Fidelity to Disagreement: Jacques Rancière’s Politics without Ontology

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In the 1980s Jacques Rancière published two remarkable books. One was Proletarian Nights, the result of research in nineteenth-century French working-class archives. He found testimonies of workers who used part of their nights to study, write, act, sing, and other things. Rancière sees a subversive streak here: people living in misery and condemned to an anonymous existence ruled by the repetitive cycle of work and rest were not supposed to do those things. Yet they did. During those nights they were more than manual laborers, although not because they were ashamed of who they were. By using their resting time for other things, they were starting to experience a different way of being together. Says Rancière:

The topic of this book is, first of all, the history of those nights snatched from the normal round of work and repose. A harmless and imperceptible interruption of the normal round, one might say, in which our characters prepare and dream and already live the impossible: the suspension of the ancestral hierarchy subordinating those dedicated to manual labor to those who have been given the privilege of thinking. Nights of studying, nights of boozing. Long days of hard labor prolonged to hear the message of the apostles or lessons from the instructors of the people, to learn or dream or debate or write.1

While they dreamed and began to live the impossible they anticipated something other to come: workers already acted as if they were equals to their bourgeois counterparts and could speak about the common like anyone else.

The other book, The Ignorant Schoolmaster,2 examines the theses of Joseph Jacotot, a nineteenth-century educator who developed a method for intellectual emancipation. Instead of looking at the teacher-student relation as an opposition between knowledge and ignorance, Jacotot spoke of the equality of intelligences, showed that an ignorant person could teach another and that differences among people emerge only from their disposition to use that intelligence. Says Jacotot: “It’s precisely because we are all equal by nature that we must all be unequal by circumstances.”3 The contingency of inequality puts into question its inevitability. Equality, though, is a presupposition. It doesn’t conform to an eidos or foundation because it “is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified.”4 This presupposition has no ontological consistency because it emerges through a polemical enactment. As a practice and not a future reward, intellectual emancipation (taking ourselves as equals) is a possibility of the here and now: emancipation starts to occur from the moment we act to make it come.

These books are forerunners of Rancière’s theory of politics as emancipation. Disagreement5 draws from the experience of proletarians who gave up part of their resting time to do something else. They were reconfiguring their lived world and changing who they were. A politics of emancipation emerges when people who don’t count as much as others act as if they were their equals. Rancière calls this the process of equality or political subjectivization. The
sequence begins when people say “Enough!” and affirm themselves as equals, even if the name “equality” is not yet applicable to them: they live it as a de facto label and experience. Gordon Allport presents a nice example in his study about prejudice: “A negro woman was a plaintiff in a case involving a restrictive covenant. The lawyer for the defense questioned her, ‘What is your race?’ ‘The human race,’ she replied. ‘And what is your skin color?’ ‘Natural color,’ she answered.” This exchange took place when racism was legal in many parts of the United States. The plaintiff acted as if she was equal to the defense lawyer even though she was aware that in a racist setting a black body occupied a subordinate position. She practiced her equality instead of yearning for its arrival.

Subjectivization involves this double move of decoupling oneself from what one is supposed to be and of practicing what you want to become. It does not describe a position but an interstitial region of movement: identities constitute themselves in the interval between the assigned name and a name to come. They are identities in transit. This has the telltale signs of Jacotot’s process of equality, but instead of the equality of intelligences, Rancière speaks of the equality of all speaking subjects. Equality, the sole universal of politics, is configured casuistically through a polemical enactment. By saying “Equality remains the only reason for inequality,” he can claim that inequality is actually a wrongdoing of equality. This ties politics to democracy understood not as a political regime but as a practice of those whose sole attribute is the absence of titles to speak about common affairs yet still speak up.

What follows is a discussion of the theory of politics developed in Disagreement. I use two reading criteria. One is that published work is not necessarily an author’s last word on a given matter. Thinking, writing, and publishing take time, and people often reformulate their arguments in the light of the events and polemics that frame their views. More than a body of work, we encounter work in progress. Rancière’s intellectual itinerary is punctuated by the events of May 1968, racism and the consensus politics of the 1990s, by his disagreement with Hannah Arendt and other political theorists, and his reaction to his critics. He returns to familiar topics—subjectivization, verification of equality, wrong, demos, politics, police, and so on—and looks at them from slightly different angles. As work in progress, his writings are always exposed to the possibility of rewriting, whether by himself or others.

My second criterion is the role Rancière assigns to disagreement. He says: “Disagreement is not only an object of my theorization. It is also its method. Addressing an author or a concept first means to me setting the stage for a disagreement, testing an operator of difference. This also means that my theoretical operations are always aimed at reframing the configuration of a problem.” Disagreement is a speech situation in which one of the interlocutors understands and doesn’t understand what the other is saying: it occurs “wherever contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation.” Disagreement functions as the human condition of politics and theory. It spares nothing, not even equality, which is not an a priori but a presupposition that has to be verified. If disagreement is the object and method of Rancière’s political inquiry, then his own account of politics cannot enjoy an immunitarian privilege shielding it from the test of disagreement.

Submitting Rancière’s arguments to the protocols he himself established is a way, perhaps the most honest one, of being faithful to the ethos of disagreement that reverberates through his political thought. This fidelity acknowledges the contingency of all foundations. It
undoes the faith in masters and mastery, making good on Rancière’s celebration of Jacotot’s assumption of the equality of intelligences. And if Rancière says that “addressing an author or a concept” is “aimed at reframing the configuration of a problem,” then the discussion of his political thought is also an invitation to reframe problems and explore possibilities that he didn’t contemplate or didn’t feel inclined to pursue.

I begin with Rancière’s effort to flush ontology from his theory of politics. Then I look at his claim that police symbolizes the common as a partition without a supplement, which if taken literally leaves no room for dissensus. The other three sections are more contentious. I argue that politics has a double parasitic relation with police: it feeds off its themes and sets up its own partition of the sensible. I describe this with an oxymoron, the police of politics. Then I argue that the goal of politics is not to create a better, more inclusive police, because politics is a vanishing mediator. The final section introduces another oxymoron, the homeopathic politics of police as a possibility alongside Rancière’s politics of emancipation.

