. See Justin Brake, “ ‘It’s Okay to be White’ posters an educational opportunity, say professors,” *APTN*, November 8, 2018, <https://aptnnews.ca/2018/11/10/its-okay-to-be-white-posters-an-educational-opportunity-say-professors/>.

73. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 200.

74. See Matthew N. Lyons, *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right’s Challenge to State and Empire* (Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2018).

75. Dean, “Politics without Politics,” 82.