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1.

There is little that observers of the contemporary political scene agree upon so readily as the need to reinvigorate civic conversations. In a time of social division, citizens routinely live in spaces where they interact with those who already share their values, and they absorb information streams tailored to their existing ideological commitments. As a result, civic debates increasingly sidestep meaningful normative exchange, in favor of talking points designed to provoke or belittle. To counteract these dynamics of social distance, we are often told that conversations need to take place across sectarian lines. And from this vantage point, Jacques Rancière and Jürgen Habermas are frequently highlighted as uniquely well suited to explore the possibilities and difficulties that attend civic conversations.

Both theorists, after all, identify the production and exchange of speech as central to democratic practice. The association of language and citizenship has a deep provenance—reflected in a long tradition of thinking the human subject as uniquely qualified for politics. The human, in Aristotelian terms, possesses language in order to present and negotiate matters of justice.¹ And both theorists coincide in their suspicions toward features of the late modern world that erode possibilities for democratic exchange. From his earliest writings, Habermas has criticized a technocratic culture that seizes social decisions from citizens and, instead, allows policy choices to devolve to experts. Here, a culture of top-down administration, defined by considerations of efficiency, increasingly supplants citizen oversight or meaningful deliberations over justice.² Likewise, Rancière has targeted the “post-politics” of neoliberal modernity, where the agonistic character of democratic life is elided in favor of the “public opinion poll” or the ostensible necessities of

economic markets.³ To counteract these tendencies, both theorists highlight the politicization of more spheres of life as central to democratic politics, so that ever more practices come under collective scrutiny and debate.

That said, there is no easy way to reconcile these efforts to understand citizenship as a domain of speech. From this broad starting point, Rancière and Habermas diverge considerably on what it means to be a speaker and the democratic contributions of language. Indeed, the essay will highlight how this shared emphasis on speech gives rise to significant divides regarding the social ontology of language, the forms of power that attend linguistic exchange, and how speech informs democratic agency. Accordingly, the first section will stage the dispute between Rancière and Habermas in such a way as to bring out their competing phenomenologies of the speech situation. Although much commentary rests on this point, the subsequent sections will use this disagreement to develop a broader set of reflections on the meaning and role of language for a politics of equality. Where Habermas privileges discourse as a medium of understanding, Rancière highlights an “excess of words” that proves generative for political agency. The divergence leads the essay to close on a normatively richer question: how this “excess” of language might enable a substantively *democratic* politics. As the essay will ultimately argue, Rancière does not only expose the political deficits in deliberative models—in stressing how civic language is litigated and contested, he offers productive resources to theorize how democratic publics can be rearticulated in more egalitarian directions.

2.

As scholars will know, Habermas sought to rescue critical theory from the path of the late Frankfurt School. On Habermas’ reading, the canonical figures of the Frankfurt School viewed capitalist modernity as a space of nearly totalizing control. The effects of power reach into the deepest levels of experience, and reason itself has become a tool of domination.⁴ In response, Habermas argues that this pessimism reflects a fundamental misdiagnosis. Where earlier generations of critical theory situated reason within the instrumental mastery and control of objects, a reinvigorated critique would attend to the rational potentials of everyday communication. To compress a nuanced story into brief form, communicative reason is based in the linguistic negotiations made by speaking agents as they forge or restore the consensus upon which social coordination rests. To take communication seriously is to access a distinctly intersubjective reason undersold or missed by the core figures of the Frankfurt School. And, in a more robust sense, these communicative resources ultimately offer a path toward a more fully rational society.⁵

From this opening follow a number of substantive political conclusions. Most broadly, everyday communication does not simply yield another form of reason, but one that makes distinct contributions to democratic life. In perhaps

the farthest-reaching line of argument, Habermas proposes that a) communicative reason offers a noncoercive means to coordinate the complex operations of social life; and b) the quasi-transcendental conditions of everyday communication yield a standard for rational justification under conditions of value pluralism.⁶ Such gains can first be situated within the relational structures of dialogue. When partners engage in communicative action (as distinguished from strategic action), they must make a number of commitments in order to avoid unintelligibility. Minimally, speakers commit to justifying their positions to others. And to do so without contradiction, they are required to approach their interlocutors as rational beings, capable of understanding and responding to reasons.⁷ In Hegelian terms, there is a moment of recognition by which participants confer the status of rationality upon their partners in communication.⁸ In a more robust sense, the assumptions that govern communication constrain what *qualifies* as a rational form of dialogue. As Habermas argues, a fully rational consensus would be the result of an open-ended dialogue in which a) all affected parties have the right to participate; b) any participant can enter questions and topics; c) the conclusions of the conversation can be reinterrogated at any moment; and d) the form, language, or terms of evaluation can also be challenged by the participants.⁹

For democratic theorists, Habermas' account of communication yields some significant insights. Minimally, it is through the public activity of giving reasons and responding to the reasons of others that participants experience a reflexive moment of value refinement. On this epistemic reading, successful positions are not brute preferences, to be aggregated and pursued no matter their claim to rational validity. Rather, the back-and-forth of communication forces speakers to account for competing standpoints and thus shapes what sorts of commitments can reasonably be endorsed in a contested social field. By submitting positions to others and encountering challenges, participants engage in an intersubjective learning process that preserves the pluralism of late modern societies while minimizing their more invidious dynamics.¹⁰ It is for this reason that Habermas describes a deliberative politics as a source of solidarity under conditions of social difference. As he puts this point, "the communicative mastery of *these* conflicts constitutes the sole source of solidarity among strangers—strangers who renounce violence and, in the cooperative regulation of their common life, also concede one another the right to *remain* strangers."¹¹ In a stronger sense, these meditations on communicative action provide what Habermas takes to be a criterion for democratic legitimacy. Although no empirical speech community may ever fully actualize the conditions of an ideal speech situation, the pragmatic conditions of communication offer a procedural guide for generating a rational consensus, rather than settling for a *modus vivendi* or a moment of communicative exhaustion. More importantly, this normative ideal is already at work in the everyday life of speech communities and is not a utopian fiction, subject to the usual objections from materialist critics. It is, in other words,

both immanent to this historical form of life, and a transcendent standard by which the lifeworld could be evaluated.¹²

The ambitions of Habermas' project have been met with equally strong objections over the resources (whether historical or normative)¹³ that are buried by this strong push toward a political rationality of consensus.¹⁴ What is most relevant for current purposes is Rancière's contention that Habermas has not sufficiently theorized a) the scene of language in which his deliberative model is rooted, or b) the features of language that contribute most fully to democratic potentials. In Rancière's own terms, "an *a priori* presumption of speech, shared by all subjects, is unsustainable: "this 'common' capacity is split up from the very beginning.... There is politics because speaking is not the same as speaking... It is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice."¹⁵ These challenges take a number of distinct forms, so it will be necessary to move in steps in order to unpack their scope and ramifications.