**Deontologizing Politics**

Rancière sees politics as a name for the practice of emancipation or process of equality, “a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition. The proper name for this set of practices remains *emancipation*.“¹⁰ He wants to strip his account of politics of all ontological dressings. This is a welcome respite in an interpretive field saturated by ontology. It sets the thinking of dissensus apart from many postfoundational theories of politics despite their shared belief in the contingency of all objectivity and the absence of transcendental signifieds. Advocates of postfoundationalism generally oscillate between the weak, negative, or quasi ontologies of excess and lack.¹¹ The inclination for one or the other depends on their proximity to the Nietzschean-like assumption of the world as pure becoming or to the Lacanian-inspired belief in an ineradicable void in Being. Both postfoundational lineages negotiate escape routes from the metaphysics of presence and deal with the absence of transcendental foundations. Those closer to a Nietzschean frame conceive the world as pure becoming: you can domesticate it, but something always escapes the grip of the best systemic drive. Those sympathetic to the psychoanalytical tradition reach similar conclusions by stating that the void in Being is a fault that can never be completely filled. Whether through excess or lack, Cartesian-like objectivity is jeopardized.

Among the Nietzscheans one finds people like William Connolly, whose ethos of pluralization¹² is built on the assumption that becoming prevents the closure of history, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, whose theory of hegemony¹³ states that no society ever manages to contain the infinitude of the social. Hegemony is a way of instituting finitude by means of a precarious suture. Slavoj Žižek¹⁴ is an exponent of the ontology of lack. He discusses multiculturalism, subjectivity, and politics by reference to the Lacanian Real. Laclau’s solo writings on politics, populism, and hegemony moves in this direction. His reasoning borrows from Joan Copjec’s reading of Lacan. The *objet petit a* (shorthand for the cause of desire and for its unattainable object) seeks to negotiate the lack in Being by elevating the external object of the drive to the dignity of the Thing. Hegemony, Laclau adds, deals with the lack by making a particular assume the representation of the fullness of society, an ultimately impossible yet necessary object. His theory of populism takes the *objet petit a* is the main ontological category, only that the name for the absent fullness of community moves from hegemony to the people.
Rancière steps outside this system of alternatives. For him there are only limited forms of wrong, difference, and excess. Dissensus is always the dissensus resulting from a specific miscount, and excess is “inherent in any process of nomination: the arbitrariness of the relationships binding names and bodies together, the excess of names which makes them available to those who are not ‘destined’ to give names and speak about the common.” This is an argument of practical reason. If the relationship between names and bodies was necessary instead of arbitrary there would be no point in trying to challenge racist, patriarchal, or heterocentrist settings by linking black, female, or gay bodies with the name of equality. The rejection of the naturalness of subordination creates an opening for equality. Yet nothing guarantees that a challenge of one’s place will follow from that opening, and if it does, there is no assurance that an act of refusal will bring change.

Addressing a wrong is a polemical exercise unencumbered by foundational narratives of equality. It doesn’t seek to restore the spirit of the laws or enact the true principle of the community but to manifest the refusal of the uncounted to accept their lot. The practice of equality puts in motion an exodus from invisibility without any guarantee of reaching a promised land. There is no such thing as an egalitarian society because for Rancière all society wrongs equality. Equality is not an attribute of subjects. It is the nonpolitical supposition that every speaking subject is equal to every other speaking subject. Politics simply seeks to verify it:

I don’t have an irenic understanding of language as some sort of common patrimony which allows everyone to be equal. I’m just saying that language games, and especially language games that institute forms of dependence, presume minimal equality of competence in order that inequality itself can operate... I say this not to ground equality but to show, rather, how this equality only ever functions polemically. If this is a transcendental category, its only substance lies in the acts that make manifest its effectiveness.

Readers of Rancière are acquainted with the example he uses to illustrate the supposition of minimal equality for inequality to operate:

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 understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order. Doubtless inferiors obey 99 percent of the time; it remains that the social order is reduced thereby to its ultimate contingency. In the final analysis, inequality is only possible through equality.

The contingency of equality and inequality trumps the suspicion that these terms may be endowed with ontological consistency. They are worldly practices whose status is not discernible outside a polemic.

Rancière’s allergy to ontology reappears when he discusses politics as the practice of dissensus. Politics operates through demonstrations and verifications. It is casuistic. One has to put the universality of equality (or freedom, justice, etc.) to the test of disagreement because knowing that we are equal before the law doesn’t guarantee that we will be treated as equals. Equality is not an arkhē or principle of all principles. It is a supposition to be verified. Without
this verification there is no politics. This resembles his practice of philosophy, which he describes as follows:

[It is] an-archical, in the sense that it traces back the specificity of disciplines and discursive competences to the “egalitarian” level of linguistic competence and poetic invention. This practice implies that I take philosophy as a specific battlefield, a field where the endeavor to disclose the arkhē of the arkhē simply leads to the contrary, that is, to disclosing the contingency or the poetic character of any arkhē.18

Rancière’s postfoundationalism doesn’t deny foundations but refuses to grant them the status of transcendental signifieds: all foundations are conventional. This is the meaning of the contingency of the arkhē. His view of philosophy as a battlefield matches his claim that disagreement is an object and a method of political inquiry. “An egalitarian practice of philosophy,” he says, “is a practice that enacts the aporia of foundation, which is the necessity of a poetical act to constitute an arkhē of the arkhē, an authority of the authority.”19 He says that what sets him apart from the likes of Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou is his refusal to ontologize the aporia. Instead of seeing it as immanent, as derived from an excess that escapes a systemic drive, or as a proof of the ineradicable lack in being, Rancière situates “the authority of authority” in a poetical act. So for him foundations are contingent, efforts to ascertain a principle of principles are always poetic acts, universals are polemical and only acquire consistency when they are singularized in cases, and ontology is basically a distraction for understanding politics.

**All Police Is Always n−1 Police**

Police basically means governing, the law or the status quo. Rancière uses other analogues like the partition of the sensible, configuration of the perceptible or distribution of shares where everyone has been accounted for and have a designated place and name. Police represents society as “made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places.”20

Police resembles census data, classifying people according to their occupation, gender, ethnicity, age, education, and so on. This distribution of names, places, and bodies is not neutral. It is a symbolization of the common that distinguishes those who are entitled to speak about the common from those who are not really qualified to do so. Police wrongs equality by establishing a hierarchy of worth: “The logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the account that is made of this speech: the account by which a sonorous emission is understood as speech, capable of enunciating what is just, whereas some other emission is merely perceived as a noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt.”21 Eduardo Matte, a nineteenth-century Chilean banker and politician, expresses this view of the logos in the daily *El Pueblo* on March 19, 1892. He does so with the candor of someone utterly convinced that the rich have a natural command over the poor: “We, the owners of capital and land, are the owners of Chile. The rest is an impressionable mass that can be bought and sold. Their opinion and prestige carry no weight.”22 Matte does not dispute that rich and poor are fellow countrymen. He simply offers a computation of people’s worth that creates an asymmetric common where everyone has been counted but some count less than others: there are those with land and capital and those whose “opinion and prestige carry no weight.”
The question is whether the police count coincides with the whole or if something escapes its grip. For Rancière, there is no room for an uncounted remnant because the police signification of the common “is the principle of saturation; it is a mode of the partition of the sensible that recognizes neither lack nor supplement.”\textsuperscript{23} He is adamant about this: “The essence of police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement.”\textsuperscript{24} He says something similar in his criticism of postdemocracy in the expert state. This state “eliminates every interval of appearance, of subjectivization, and of dispute in an exact concordance between the order of law and the order of facts,” as politics ceases “wherever the whole of community is reduced to the sum of its parts with nothing left over.”\textsuperscript{25}

This leads to a strong conclusion: police symbolizes the common as a community of consent whose essence is the absence of a supplement. But is such a radical absence empirically possible? If we take Rancière’s claims at face value, police resembles a metaphysical monster of plenitude or the fully realized fantasy of totalitarian and megalomaniac drives—a world where the inscription and the inscribed coincide, where the gap between norms and acts narrow down to such an extent that it is practically nonexistent. Augusto Pinochet expressed this possibility in no uncertain terms: “Not a leaf moves in this country if I’m not moving it. I want that to be clear!” In Pinochet’s fantasy, the absence of a remainder leaves no room for disagreement, and thus for politics to challenge the status quo. It is the dream of a perfect police. Dissensus would be little more than residual noise in the system.

But for political inventiveness to emerge and deploy its disruptive effects there has to be a gap between laws and facts. Some interval of appearance must remain. So how should we understand the absence of a remainder? A first response is that police is a way of symbolizing order, not the actual rendition of the way it is structured. It symbolizes order as if there was an actual coincidence between norms and acts. This “as if” makes all the difference: it indicates that the police representation of itself as an order without remainder doesn’t actually reach the factual \( n \) of plenitude. Every police is always of the \( n-1 \) kind.

Plato’s allegory of the cave illustrates this. A man escapes from lifelong captivity in a cave and realizes that until then he had mistaken the shadows for true knowledge. Plato doesn’t propose a simple passage from ignorance to knowledge. Opacity is immanence because caves are inside the world, which is why philosophy must remain vigilant to identify and destroy the pretenders that undermine the possibility of a transparent world. This is a task of Sisyphus. Unable to banish all caves, philosophy has to settle for an imperfect or \( n-1 \) transparency. We can take as a general rule that every order must come to terms with its own impotence: it will never rule over everything and the fantasy of fullness expressed by Pinochet (“Not a leaf moves in this country if I’m not moving it”) will remain a fantasy.

Rancière refers indirectly to this in his criticism of Althusser’s theory of ideology as interpellation—the police hailing, “Hey, you there!” This, he says, is simply religious subjection; police is not about interpellating demonstrators but about breaking up protests. It “consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather of what there is not, and its slogan is: ‘Move along! There is nothing to see here!’” because “it asserts that the space for circulating is nothing but the space of circulation.”\textsuperscript{26} There is nothing to see precisely because there is something but should not be seen by those passing by or should be of no concern for them. If there were an exact concordance between norms and acts there would be no need to
remind people to move along; traffic cops, the courts, tax collection agencies, and the rest of the paraphernalia of governing would be superfluous. These exist because the connection between the places allocated by the status quo and the bodies that occupy those places is not self-evident. People can deviate from the given without putting into question the given. They do so when they ignore a red light or cheat in their tax returns. Police is an ongoing effort to reproduce the communal space and doesn’t have the luxury of a seventh day of rest.

This is true even if police manages to naturalize the difference between those who count and those who don’t: a degraded presence pushed toward irrelevance (the mass of people whose “opinion and prestige carry no weight,” as Matte put it) is not the same as its actual absence. The part without part have nowhere to go because they have no elsewhere at their disposal. Sometimes the no-part responds through the nonpolitical disorder of revolt, others by means of processes of subjectivization whereby people disidentify with their place and resist efforts to make them invisible. So there’s always an interval for the appearance of dissensus even if the latter appears seldom or never arises. Police remains in the vicinity of plenitude.

Moreover, police does not imply an absence of conflicts because nonpolitical conflicts—those that pit recognized and counted parts against one another—are a common fixture of police. But for Rancière there are conflicts and conflicts. Some disputes focus on distribution of public resources, others on power and prestige, or refer to the wrangling about policy among political parties, interest groups or movements. Many are about the accepted interpretation of norms. “A strike,” he says, “is not political when it calls for reforms rather than a better deal or when it attacks the relationships of authority rather than the inadequacy of wages. It is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community.”

Many labor disputes never cross the threshold that turns them into political events as Rancière understands them, yet still they short-circuit the presumed coincidence of norms and acts. The corollary is that the presence or absence of conflict is not a criterion to distinguish politics from police. Police is a site where those who want to govern confront those who resist being overcoded, even if they don’t do so in the way Rancière understands politics.

So, police never rises above the n−1 threshold and the absence of a void doesn’t refer to the elimination of the uncounted but to their condition as outcasts. They are an empirical part that has no real part because they count less than others. The police is haunted by the ghost of the uncounted: “What we call ‘exclusion’ refers to the one element that cannot be counted in a state system where everyone can supposedly be counted; where it is supposedly possible to quantify every element in the polis, their needs and their opinions. There is a remainder that has not been counted and cannot be counted.”

The counting of the police is always already a miscount or symbolization of the common where the uncounted are included as the insignificant part. Such a miscount inscribes politics as a structural possibility (although not necessarily an actuality) of any order.