Any such reconstruction must begin with the scene of speech that undergirds Habermas' vision for critical theory. Where Habermas persistently invokes everyday linguistic exchange for his model of communicative reason, Rancière details how any cognitivist approach to communication must be thickened according to the forms of power that structure discursive practice. Minimally, it is inadequate to describe speech as an exchange between "preconstituted" language users. The status of speaker is not something that participants in communication "must" extend if they are to avoid an important contradiction; and neither is it a natural or metaphysical capacity that distinguishes the human as a uniquely political animal.¹⁶ Instead, to *count* as a speaking subject reflects broader social dynamics: those economies of power and esteem that condition who is (or is not) considered a bearer of full speech within the sphere of citizenship. Societies, from Rancière's perspective, reflect an "immemorial and perennial wrong":

[T]here is the symbolic distribution of bodies that divides them into two categories: those that one sees and those that one does not see, those who have a logos—memorial speech, an account to be kept up—and those who have no logos, those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain.¹⁷

A theory concerned with discursive equality, then, must begin by treating *access* to speech as an essentially social question. Broadly, the authority of speech is conditioned by the "account" (*le compte*) made of it—that is, those social regimes of perception (the "partition of the perceptible"¹⁸) that allot normative weight differentially on the basis of *who* is speaking, in which settings, and on which topics.¹⁹ To be a speaker (in the emphatic sense) is not simply to have mastered the phonetic and lexical capacities for intelligible

utterances; further, it is to have meaningful access to relevant forums of will-formation, to speak in socially approved idioms, and to be taken seriously in the questions or claims one poses. And, conversely, a bearer of “noise” is not simply the one silenced or blocked from participating in the conversations of a given community. More commonly, these agents show up in forums of civic speech to present their interests, anger or indignation, and yet their words are sapped of authority by hierarchical patterns of social worth.²⁰ In Rancière’s evocative terms, these disqualified agents offer only the “the animal noise of voices expressing pleasure or pain.”²¹ As noise, these expressions do not possess the binding power of reason (or what is recognized as such) and thus do not *matter* in ways that command response or repair.

It is for this reason that Rancière builds his rejoinder from a series of cases that have historically distinguished those with access to full speech and those without.²² For instance: the ancient *polis*, where only the property-owning, native-born male possessed the speech of citizenship—as counterposed to the slave, the one who is an instrument of another, and thus considered incapable of the *logos*; the woman, whose putative emotionality equips her for care labor in the domestic sphere, but disqualifies her for the dispassionate calculations of civic life; or, the colonized subject, whose native speech is mocked as the howling of animals or children (to be replaced by an imposed language of “civilization”). What binds these disparate cases is that they are subjects who offer their needs, challenges, and wants in speech communities—but whose words are dismissed, mocked, or set aside; no matter their facility with language, the values they invoke, or the warrants they provide for their claims. In Rancière’s peculiar idiolect, these are bearers of compromised speech, examples of “the part of no part” (*la part des sans-part*). Even when such agents enter the debates of civil society, they do not possess the authority to claim public attention. By extension, their words do not reverberate in the civic imagination or trouble the halls of power.²³

In philosophical terms, the tension detailed thus far reflects competing approaches to the normative term of universality. As readers of Habermas will know, his appeal to discursive validity is not simply based upon a procedural specification of conditions through which social conversations would give rise to a non-coerced consensus. Rather, the strong claim to rationality rests upon a demand for discursive universalization. In a particularly clear formulation, Habermas proposes “Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants within a rational discourse.”²⁴ In a word, the force of legitimacy stems from a Kantian rendering of universality, translated into intersubjective-dialogical terms.²⁵ To meet the bar of communicative reason is to secure the potential assent of all parties—so long as debate on the salient issue is conducted under conditions that would make its conclusions rationally defensible.

At a preliminary level, then, Rancière’s challenge to Habermas could be rendered through left-Hegelian critical terms: that no instantiation of the

universal remains uncontaminated by particularity. Put brutally, norms are actualized in terms that are necessarily partial, limited, and incomplete, which means that each is haunted by the traces of its unredeemed possibilities.²⁶ In Hegelian logic, this discrepancy yields the “unrest” of the concept—the unsustainability of its particular shapes and the impetus to develop in such a way as to actualize further potentials of the ideal at stake.²⁷ As Rancière translates this principle into more recognizably political terms, “in human relations, heretofore, universalism has always been particularized.”²⁸ If there is anything like an apodictic moment in Rancière, it is this: every shape of inclusion rests upon the refusal or bracketing of those contents that cannot (or will not) be accommodated. Or, in terms that reflect present concerns, every community is defined by a symbolic articulation (in Rancière’s terms, the “police”) that allots full speech to some and withholds it from others.²⁹ The speech of hegemonic subjects attains to the logos and a heightened authority within the social economy of speech. These are speakers whose words demand consideration and response. Those who have “no part,” on the other hand, access speech insofar as they submit to the orders they receive. What they produce is *noise*—an indicator of mere preferences or wants, lacking the force of reason, commanding no recognition.

3.

As detailed to this point, Rancière’s challenge is straightforward: Habermas has idealized (or effaced) the social conditions for communication, thus obscuring the power of the symbolic economy that differentially authorizes (or deauthorizes) speakers in civil society. The normative stakes of this critique come clearer, however, in shifting from diagnostic to *praxical* considerations. On this point, Rancière proposes that the deliberative approach fails to account for the most significant dispute in a dialogical politics: “The problem is knowing whether the subjects who count in the interlocution ‘are’ or ‘are not,’ whether they are speaking or just making a noise. . . . The quarrel has nothing to do with more or less transparent or opaque linguistic contents; it has to do with *consideration of speaking beings as such.*”³⁰ Upon deepening the scope of conflict beyond claims, their meanings, or their justifications, the guiding question must be reformulated to ask what sort of politics is called for when the fundamental dispute is over the status of speakers themselves—who can *count* as a speaking subject and who cannot (or who counts only in partial or attenuated forms).

To render this challenge along the lines of an ideal vs. a non-ideal approach to discourse would be inadequate. Such a reading fails to recognize that Habermas routinely allows that the practice of speech cannot be confused with the “idealizing presuppositions” of the ideal speech situation. As he concedes, civic speech is persistently short-circuited by ideological structures of knowledge or the withdrawal of topics from democratic scrutiny, and citizen interests are regularly supplanted by technocratic decision structures that erase fundamental questions of value.³¹ Even when the conversations of civil

society succeed in reaching consensus, such conclusions may have difficulty finding purchase in the distant, bureaucratized structures of the state (itself often captured by other actors and interests).³² Furthermore, Habermas' later writings clarify that the empirical practice of civil society has rarely been so accommodating as his early references to a public sphere might suggest. As critics have pressed, it is unsustainable to refer to any single public sphere in the historical sense, as these sites of will-formation, interest, and opinion are best construed in the plural. The discursive world of citizenship is ultimately an overlapping set of publics and counter-publics, where minoritarian discourses seek to intervene within hegemonic debates and narratives.³³ This point increasingly informs Habermas' later work, which is more prone to theorize "segmented public spheres" that approach the aims of universality only insofar as previously excluded groups (and the discourses forged in these experiences of marginality) come to enter the conversations of citizenship.³⁴

In many ways, this diffraction of civil society resonates with Rancière's critical intuitions—more specifically, his insistence that communities are structured by the divide between the authoritative speech of hegemonic groups and those subordinate populations who "have no speech to be heard."³⁵ Accordingly, politics (in the emphatic sense) is located in the movement where radical agents assume their equality and enter economies of speech in which they previously had no place. In Rancière's own terms, "political activity . . . makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise."³⁶ That said, this form of politics cannot be reduced to the abstract "entry" of groups upon a discursive stage that stretches to become more inclusive and accommodating. To recognize his distance from this more robust vision of deliberative politics, it is necessary to examine how such an entry is enacted—and, moreover, what this egalitarian movement means for the groups in question and the communicative space it unsettles.

Most prominently, Rancière calls attention to the "subjectification" that defines political agency: "politics is a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification. By *subjectification* I mean 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."³⁷ Minimally, this passage highlights a point from the history of emancipatory politics. The discursive scene is rarely (if ever) expanded through the good will of hegemonic groups; it is instead broken open through the efforts of marginal actors. In Rancière's terms, "politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part."³⁸ It is not enough, then, to ask into how speech could be better distributed (in standard liberal terms), as such a question places the subject of politics into a position of passivity, a recipient of goods allotted by others.³⁹ As Rancière argues, such a rendering would falsify the history of democratic agency, where the excluded force themselves

into the debates of citizenship—a break into a sphere that had, to this point, constituted itself through the bracketing of these voices.⁴⁰ Through politics (in the strict sense), the previously “uncounted” make themselves count. They stage interventions into civic space; they interrupt the regular rhythms of the community; they act *as if* they were equal to their social “betters,” enacting the same rights and privileges; and they demand response from those who have never been required to answer to these insubordinate actors.⁴¹ It is this rupture that enacts the work of democratic agency: “to give a name to the anonymous and to make words audible where only noise was perceptible before.”⁴²

To privilege this dynamic may seem to rehash a core deliberative commitment: that civil society more fully approximates a democratic public insofar as more groups offer their challenges, needs, and questions within public conversations over shared institutions and norms. The radicality of Rancière’s position comes clearer, however, with one further insistence: the subjects of politics do not possess a fixed social meaning that moves from margin to center.⁴³ Rather, by assuming new powers and privileges, these agents take on an identity unprepared by what Rancière terms a ‘policed’ system of social meaning – that is, a system that assigns to members a circumscribed role within the civic imagination, along with the capacities and privileges deemed ‘natural’ to that placement.⁴⁴ In his own terms, “any subjectification is 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.”⁴⁵ To mitigate the vagueness of this formulation, it will be helpful to read it against some familiar political alternatives. Minimally, Rancière proposes that the subjects of politics are not defined by pre-political experiences or identities that come to be recognized by others in the public sphere. As he insists, these actors rather undergo a *dis*-identification when they enact an equality they did not previously ‘possess’ within dynamics of subordination. Political action thus possesses a fundamentally generative element: radical agents become subjects *in the first place* by acting in excess of their ‘proper’ place – laying claim to rights and values that have historically been inaccessible from that position.⁴⁶ As Benjamin Arditì describes the argument: “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.”⁴⁷ Through this movement, political actors do something more than acquire a new social meaning; instead, they reconfigure the topography of who can speak authoritatively, on which issues, in relation to which binding values. It is in this way that political activity “inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community.”⁴⁸

This line of argument leads to many of the characteristic frustrations with Rancière’s thought. For instance, does the persistent emphasis on novelty undersell the experience of marginal groups, for whom these interests and claims would be long familiar?⁴⁹ Does the hyperbolic rhetoric of insurgence

acknowledge the historical sedimentations of power that must be addressed for these interventions to serve meaningful social change?⁵⁰ There is now an established literature on these reservations, that is complicated by Rancière's insistence that he does not reduce politics to exceptional and vanishing moments of uprising. Given the interests of this essay, however, the remainder will set aside these questions (as well as those who would defend him on these counts⁵¹) to pursue his deeper tension with deliberative theory—more specifically, how discursive resources can facilitate a democratic vision of politics. Here, the critical question must be recast from the usual terms (i.e., the brute gain or loss of speech), so as to ask how marginal subjects *use* civic languages in order to destabilize the space of citizenship and the identities that structure its economy of participation. The final section will thus engage how both theorists construe the normative possibilities of language in order to pose some broader lessons for democratic theory. At stake is not simply *who* possesses the full speech of citizenship, but rather the linguistic resources that permit this economy of speech to be remade in more egalitarian fashion.