**Politics as a Parasitic Practice and the Police of Politics**

For Rancière conflicts that others call political—those between rich and poor or among interest groups—are not really so if they involve groups that are already counted and are therefore internal to police. These can become political when their practice generates a supernumerary part of the uncounted. Politics seeks to verify the supposition that everyone is equal to everyone else
as opposed to police, which is concerned with governing or the creation of a community of consent.\textsuperscript{29}

This doesn’t mean that politics is so special that we can’t mix it with other things. Rancière is no fan of purity. He is very clear about this: politics “has no objects or issues of its own. Its sole principle, equality, is not peculiar to it and is in no way in itself political. All equality does is lend politics reality on the form of specific cases to inscribe, in the form of litigation, confirmation of the equality at the heart of the police order.”\textsuperscript{30} “Politics acts on the police. It acts on the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status quo.”\textsuperscript{31} Finally, it “is never pure, never based on some essence proper to the community and the law.”\textsuperscript{32} These quotes confirm that police can thrive without politics but that politics does not enjoy this self-referential advantage. Politics feeds off the police—its rules, decisions, or prohibitions—and occurs in the territory of police because it has no space of its own.

Rancière confides that he wrote “Ten Theses on Politics” partly as a critique of Hannah Arendt and her strict separation of political and nonpolitical life.\textsuperscript{33} For Arendt, the polis is a way of life characterized by fierce agonistic competition among the homoioi or equals who want to stand out through their words and deeds. They seek greatness and transcendence because the memory of their accomplishment may offset the inevitability of death. In contrast, the private realm of the household, or oikos, is a unit of economic production that deals with activities required to maintain life. It is the invisible world of necessity characterized by despotic rule, violence, and the strictest inequality.\textsuperscript{34} What Arendt describes as politics is an elitist view that depicts the doings of a few wealthy men unconcerned about the fate of the underclass. It takes the wronging of equality as a given: she doesn’t seem troubled by the fact that the homoioi pursue transcendence while women and servants remain out of sight and inaudible in the oikos. Rancière dismisses a political life and people destined to it: there’s only a political stage for the mise-en-scène of a quarrel about the common that is also a polemic about what counts as political and what doesn’t.\textsuperscript{35} Arendt, he says, takes for granted what she should have had to demonstrate: “The notion that politics can be deduced from a specific world of equals or free people, as opposed to a world of lived necessity, takes as its ground precisely the object of its litigation.”\textsuperscript{36}

Politics is thus parasitic of police. I don’t mean it in a pejorative way. It is parasitic because it draws its themes from the given: “Politics has no 'proper' object” because “all its objects are blended with the objects of the police.” It inscribes the democratic process—one of the names of politics, dissensus, and so on— “in the texts of the constitutions, the institutions of the states, the apparatuses of public opinion, the mainstream forms of enunciation, etc.”\textsuperscript{37}

This parasitism of politics has another face too. For Rancière, politics is a rare occurrence and domination, or police, is the norm. “If politics is the outline of a vanishing difference with respect to the distribution of social parts and shares, it follows that its existence is by no means necessary, but that it occurs as an always provisional accident within the history of the forms of domination.”\textsuperscript{38} This accident seeks to interrupt the normality of domination, a claim reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s view of revolution as an activity that makes the continuum of history explode.
His depiction of politics as vanishing, provisional, and accidental does not mean that the rarity of its occurrence also makes it an ephemeral and unexpected bolt of lightning in a blue sky, nor does it limit politics to moments of insurrection. “There is a historical dynamic of politics,” says Rancière, “a history of events that break the ‘normal’ course of time, a history of events, inscriptions and forms of subjectivization, of promises, memories, repetitions, anticipations and anachronisms.” He couldn’t be clearer: the interruption of historical time has a history. It unfolds in the interval between an insurgency and the return of business as usual. History introduces duration into the polemic to reconfigure the world.

The effects of temporality are quite obvious. Politics must bind people together to do something in concert. It doesn’t matter if they coalesce in a highly structured or a more informal manner: crafting a “we” requires a sustained effort over time. Consider the occupation of the Madrid square Plaza del Sol in May 2011. It detonated the mobilizations of the indignados (the outraged), a name that draws its inspiration from Stéphane Hessel’s bestseller Indignez-vous! (Time for Outrage!). This event was political in Rancière’s sense of the word. What came to be known as the 15M movement began when some forty people decided to spend the night in the square after a demonstration. They took their cue from the protests in Tahrir Square in Egypt earlier in 2011. The idea was to camp in the square for a week until the municipal elections. They ended staying a month. During that time, they held countless meetings and formed committees to elaborate proposals that were later discussed in the general assembly. The initial occupants had no plans of what to do, but as time went by they started to imagine another world to come, and to figure out how to get there. The square evolved into a tent city where hundreds lived. People at Sol had to take care of practical issues like feeding themselves, making sure that sanitary facilities worked, providing medical assistance and day care, setting up broadcasting services, establishing mechanisms to solve controversies, and so on. That is, the occupation had to govern itself. It is hard to tell when a political act like the one spearheaded by the forty initial dwellers of Plaza del Sol morphs into police. There is no clear signpost to ascertain this passage. What we can say is that the makeshift city of the indignados bears the unmistakable signs of governance, that the practice of dissensus of those who participated in the occupation built its own ad hoc partition of the sensible. Shouldn’t we call this by its name, a police of politics?

Rancière himself suggests this: “What do the plebs gathered on the Aventine do? They do not set up a fortified camp in the manner of the Scythian slaves. They do what would have been unthinkable for the latter: they establish another order, another partition of the perceptible, by constituting themselves not as warriors equal to other warriors but as speaking beings sharing the same properties as those who deny them these.” And again: “A demonstration is political not because it occurs in a particular place and bears upon a particular object but rather because its form is that of a clash between two partitions of the sensible.” There is an encounter of two partitions of the sensible—that is, the police distribution and the one that emerges through the practice of dissensus. This second partition is the police of politics.

I am not trying to neutralize Rancière’s argument that politics and police are opposing ways of symbolizing the common. I just want to add another layer to the impurity of politics. For Rancière it is impure because of its parasitic relationship with police. For me politics also shares something of police logic. The Spanish indignados set up an ad hoc distribution of the sensible while they attempted to reshape the existing order because to sustain a practice of dissensus over time you need some kind of division of labor, mechanisms of accountability and redress, and so
on. So politics is impure not only because it draws from the themes of police. It is also parasitic of police at the level of form: it creates its own distribution of the sensible, a police of politics.

**Politics as a Vanishing Mediator**

What does this parasitic practice of politics want? “Want” is obviously a misnomer because it endows politics with the human attribute of volition. I use “want” only as a rhetorical device to examine the specificity of politics.

We can begin by discarding the temptation of saying that politics wants to become police. There is some truth to this, for politics aims to redress exclusion. But a more inclusive and tolerant police is still police, so this would ground the specificity of politics in the desire to become order or consensus. Police is not the truth of politics or the goal to which it strives. It would also be wrong to claim that politics exhausts itself in the dissensus mounted by the demos to demonstrate that their equality has been wronged. This is because even a formal argument has to avoid the excesses of formalism. Unlike Carl Schmitt, who wanted to define the political in terms of friend-enemy relations alone—without invoking anything external to this relationship—Rancière has no problem in admitting that politics borrows something nonpolitical from which to take off. Equality is the “content” of politics. It is a supposition implicit in Plato and Aristotle: humans differ from beasts because they are in possession of the logos, which, by implication, establishes an egalitarian baseline for humanity. But equality can be wronged by the count and worth of people’s speech. “I am far away from the Schmittian formalization of antagonism,” says Rancière, because politics “has its own universal, its own measure that is equality. The measure never applies directly. It does so only through the enactment of a wrong.” It is a casuistic equality.

Yet people don’t mount a quarrel about the exclusion of the uncounted to show that they have been wronged. Rather, they do so to address that wrong and make it right. The dispute has a triangular structure: A confronts B in order to get C, where C stands for the counting of the uncounted. To suppress the negativity of their exclusion you need to reconfigure the given, institute a new police. Wouldn’t this contradict the claim that politics doesn’t aim to become a better, more inclusive police? Not necessarily: Rancière finds a way around this. In an interview about art and the artistic experience he says, “Dissensus is a modification of the coordinates of the sensible, a spectacle or a tonality that replaces another.” An act is political if it disturbs (or tries to disturb) the partition of the sensible through “the demonstration of a possible world in which the argument could count as an argument . . . It is the construction of a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds.” Finally, politics is “not a world of competing interests or values but a world of competing worlds.”

These citations show that dissensus can avoid the problem of circularity through an object outside itself. I am not referring to the parasitism of politics vis-à-vis police, or to the verification of the nonpolitical supposition of the equality of all speakers. The object outside politics is the representations of worlds to come where the name “equality” could apply to bodies that until then didn’t qualify for that label. This may entail a Kantian horizon, or not. Michelet provides a measure of levity to the Kantian option by saying that every epoch dreams the next. I interpret this to mean that those who embark in the processes of subjectivization characteristic of politics produce images of other worlds that could emerge through their actions. They do so from
within the existing world. These images are surfaces of inscription of expectations and desires, not blueprints of the future police.

What happens if insurgents manage to shake the partition of the sensible sufficiently to trigger a change? They would start to build a new world, in which case they would cease to be the demos and would instead become counted groups within police. A successful politics would then seem to be “destined” to negate itself and become police, thus ceasing to be what it is: the practice of dissensus.

Rancière doesn’t see it like this. Politics is “the tracing of a vanishing difference with respect to the distribution of social parts and shares.”46 It marks a difference vis-à-vis an existing distribution, it is not the architect of whatever distribution may follow, and it disappears as soon as one begins to allocate parts and shares:

Do we not need to frame a specific temporality, a temporality of the “existence of the inexistent” in order to give sense to the process of political subjectivization? I prefer to reverse the argument by saying that the framing of a future happens in the wake of political invention rather than being its condition of possibility. Revolutionaries invented a “people” before inventing its future. Besides, in the context of the “ethicization of the political” that is ours, I think that we have to focus first on the specificity of the “aesthetics of politics,” the specificity of political invention.47

Inventing a people before inventing its future seems counterintuitive because it inverts the usual sequence through which we think a politics of emancipation. Rancière’s reasoning might be unusual but it is also impeccable. In the conventional narrative people get together to outline who they are and what they want, propose a plan for action, and then proceed to recruit followers. Rancière doesn’t believe we need a program for people to do something. He is referring not to the disorder of revolt but to the process of emancipation. This process creates a people or part of the excluded-uncounted before anyone starts to think about the future society where those pariahs could name themselves as equals. Politics disturbs the given to show that another world is possible. Programs of what the future will look like can come handy, but they are not a precondition for people to try to change the world. Programs and policies are assembled on the go.

Historical evidence is on Rancière’s side. Insurgents always voiced their indignation and then began to think about what would follow. They often didn’t even have demands, only goals, like the Spanish indignados. People camping in the square called for real democracy and an economic system that wouldn’t reduce unemployment to a collateral damage of growth. They were not just fighting for a higher share of public resources but for a change in the way decisions about the allocation of shares are made. They started to figure out who they were and what they wanted as they built their tent city. Something similar happened in the Occupy Wall Street insurgency, which mobilized the U.S. indignados to fight for a world where the 99 percent could count. These experiences disturbed the given. Their aim was not to design a future society but to displace our cognitive maps and offer portals connecting the present to other, more egalitarian possibilities.
The role of politics as a connector brings Rancière’s thinking close to what Fredric Jameson calls a vanishing mediator. Jameson coined this expression to describe the role that Max Weber assigns to the Protestant ethic in the development of capitalism. Protestantism, Jameson says, contributed to disseminate instrumental rationality and the means-ends relation required by capitalism. It functioned as a bridge connecting two eras, the Renaissance and capitalist modernity. Once capitalism had taken root, the Protestant ethics became redundant and could be jettisoned. Protestantism was a vanishing mediator of capitalism. Such a mediator, Jameson says, “serves as a bearer of change and social transformation, only to be forgotten once that change has ratified the reality of the institutions.”