4.

There are many ways to address this question. Deliberative theory offers a familiar rendering of discourse as a means for social coordination: it is through communication that subjects forge or restore consensus over the structures of the world. Citizens submit “criticizable validity claims” on topics of common concern, consider rejoinders or alternate standpoints, and reevaluate their commitments toward greater rational defensibility. In formulaic terms: language (for purposes of a rational politics) is a medium of understanding, guided by “the unforced force of the better argument.”⁵² For Rancière, it is not only that the deliberative approach glosses over the intractable dynamics of power; so too does it thin out the agentic possibilities of speech and the linguistic reserves that render such agency possible.⁵³ In response, Rancière highlights a dimension of language that he terms “literarity.” As he explains, “the modern political animal is first a literary animal, caught in the circuit of a literariness that undoes the relationship between the order of words and the order of bodies that determine the place of each.”⁵⁴ Or, put differently, “humans are political animals because they are literary animals: not only in the Aristotelian sense of using language in order to discuss questions of justice, but also because we are confounded by the excess of words in relation to things.”⁵⁵

To render this move in more legibly political terms, it is useful to press what the “excess of words” amounts to and what distinguishes this excess from the “noise” of disqualified social groups. At times, the argument reflects the approach to agency detailed above: the insubordinate subject who demands to be heard, even when she or he is not recognized as a proper speaker in the official times and places of politics. Such an excess is “that of a living person who speaks too much, who speaks incorrectly, out of place and outside of the truth.”⁵⁶ A less obvious form of excess, however, is located within the

pragmatics of language itself—what it permits agents to *do* in in order to “mak[e] what was unseen visible” or “mak[e] what was audible as mere noise heard as speech.”⁵⁷

This broad gesture gains substance by attending to the history of emancipatory politics. For instance, the success of political movements has often hinged upon requalifying practices and spaces so that they are perceived as amenable to justice considerations (when they did not previously enjoy this status).⁵⁸ In this connection, think of ongoing efforts to divert the discourse of financial debt away from private arrangements governed by market norms, and instead into the register of power, class predation, and the state. Such a rhetorical shift aims to undo the spurious depoliticization of market mechanisms so that they are *seen* differently within the space of citizenship—as political institutions, entangled with (and enabled by) state policies, and thus subject to democratic oversight and constraints. This polemical work of redescription renders possible not only new perceptions, but new possibilities to contest the financialization of social practice. To continue the thread of the previous section, however, Rancière contends that the excess of words enables groups to “mak[e] themselves seen or heard as speaking subjects” by complicating the established taxonomy of social roles.⁵⁹ To illustrate, take two examples that appear repeatedly in Rancière’s work: a) the invocation, within the demonstrations of May ’68, that “we are all German Jews” (offered by a crowd largely composed of French Catholics); or b) the trial of August Blanqui, in which the defendant insists to a puzzled magistrate that the proper name for his profession is that of “proletarian.” While these instances may seem to have little in common, they point to civic language as a site through which insurgent agents “transform identities defined in the natural order . . . into instances of experience of a dispute.”⁶⁰ In each case, Rancière is interested in how speech does something more than pose questions, petition representatives, or present interests. Instead, these are moments where agents reinvest the civic vocabulary in order to loosen or transform its structuring categories. For instance, when Blanqui insists that proletarian is his “profession,” he displaces the significance of this term from a) a sociological category (i.e., profession as employment), to b) a place of enunciation for those who identify in common (i.e., a declaration of having-been-wronged by class society).⁶¹ This sort of profession is less a category of labor, imposed by the economic order, and more a site for the articulation of a grievance. And by extension, the normative meaning of the proletarian is likewise displaced—from the “universal victim” of an expropriative economic apparatus (along with a moralist framework of pity) to a source of justice claims, open to all wronged by class society.⁶² To enact this shift is to go beyond an abstract disruption of meaning, so as to permit new connections and alliances among those who identify with this expanded field of wrong.

This approach to language as a site of counter-hegemonic solidarity resonates with some familiar instances of political mobilization. Take, for

instance, the phrases “we the people” or “we the ninety-nine percent” by which collectives announce themselves on the public stage. As Rancière argues, such phrases do not name a preexistent given that simply awaits its appropriate name, but rather *does* something in the act of its articulation.⁶³ To offer this “we” in the appropriate conditions is to create a new site around which diffuse political energies could coalesce into something approximating a collective subject, speaking and acting in common. In Rancière’s own terms, “The ‘we’ is not the expression of an identity; it is an act of enunciation which *creates the subject that it names*.”⁶⁴ Where this formulation might evoke some now-standard reservations toward performative models of political action (i.e., an approach that fails to account for the material circumstances and constraints of power⁶⁵), a more nuanced reading would attend to Rancière’s insistence that “a mode of subjectification does not create subjects *ex nihilo*; it creates them by transforming identities defined in the natural order of the allocation of functions and places into instances of experience of a dispute.”⁶⁶ Or, to invoke the terms that he increasingly comes to use, the emergence of new subjects reflects a transformative work upon the “political names” that orient civic space.