Jacobinism played a similar role in the birth of bourgeois society in France as the “guardian of revolutionary morality, of bourgeois universalistic and democratic ideals, a guardianship which may be done away with in Thermidor, when the practical victory of the bourgeoisie is assured and an explicitly monetary and market system can come into being.” Protestantism and Jacobinism were not a cause but a vanishing mediator of capitalism, its midwives rather than its parents.

Vanishing mediators overlap with Rancière’s claim that politics is “the tracing of a vanishing difference with respect to the distribution of social parts and shares . . . [that] occurs as an always provisional accident within the history of forms of domination.” Their family resemblance doesn’t lie in the shared adjective (“vanishing”) but in their role as connectors: Jameson’s mediators connect different modes of production or conceptual formations and subsequently fade away, whereas Rancière’s politics is a provisional accident that connects different ways of symbolizing the common and then vanishes. When it actually succeeds, in the sense of opening the way to a different configuration of the given, things start to change, and police enters the scene to build and govern a new partition of the sensible.

Politics wants, wills, or desires nothing because it is a connector of worlds. Like the nocturnal activities of laborers described by Rancière, it interrupts “the normal round, one might say, in which our characters prepare and dream and already live the impossible.” The uncounted “already live the impossible” because of the performative dimension of politics: when they connect the existing world with another one, as in Allport’s example of the black plaintiff, people don’t wait for the arrival of the many Godots of equality, justice, or freedom because they have already begun to experience what they strive for. This is the public secret of Jacotot’s intellectual emancipation and Rancière’s process of equality: they are always an enactment. Even if politics fails to trigger a change, this doesn’t mean that it achieves nothing. It experiments with different ways of organizing the common that leave behind the memory of ways of being together that change participants as well as a trove of ideas and experiences that function as a toolbox for other insurgencies.

So, the specificity of politics is to open up possibilities, not to become police. It resembles the rabbit hole in Alice in Wonderland, except that it doesn’t link a conventional adult world with a fantastic one: dissensus puts into contact an existing world that is unbearable for the uncounted and another in which they might find a fit. There will have been politics even if the passageway it opens fails to take us to other worlds. Politics is not the engineer that designs and builds the world in which those other possibilities of being together may flourish. Designing, organizing, and governing are what the order of police does.
The Politics of Police as a Homeopathic Process

The last question I examine is another oxymoron, the politics of police. The expression seems incongruous because it squares off the practice of dissensus with the pursuit of consensus. I want to show that it isn’t.

My starting point is Amador Fernández-Savater’s depiction of police and politics as two different visions of politics, one literal and the other literary. He uses a passage in Count Joseph de Maistre’s Considerations on France to illustrate the literal or police view. Says de Maistre: “The Constitution of 1795, like its predecessors, was made for man. But there is no such thing as man in the world. In my lifetime I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that one can be Persian. But as for man, I declare that I have never in my life met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me.”⁵¹ De Maistre wants something more substantive, says Fernández-Savater, people classified “according to their position at birth within the Ancien Régime (royalty, nobility, the peasantry), all of this conforming to natural laws ‘about which nothing can be said except that they exist because they exist.’” Equality is not one of those things that “exist because they exist.” It is simply a fiction, or abstraction. What is real for de Maistre is people’s position at birth, and their nationalities.

The former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher mirrored this reasoning in an interview where she famously stated, “There is no such thing as society”. She expands this in another passage: “I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand ‘I have a problem, it is the government’s job to cope with it’ . . . And so they are casting their problems on society, and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families.”⁵² Thatcher says that society doesn’t exist, or is an abstraction, in order to displace the burden of responsibility for inequality to the individuals and their families, who must then deal with their lot as best they can. De Maistre doesn’t see man, and man as citizen, because he refuses to come to terms with the subject of rights championed by the rebels of 1789.

Both narratives fall under what Fernández-Savater describes as a literal vision of politics, one that occurs within the parameters of the given. But how literal is this literality? In S/Z, his study of Balzac’s novel Sarrazine, Roland Barthes demonstrated that nothing is strictly literal, not even realist novels that pretend to be so through their use of denotative language. This is because denotation is not a nomenclature of the real but an attempt to present language as nature. As Barthes puts it, “Denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature.”⁵³

Similarly, de Maistre’s symbolization of the common is not a rendition of reality but a narrative that celebrates a stratified partition of the common. His units of analysis—the nation and, therefore, Italian, British, and other nationalities—are creations of modernity and not empirically given entities drawn from the nature of things. Thatcher’s individuals are as abstract as the market individualism that functions as a backdrop for her tirade about the nonexistence of society. But their literality wavers as all politics, even the literal kind, turns out to be literary. When Fernández-Savater calls de Maistre’s narrative “literal politics,” he means simply to
indicate that it presents itself as if it was a description of the world rather than what it really is, a set of judgments about the meaning of the lived world.

Politics, in contrast, is a fiction whose generative force unsettles the given and seeks to renew it. Political fiction counts the uncounted, invents narratives that construe the uncounted as visible and speaking subjects. So when de Maistre says, “As for man, I declare that I have never in my life met him,” he is probably telling the truth. He hasn’t met him because man falls outside his symbolization of the common. “If de Maistre sees nothing,” says Fernández-Savater, “it is because revolutionary fiction invents a space that didn’t exist before; it interrupts the order of classifications that define reality by questioning the necessity of the necessary and suspending the injunction that commands subjectivities to be what they are.” De Maistre isn’t interested in inventing another world. He wants to thwart the emergence of a new one, and even go back to the Ancien Régime. Politics for Rancière is clearly literary: it disputes “the necessity of the necessary” to show something that didn’t seem to exist, and for this you have to imagine a world different from the one defined by the status quo.

But we’ve seen that literality is not simply literal. De Maistre is aware that “man” creates a baseline for humanity—that is, something we all share. This challenges the stratified image of the world he expounds, so he wants to counter it with a narrative that highlights the national differences within humankind. This is why he says that there are only flesh-and-bone men like the Italians or the French. But his real goal is to change the world backward by undoing what the revolutionaries of 1789 achieved. This means that a literal politics that seeks to neutralize changes that improve the lot of the excluded is never purely literal. It also has a literary-fictional dimension that celebrates the past (and sometimes glorifies the present) and construes inequality as a result of heritage, chance, laziness, and so on. In de Maistre’s literal-literary politics, the contingency of one’s lot as a matter of necessity: he describes as natural what is really a stratagem of verisimilitude like the one Barthes identifies in the realist novel.