Minimally, this phrase highlights the linguistic categories that allot agents a legible place within the civic imagination (along with the treatments and evaluations that attend this role). But the more interesting question stems from how such categories offer purchase for a politics that destabilizes the accepted order of entitlements and powers. For instance, as Rancière engages Hannah Arendt, he argues “man and citizen do not designate collections of individuals. Man and citizen are political subjects and as such are not definite collectivities, but *surplus names* that set out a question or a dispute about who is included in their count.”⁶⁷ This theme of names—surplus names or excess names—turns up repeatedly in Rancière’s thought.⁶⁸ At bottom, the term reflects a core intuition: the social categories embedded within the language of citizenship are not neutral, sociological classifications, but rather lend normative meaning to these groupings and organize the social distribution of privileges, burdens, and benefits. These categories delineate who belongs where, who merits the protections of institutions, who is authorized to engage in the ordering of communal life, and who, conversely, is to “stay silent and submit.”⁶⁹ Further yet, the lived work of these names is to naturalize such distinctions within the everyday regime of “common sense.” Where this description may suggest a closed set of social assignments, political history reveals that such names likewise offer *praxical* openings on the most fundamental question: who is (or can be) “included in their count.”⁷⁰ Take the examples from the cited passage: to be a “human,” “man,” or a “citizen” is not a settled status that irrevocably delineates those within and those without these privileged categories. Rather, such names are persistently appealed by those left outside their count, so as to become the object of struggle for those who do not qualify or qualify in only an attenuated sense (e.g., the demand to

be recognized as *human*—and thus protected as such—issued by populations abandoned to state violence).⁷¹

To put Rancière's point more broadly, dispossessed groups are not solely ordered (in a passive sense) by the current set of civic names. Instead, such assignments are routinely contested by a politics that roots itself within these categories so as to exploit their ambiguities, inconsistencies, or applications. For instance, movements of equality have long juxtaposed various civic names to lay bare how even the most (ostensibly) universal normative goods are distributed in an exclusionary or inequitable fashion. As Rancière details this trajectory of left politics, "the various forms of 'us' have . . . put the inscription of equality to the test, to ask if human rights, the rights of man, were more or less than the rights of the citizen, if they were those of woman, of the proletarian, of the black man, of the black woman, and so on."⁷² In this sense, a politics of the name exposes the normative hierarchies that rest below official narratives of inclusion and equality. And such strategies take a more constructive form when radical agents claim membership in the name that has refused them, thereby transforming the category as it is redeployed in new situations, over new bodies and lives (e.g., efforts by sexual minorities to claim the names of partnership associated with straight attachment; or, efforts by sexual performers to gain the name of sex workers).⁷³ To employ Rancière's own terms, these names are fundamentally "conflictual."⁷⁴ By taking these names as their own, emergent subjects do not only disturb the regime of meaning that has, to this point, naturalized a hierarchical social space; further yet, they *use* these names to seize an expanded set of powers and privileges (e.g., voting, the right to work, access to civic spaces).

A politics of "literarity" thus reflects the ambiguity of the political name—its ambivalent tie to legibility, subordination, and agency. Rancière illustrates this point through the case of Olympia de Gouges, who argued in revolutionary France that "if women are entitled to go to the scaffold, they are entitled to go to the assembly"; here, playing on the civic status of women, both included and excluded from the life of the state.⁷⁵ More specifically, the *name* of woman is invoked in what Rancière terms the form of dispute. A diminished capacity to participate in the polity (i.e., the historico-empirical practice of this name) is counterposed to the absolute claim that the state nevertheless makes to the lives of women—and this again counterposed to the universal normative status that women are owed as human beings. Each of these senses a) puts the meaning of "woman" back into play as a contested operator for civic or moral rights, and b) reveals how this name overlaps and jostles with other names that this subject can claim as their own (each with its own entitlements, burdens, or privileges).⁷⁶ Or, in contemporary terms, the point could be illustrated through a recurring trope of prison activism in the contemporary United States. Where the carceral state is often defined by the sheer number of bodies confined by the state at any given time, it has likewise unleashed a set of correlative penalties, abridging the rights of incarcerated

persons long after their release from prison. Accordingly, much prison activism stakes itself upon this categorial tension in the social imagination, between the criminal and the citizen. As one prisoner, facing disenfranchisement penalties upon his release, details, "I will pay taxes but I won't be able to vote. . . . It lets me know that I'm not truly a citizen . . . I will have no say in the political process or the direction of the nation."⁷⁷ Here, the appeal to citizenship plays upon the tensions surrounding this term within the history of the United States: the full contributor who pays their share as set against the one with the right to participate in collective decision making.⁷⁸ By invoking this name, the prisoner invokes the torsion of citizenship as simultaneously a term of empowerment and dispossession—and thus to highlight the civic violence within the regime of mass incarceration.

At bottom, then, Rancière's concern for the "excess" of words challenges the thinness of deliberative efforts to delimit and rationalize the appropriate bounds of political language. The history of emancipatory politics reveals that speech is not only a resource to arrive at mutual understanding, justification through public reasons, or "the simple rationality of a dialogue of interests."⁷⁹ Instead, radical actors seize, problematize, and reoccupy the linguistic markers of political identity in order to destabilize the familiar moorings of civic life. It is for this reason that Rancière highlights the name as something more than a possibility for nomination or classification; rather, it is a site of political *litigation*. As he puts this point, "political names are litigious names, whose extension and comprehension are uncertain, and which for that reason open up the space of a test or verification. Political subjects build such cases of verification. They put the power of political names—that is, their extension and comprehension—to the test. Not only do they bring the inscription of rights to bear against situations in which those rights are denied but they construct the world in which those rights are valid, together with the world in which they are not."⁸⁰ Accordingly, this vision of discourse is more robust than a medium to convey interests or negotiate values. Rather, it is a site to destabilize the assigned order of identities, along with the rights and entitlements that follow. When such agents assume an equality beyond their assigned categories (and the normative expectations that follow), they become something that is not prepared by the present coordinates for social legibility. And in contesting or claiming these names, such actors ultimately gain new purchase on the space of citizenship.

5.

To bring the foregoing to a head, there is much that Habermas and Rancière share as they develop a politics of speech. Both pin their normative visions upon a broadened economy of discourse, incorporating new speakers and new objects for scrutiny. And each targets the reduction of political discourse as a fundamental obstacle to the possibility of democratic life. And yet, perhaps the clearest way to preserve their tension is through the dimension of language that each considers central to politics. Habermas

stresses a non-instrumental form of communication toward understanding between recognized speakers—a stance that reflects what he takes to be one of the central normative tasks of late modernity: to arrive at resources for rational justification, even under conditions of value pluralism, market expansion, and social division. Rancière, on the other hand, stresses a different question, founded within the impetus of democratic life: how to secure a more equal access to speech when this status is diminished or blocked by social economies of power.

As detailed above, there are substantive outcomes to shifting the question in this manner. In “litigating” civic languages, radical agents become something more than objects of social discourse; instead, they disturb categories of civic perception (for people, spaces, and things), along with the normative status such classifications carry. These possibilities for agency rest upon a deeper thesis regarding the “excess” of words—more specifically, their resources beyond the hegemonic renderings of classifications, values, and names.⁸¹ What this means is that a politics of equality has historically drawn from linguistic resources and performances that are routinely neglected from a deliberative perspective. Speech is not reducible to a medium for clarifying commitments, presenting claims, posing questions, conveying information, or presenting orders—all of which reflect what Rancière terms “the fairy tale which clothes the debating of common interests in the garb of philosophical dialogue.”⁸² Rather, civic languages possess tensions and ambiguities that are exploited in order to destabilize the perceptual regime of civic life along with its possibilities for belonging and participation.

From this point, it is tempting to conclude that Rancière simply roots politics within those aesthetic practices that “disrupt” language in order to enact new possibilities of thought and experience—a reading that would only seem to be confirmed by his insistence upon a foundational link between politics and aesthetics.⁸³ If the argument were reducible to these terms, it could easily be domesticated through Habermas’ typical rejoinder: such an “aestheticist” move would ultimately level the distinctions between discursive modes (each with its own governing logic and conditions for validity) and thus bury the specificities of political discourse.⁸⁴ This rendering, however, would miss both the contours and the stakes of the dispute. To link political agency to these generative elements of language is not to absorb multiple discursive forms (or the search for rational consensus) into “the world-disclosing force of innovative linguistic expression.”⁸⁵ Instead, the rejoinder is more accurately approached as an imminent critique of the deliberative project: these irruptive entries into the space of communication are necessary for the very aims that the deliberative ideal avows.⁸⁶ The model of uncoerced exchange between free and equal speaking subjects is not embedded within the ostensible necessities of language, communication, or rationality. Nor can it be folded into the acts of recognition performed by individual communicants, regardless of the symbolic economy that structures the space of their encounter. Instead,

“the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” can be gained only through political efforts to reconfigure the civic field.⁸⁷ And one of the core axes for doing so is through the repurposing and reinvestment of civic languages.

Ultimately, then, there are much wider implications to this dispute over the production and exchange of civic speech. For Rancière, it is not simply that Habermas misses the intractable dynamics of dispossession at work in the communicative scene. In a normatively richer sense, his challenge targets the deliberative approach as inadequate to deliver on the democratic values it persistently invokes. If consensual adjudication reflects a core element of democratic legitimacy, what is too often left unasked by the deliberative approach is the *political* question that animates the democratic tradition—how dynamics of power, hierarchy, and dispossession are (or can be) contested in order to secure a greater equality of speech. And this critical rejoinder can be put in positive terms. If a democratic regime of speech is to be possible, it is not based within the transcendental structures of communication or the exchange of reasons on the part of recognized speakers. Rather, a practice of equality is rooted in the capacity of agents to *use* the ambiguities and slippages of civic languages to make themselves count within economies of speech, even when they possess no “title” to do so.⁸⁸

1 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 2-5.

2 For an early articulation of these anxieties, see Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 62-80.

3 See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95-121; also Jacques Rancière, *Chronicles of Consensual Times* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

4 This critique is detailed in Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 366-399. See also *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 106-130. For a helpful overview of this argument, see Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norms, and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Axel Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social*, ed. Charles Wright (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 92-120.

5 See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 294-326.

6 As Habermas puts this point, “I would like to insist that . . . communicative reason is directly implicated in social life-processes insofar as acts of mutual understanding take on the role of a mechanism for coordinating action.” *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 316.

7 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 309-315. For a helpful discussion of this point, see Matheson Russell and Andrew Montin, “The Rationality of Political Agreement: Rancière’s Critique of Habermas,” *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 543-554.

8 For this Hegelian theme in Habermas, see Kenneth Baynes, “Freedom and Recognition in Hegel and Habermas,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 28, no. 1 (2002): 1-17.

9 See, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 89. A helpful gloss of this argument appears in Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 13-21.

10 In a symptomatic formulation, Habermas proposes, “communicative rationality recalls older ideas of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their at first subjectively biased views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement.” *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 315.

11 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 308. Or, elsewhere, Habermas proposes that “the problems to be resolved in moral argumentation cannot be handled monologically but require a cooperative effort. By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted” (*Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 67). This theme of solidarity is well treated by Max Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity: Discourse Theory in Ethics and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

12 This point is well treated by Jay Bernstein in *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 51-54. For an excellent discussion of this dialectical relation of immanence/transcendence, see Maeve Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 37-72.

13 Perhaps the most prominent is Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 18-43.

14 From a historical perspective, many have argued that Habermas fails to grasp the dynamics of exclusion by which the public sphere was historically forged. On this point, see Craig Calhoun, “The Public Sphere in the Field of Power,” *Social Science History* 34, no. 3 (2010): 301-335. For the canonical rejoinder, see Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, and Assenka Oksillof (New York: Verso Press, 2016). And more agonistically minded theorists persistently argue that this push toward consensus eviscerates politics of dissenting voices. See, for instance, Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000), 80-107; Iris Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 120-135.

15 Jacques Rancière, “The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics,” in *Reading Rancière*, eds. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (New York: Continuum, 2011), 2.