This invites us to reassess Fernández-Savater’s view of police as literal politics. A literal politics might be his analogue of police, but if it is also a literal politics, then police can’t simply be literal. It has a fictional dimension too, like politics. This makes all the difference. Fernández-Savater subverts Rancière’s schema, perhaps without realizing it. He grants police the attributes of politics. I call this a politics of police. To think this through, one has to work both with Rancière—by positioning oneself in the speech situation he calls disagreement—and against him. I do so by interrogating the relationship between politics and the verification of equality. I argue that politics has two modes of being, both of them literary: the politics Rancière identifies with emancipation and the politics of police, which seeks to modify the status quo without necessarily riding the Siamese twins of equality and emancipation.

Samuel Chambers was the first to talk about a politics of police, in an article aptly titled “The Politics of Police.” Like Rancière, he avoids the temptation of disssing police in the name of the higher calling of politics. Politics is always entangled with the themes and rules of police. Similarly, if Rancière sees democracy as the institution of politics and not as a political regime, Chambers is right to say that democracy is not a promise of something in waiting. We will never live in a democracy because democracy is the paradoxical condition of politics and not a type of regime. To speak of a democratic government would be a misnomer. But we can make life more bearable by intervening in the partition of the sensible. As he says, “We must remain committed
to and concerned with the politics of the police in the sense of changing, transforming, and improving our police orders.” This is an invitation to “cultivate a democratic politics more not less attendant to the possibility of transforming the police order.”

By stating the desirability of a better police (because it is more inclusive, not because it controls us better), Chambers builds on Rancière’s refusal to grant a normative preference to politics over police. His politics of police also introduces something different from politics and police: Rancière sees politics as emancipation (it redraws the given) and Chambers chooses to use the same name, politics, to designate emancipation as well as the activity of improving the status quo. Hence the trilogy: police, politics, and the option Chambers adds, the politics of police. His distinction between politics as a project of redrawing the field of experience and a politics of police intent on “changing, transforming, and improving” police echoes the opposition between revolutionary and reformist politics, whose archetypical proper names are Rosa Luxemburg and Eduard Bernstein, correspondingly. Rancière himself flirts with this distinction when he says that a strike for wages (reform) can make things better but is not political unless it seeks to reconfigure the given (revolution). Politics and the politics of police reopen the polemic about how to differentiate between reform and revolution.

Rancière believes that there are better and worse varieties of police too. The Scythian would be less desirable because they “customarily put out the eyes of those they reduced to slavery, the better to restrict them to their task as slaves, which was to milk the livestock.” Rancière doesn’t specify what makes a police more or less desirable. He lets the brutality of the Scythian practice do the argumentative legwork. Saying “There is a worse and a better police” and “One kind of police may be infinitely preferable to another” involves a tacit normative assumption about what is desirable in police matters. It also means that Chambers’ call for an improvement of police is not outside Rancière’s conceptual framework.

Chambers pegs the politics of police to the consequences of our actions on the status quo—that is, to whether they will improve or redraw the given. This is a perfectly legitimate option, but for me a politics of police is inherent to the police-politics relation, and shows the structural impurity of these two terms. This impurity opens the door for understanding the politics of police as a homeopathic practice of counted groups: they are part of the police yet seek to reconfigure the given. I am not referring to the becoming-politics of a police occurrence, for Rancière himself contemplates this in his example of the workers’ strike. My point is that named groups can modify the given without embarking in a process of subjectivization. Grounding the politics of police on the impurity of its terms means both terms, politics as well as police. Rancière addresses the impurity of politics. I want to add the impurity of police.

I begin by reiterating that conflicts are part of the police. The very obviousness of what can be said, heard, seen, and done by whom, when, and where is anything but obvious. Nobody really knows for sure the limits of the place she occupies. Courts and governmental agencies would be redundant if we all knew the norms, understood their meaning, and adjusted our behavior to their dictates. Streets are meant for circulating, but they are also places where people assemble to protest, run marathons, hold public festivals, argue with one another, and so on. We quarrel about when they can be used for circulation and when for other purposes. This kind of polemic is a police affair, not the manifestation of political dissensus in the sense Rancière gives
to that word. Interpretive conflicts highlight that the consensus that characterizes police is not all that consensual.

But counted groups also subvert the stability of a governable space. These are parts of the status quo and can generate effects that resemble the dislocations Rancière associates with politics. They are homeopathic in the usual sense that like can cure like. I take this idea from Carlo Donolo. He speaks of allopathic politics as shorthand for the politics of political parties that intervene on society from the political system. Homeopathic politics, by contrast, refers to social movements that want to cure society from within the social.\(^{59}\) Donolo’s distinction is pertinent even if his topology of spaces as well as the debate about parties versus social movements is a bit dated. Homeopathy serves as a counterpoint to Rancière’s view of the political as the encounter of two heterogeneous processes—governing, or police, and equality, or politics as the effort to verify the supposition that everyone is equal.\(^{60}\) A politics of police is not an encounter of radically different processes but a homeopathic one where like changes like. It happens when counted parts, whether individuals or groups, act on the existing field of experience to reconfigure it. This politics taps on the generative force of counted parts and the multiple conflicts they generate inside police.

These groups sidestep political subjectivization. I mentioned subjectivization when I spoke of identities in transit. Rancière describes it as “a disidentification, removal from the naturalness of a place, the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part.”\(^{61}\) The meaning of this quote depends on how we understand “the naturalness of a place.” I interpret it as something less than natural: if the subject identifies with an assigned place to the extent that she lives it as natural (as if there were no gap between the place and its occupant), it wouldn’t be a subject but a substance, or the fantasy of a literal world. A full identity with what one is supposed to be is rare. Torturers can develop empathy for people whom they have just waterboarded. People who clean toilets in slums would prefer to do anything other than what they do. And Rancière himself reminds us that at night many proletarians chose to study or join theater groups rather than rest. There is no shortage of examples. If there is no straightforward relation between bodies and places, or if their relation is open to discussion, then disidentification is not the first step in breaking from the assigned place because every subject position is already exposed to uncertainty. This is either because people don’t quite know who they are supposed to be or because they negotiate what can and cannot be said, seen, or done within the place they find themselves. The way people represent their relationship with the places they occupy is always a matter of debate because there is a gap between their identification with a place and the place as such.