16 This point is best read in light of Rancière’s engagement with Aristotle. See *Disagreement*, 1-10.

17 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 22.

18 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 21-27. For a helpful account, see Davide Panagia, “*Partage du Sensible*: The Distribution of the Sensible,” in *Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts*, ed. Jean-Phillipe Deranty (Durham: Acumen Press, 2010), 95-103.

19 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 22.

20 Pierre Bourdieu offers a similar challenge to those linguistic schools that inadequately theorize the *practice* of speech as forged by social considerations of class and training: “the linguist proceeds as if the *capacity to speak*, which is virtually universal, could be identified with *the socially conditioned way of realizing this natural capacity*, which presents as many variants as there are social conditions of acquisition. The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produced sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak.” See *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 54-55.

21 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 22.

22 As Rancière reformulates the classic, Aristotelian formulation: “The supremely political destiny of man is attested by a *sign*: the possession of the logos, that is, of speech, which *expresses*, while the voice simply *indicates*.” *Disagreement*, 2.

23 I have treated this feature of their dispute toward different aim in Michael Feola, “Speaking Subjects and Democratic Space: Rancière and the Politics of Speech,” *Polity* 46, no. 4 (2014): 498-519. See also Michael Feola, *The Powers of Sensibility: Aesthetic Politics through Adorno, Foucault, and Rancière* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 78-80. Although she does not negotiate this point through Rancière, similar conclusions are reached by Iris Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 2.

24 Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 66.

25 This is, of course, not to say that Habermas is an orthodox Kantian—as he persistently criticizes Kant for the monological quality of the categorical imperative. See, for instance, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 66-70. For a helpful discussion of this dialogical universalism, see Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*, trans. David Midgley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), ch. 4. This contested theme of universality is likewise treated by Russell and Montin, “The Rationality of Political Disagreement,” 550.

26 As Herbert Marcuse puts this point: “However ‘man,’ ‘nature,’ ‘justice,’ ‘beauty’ or ‘freedom’ may be defined, they synthesize experiential contents into ideas which transcend their particular realizations as something that is to be surpassed, overcome. Thus the concept of beauty comprehends all the beauty not *yet* realized; the concept of freedom all the liberty not *yet* attained.” *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 214. See also Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 43-87.

27 Judith Butler expresses this Hegelian commitment as follows, “to claim that the universal has not yet been articulated is to insist that the ‘not yet’ is proper to an understanding of the universal itself: that which remains ‘unrealized’ by the universal constitutes it essentially.” *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Verso Press, 2000), 39.

28 Jacques Rancière and Axel Honneth, *Recognition or Disagreement: A Critical Encounter on the Politics of Freedom, Equality, and Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 94. See also Rancière, *Disagreement*, 43-56.

29 On this theme of the “police,” see Rancière, *Disagreement*, 28-33. See also Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 40-53.

30 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 50. Emphasis added. Or, as he elaborates elsewhere, “In any social discussion in which there is actually something to discuss . . . The subjects of the discussion are themselves in dispute and must in the first instance be tested. Before any confrontation of interests and values, before any assertions are submitted to demands for validation between established partners, there is . . . the dispute over the existence of the dispute and the parties confronting each other in it” (*Disagreement*, 55).

31 Where these concerns were first articulated in terms of the turn to social or economic “experts,” Habermas has recently returned to this argument vis-à-vis the possibilities of the European Union. See, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, *The Lure of Technocracy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015). For concerns over the structural features that deforms the rational potential of communication, see Jürgen Habermas, “On Systematically Distorted Communication,” *Inquiry* 13 (1970): 205-218.

32 See Habermas, *Facts and Norms*, particularly ch. 8.

33 The canonical articulation of this rejoinder appears in Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

34 For instance, Habermas proposes “in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the universalist discourses of the bourgeois public sphere could no longer immunize themselves against a critique from within. The labor movement and feminism, for example, were able to join these discourses in order to shatter the structures that had initially constituted them as ‘the other’ of a bourgeois public sphere” (*Between Facts and Norms*, 374).

35 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum Press, 2010), 32.

36 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30.

37 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 35.

38 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 11. As Andrew Schaap expresses the point, “politics paradigmatically entails the enactment of equality in a situation of inequality. The political is constituted when those who are not qualified to participate in politics presume to act and speak as if they are.” This passage appears in Andrew Schaap, “Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière’s Critique of Hannah Arendt,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 1 (2011): 35.

39 This point is central to Todd May's reading of Rancière's politics. See *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière*, 47-48. The depoliticizing tendencies of the distributive approach are likewise flagged by Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 15-38.

40 Rancière expresses the point as follows: "The egalitarian presupposition, the communal invention of discourse, requires an initial breakthrough which introduces in to the community of speaking beings some who were not hitherto of its number. This breakthrough induces a different economy of the presupposition of equality. The effectiveness of the community of speaking beings is predicted on a violence which antedates it. The essence of this inaugurating violence, which has nothing to do with counting dead and wounded, is to make the invisible visible, to give a name to the anonymous and to make words audible where only noise was perceptible before." See *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), 85.

41 This "as if" character of political agency is central to Ayten Gündoğdu's reading in "Disagreeing with Rancière: Speech, Violence, and the Ambiguous Subjects of Politics," *Polity* 49, no. 2 (2017): 188-219.

42 Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 85.

43 This account of subjectification builds upon my earlier engagement in Feola, *Powers of Sensibility*, 83-84; Feola, "Speaking Subjects": 511-513. For a helpful account of the argument, see also Tina Chanter, *Art, Politics, and Rancière: Broken Perceptions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), ch 3.

44 On the theme of 'policing', see Rancière, *Disagreement*, 29-30; Rancière, "Ten Theses," 36-37. For an excellent discussion of policing (and its complex relationship to politics), see Samuel Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 2.

45 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 6.