This gap won’t disappear through police correctives—something like infinite variations of the “Move along!” that Rancière invokes as exemplary of police activity. The presence of the uniformed police in the streets is a reminder that the actions and places occupied by agents never quite coincide. The gap is a feature of the changing nexus between places, names, and bodies. Our metastable identities are defined by this nexus. So if identification with a place is always already subverted by the distance between the representation of a place and the body associated with it, then the certainty of who we are is something less than certain and the stability of frontiers between police identification and political disidentification can never be a sure thing.
This complicates matters. Rancière says that a practice counts as political if it puts into question the partition of the sensible. Yet the instability of frontiers between identification and disidentification makes it difficult to make a priori judgments on whether actions undertaken by counted groups reshuffle the deck or reshape the status quo by changing the parts, the rules, or the playing field. This is reminiscent of the polemic about reform and revolution. How can we tell if the decriminalization of abortion is a police process—a change brought about by pressure groups, advocates of reproductive rights, and legislators—or a game-changing event in gender relations?

The question is, what counts as putting the given into question and how different another experience of being together has to be before we can say it has become something other than what it was? Focusing on quantity and intensity won’t take us far due to the notorious difficulty of measuring the intensity and numerical magnitude of a difference. The threshold between police reform and political innovation is never clear. But, again, Rancière sees disagreement as an object and method of his theorization, so there is a way to address the difference between retouching and transforming the given. It consists of submitting the statement “putting into question” to the test of disagreement. Rancière does this in his critique of Arendt. Her clear-cut separation of polis and oikos works only if you take for granted that there is a political life with people destined to such life, as opposed to the prepolitical life of those who have to endure inequality and oppression for the good of the polis. Rancière rejects this reasoning because the separation between political and nonpolitical is not the foundation but the object of politics. He is right: politics is an operator of difference, a practice that disputes what is and isn’t political. But this also applies to Rancière: why should we accept a clear demarcation between politics and police, and between subjectivization and the identification with the subject positions we occupy? These are objects of dispute because the naturalness of frontiers is not natural. It is the contingent outcome of the practice of disagreement.

Let us assume that there is no gap between a place and its occupier. This hypothetical case of individuals who identify happily with the places they are allotted wouldn’t change the fact that frontiers are fuzzy. Senators, councilors, and other figures of representative democracy are quintessential agents of constituted power. They have no reason to disidentify from the place popular suffrage assigned them. All they want to be is what they already are, professional politicians. The in-between or interval between identities and political subjectivization is not even a remote possibility. But representatives can dislocate the existing order by amending the constitution, making laws to abolish sexist or racist discrimination in the workplace, raising the legal age to purchase drinks, and so on. Some might see this as an adjustment within police. Maybe it is, but how can we tell? It can’t be settled by fiat. It has to be submitted to the protocols of disagreement. Yet even then we could agree that elected officials have a reservoir of constituent power. Their subject positions have a generative force that can be mobilized to make a difference without them ever having to disidentify from their designated places.

The point is that frontiers between social groups and processes of political subjectivization are a matter of dispute. The politics of police feeds off this possibility. It shows that counted parts can generate the disruptive effects of dissensus analogous to those Rancière associates with political subjectivization. They embark on a homeopathic politics of police.
Rancière might wonder why we make such a fuss about the instability of frontiers if he himself says that the doings of groups can morph into political acts. This is true, but, again, I am not referring to the sequence whereby an identity ceases to be what it is through a process of subjectivization. This is not the birth of a place of enunciation that had not been perceived within the existing field of experience. The politics of police describes counted groups that act as social groups and still manage to modify the given. Put differently, it is not a matter of how a subject transforms herself but how counted parts reconfigure the given without inserting themselves into a sequence of subjectivization. The homeopathic politics of police is a politics whose subjects are not in-between names and places. Better still, all subject positions are metastable, or in transit: police identities also undergo changes, but without passing through the emancipatory narrative of subjectivization. This gives us yet another reason to polemicize about how natural the naturalness of place is, and how to discern if (or when) a conflict has crossed the threshold of a census-like category and become political.

A homeopathic politics of police highlights the impurity of police because practices that are internal to it can also reconfigure the given. This is why I argue that Rancière’s police exhibits some of the traits of politics. A politics of police names the transformative practices triggered by counted groups. It identifies the homeopathic interplay between the institution and the instituted within the instituted and through transformative practices triggered by counted groups.

Notes

4 Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 137.
9 Rancière, *Disagreement*, xi.
11 There is a third option: immanence without transcendence, like the one we find in the theory of the multitude of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, which draws from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Spinoza. Rancière is not very sympathetic to this perspective. He says: “The concept of the multitude manifests a phobia of the negative, of any politics that defines itself ‘against.’” Jacques Rancière, “The People or the Multitude?,” in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010), 86. The multitude differs from his own concept of the people because it is predicated on “an ontological claim that substantializes
the egalitarian presupposition”: the multitude is a political subject that “ought to express the multiple insofar as the multiple is the very law of being” (Dissensus, 86). Rancière is opposed to any law of being.

17 Rancière, Disagreement, 16–17.
19 Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus.”
21 Rancière, Disagreement, 22–23.
22 Eduardo Matte quoted in Claudio Vázquez Lazo, “Los dueños de Chile,” El Mostrador, 2015, http://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/opinion/2015/11/09/los-duenos-de-chile/, 2015. I thank Jorge Arditi for telling me about this article. If the count of one’s speech is more relevant than access to it, then one could reexamine Gayatri Spivak’s celebrated article about subalternity. The question wouldn’t be so much “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” for they can speak with or without their academic interpreters, but whether their speech counts or not, or if it counts as much as the speech of intellectuals, government employees, politicians, businesspeople, and so on. The shift from speech to the count of that speech makes the subaltern a part of the no-part, the part of the uncounted. See Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271–313 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
25 Rancière, Disagreement, 112, 123, my italics.
27 Rancière, Disagreement, 32.
30 Rancière, Disagreement, 31–32.
31 Rancière, Disagreement, 33.
32 Rancière, Disagreement, 61.


40 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 24, my italics.


49 Jameson, “The Vanishing Mediator,” 78.