46 As Rancière famously proposes, "quite simply, parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong." *Disagreement*, 39. It is for this reason that Jean-Philippe Deranty terms Rancière's argument an 'antiontological' politics: "The subjects that engage in the political fight as defined above do not do so on account of their identity. They do so on account of their being in between two or more identities... This explains why the political subject can, or even must, claim an identity it does not have as an ontological subject." See Deranty, "Jacques Rancière's Contribution to the Ethics of Recognition," *Political Theory*, 31.1 (2003): 146.

47 Benjamin Ardit "Fidelity to Disagreement: Jacques Rancière's Politics Without Ontology," in *Distributions of the Sensible: Rancière, between Politics and*

Aesthetics, eds. Scott Durham and Dilip Gaonkar (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 54

48 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37.

49 See Holloway Sparks “Quarreling with Rancière: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Democratic Disruption,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 49, no. 4 (2016): 420-437.

50 On this point, see Peter Hallward, “Staging Equality: Rancière’s Theatocracy and the Limits of Anarchic Equality,” in *Jacques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, eds. Gabriel Rockhill and Philip Watts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 140-157; Lois McNay *The Misguided Search for the Political* (Malden: Polity Press, 2014); Ella Myers, “Presupposing Equality: The Problem with Rancière’s Axiomatic Approach,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42, no. 1 (2016): 45-69.

51 See, for instance, Jason Frank, “Jacques Rancière’s Politics of the Ordinary,” in *Distributions of the Sensible*, 27-52; Kevin Inston, “Inscribing the Egalitarian Event: Jacques Rancière and the Politics of Iterability,” *Constellations*, vol 24.1 (2017): 15-26. The Rancière quote appears in “The Thinking of Dissensus,” 5.

52 Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 306.

53 This is not to say that all deliberative theorists bracket these dynamics of power or do so to the same degree. For a deliberative vision that takes these problems seriously, see James Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity, and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), ch. 3.

54 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 37

55 Rancière, “Dissenting Words,” 115.

56 Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 24.

57 Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 38. For an illuminating discussion of Rancière’s “literarity,” see Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 112-117.

58 As Rancière argues, “the political aspect of these categories always consists in re-qualifying these spaces, in getting them to be seen as the places of a community; it involves these categories making themselves seen or heard as speaking subjects (if only in the form of litigation)—in short, as participants in a common *aesthesis*.” “Ten Theses,” 38.

59 Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 38

60 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.

61 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 38.

62 An illuminating discussion of Blanqui and Rancière is provided by Karen Zivi, “Politics is Hard Work: Performativity and the Preconditions of Intelligibility,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 49, no. 4 (2016): 442-448.

63 For some other helpful readings of the generative work of the “we,” see Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), ch. 5; Jodi Dean, “Claiming Division, Naming a Wrong,” *Theory & Event* 14, no. 4 (2011). For a reading that connects these themes more specifically to the case of Rancière, see Sam Chambers’s reflections on the iconic “We’re here; we’re queer” chant in “A Queer Politics of the Democratic Miscount,” *Borderlands* 8, no. 2 (2009).

64 Rancière, *Recognition or Disagreement*, 92-93 (emphasis added).

65 Such a “weightlessness” is at the heart of Lois McNay’s critique of Rancière, as symptomatic of tendencies in radical democratic thought. See *The Misguided Search for the Political*. For a helpful treatment of what Rancière might learn from political models of performativity, see Zivi, “Politics is Hard Work.”

66 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 36.

67 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 68.

68 For a helpful account of Rancière, the subject, and political names, see Joseph Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 64-68.

69 Rancière, “Ten Theses,” 30. This theme of “ordering” (or, rather, the constraints of power that delimit who may, and may not, participate in the ordering of social life) is central to Todd May’s reading of Rancière. See *Creating Equality*, ch. 2.

70 As Rancière puts this point: “Disagreement invents names, utterances, arguments, and demonstrations that set up new collectives where anyone can get themselves counted in the count of the uncounted.” This passage appears in Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, trans. Julie Rose (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 41.

71 This appeal to “the human” has been treated in specifically Rancierian terms by Moya Lloyd in “Naming the Dead and the Politics of the ‘Human,’” *Review of International Studies* 43 (2016): 273-277. Such a politics is, however, tempered by Rancière’s reservations toward the depoliticizing tendencies of the humanitarian political imaginary. See Rancière, *Disagreement*, 124-127.

72 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 125.

73 As Sam Chambers renders the argument, such cases represent “an individual or group actively laying claim to fundamental democratic equality by taking up a particular name themselves” (*The Lessons of Rancière*, 117).

74 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 56.

75 See Rancière, *Dissensus*, 56-57, 68-69.

76 As Rancière persistently claims, political subjects are found in the “interval” between identities and names. For an extended treatment of the overlapping, contested meanings surrounding the name of “woman”, see Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of Women in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

77 This quote is from Ed Pilkington, “US Inmates Mark End of Prison Strike with Push to Regain Voting Rights,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/09/us-prison-strike-latest-demands-voting-rights>.

78 On these competing strands, see Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

79 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 47.

80 Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man,” in *Dissensus*, 69.

81 As Rancière expresses this work of language, “politics acts on the police. It acts in the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status of those words.” *Disagreement*, 33.

82 Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, 102.

83 In a well-known passage, Rancière proposes “There never has been any ‘aestheticization’ of politics in the modern age because politics is aesthetic in principle.” *Disagreement*, 58.

84 In this connection, see Habermas’s critique of Derrida in Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 205-210.

85 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 201.

86 Indeed, Rancière explicitly rejects the presumption that “the poetic” is opposed to “the argumentative” practice of language, such that one could be promoted over the other. As he expresses this point: “Political invention operates in acts that are at once argumentative and poetic. . . . This is why the ‘poetic’ is not opposed here to argument. It is also why the creation of litigious, aesthetic worlds is not the mere invention of languages appropriate to reformulating problems that cannot be dealt with in existing languages” (*Disagreement*, 59).

87 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 30. I have previously hinted at this conclusion in Feola, “Speaking Subjects and Democratic Space.”

88 This equality without “title” is central to Rancière’s account of democracy (i.e., the “democratic scandal”) in Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (New York: Verso, 2006). See also Rancière, *Dissensus*, 30-35.