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## A Queer Politics of the Democratic Miscount

**Samuel A. Chambers**

Johns Hopkins University

*This paper uses Jacques Rancière's thinking of politics – particularly his distinction between la police and la politique — in order to insist upon the difference between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identity politics, on the one hand, and a queer politics of relationality, on the other. I argue that Rancière's conception of the democratic 'miscount' can be understood as a queering of democracy precisely because Rancière's refusal to reduce le compte des incomptés to the marginalized or excluded produces a queer politics. The essay opens with a reading of the well-known Queer Nation chant, links this to Rancière's understanding of the wrong, and then combines both with a discussion of the parallels between Judith Butler's understanding of unintelligibility and Rancière's conception of the democratic miscount. I therefore conclude that Rancière's democratic miscount is a queer form of counting and a queer form of politics.*

I called it the count of the uncounted, the part of those who have no part. *It was sometimes misunderstood as the part of the excluded.* Rancière, 'Misadventures of Critical Thinking' (2008: 15, emphasis added)

Is it possible to be 'old-fashioned' when it comes to queer theory and queer politics? This seems an odd question to ask of two entities whose history is still less than two decades long, but I pose it at the start of this essay because I fear that my arguments here might be critically construed as insisting on a set of positions, relations, and analytical distinctions that many feel have already been 'surpassed.' Of course, queer has been surpassing itself from the beginning: in an early essay within what we now might call the 'history' of queer theory – an essay that paradoxically helped to instantiate 'queer theory' as a term and concept – Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner suggested that queer was a fad that had already run its course (Berlant and Warner, 1995). Today, of course, queer is not just 'hot' (as Berlant

and Warner described it so many years ago) in certain segments of academic and activist communities; queer is now completely mainstream. It shows up not only in the titles of television programmes, but also in just about every place imaginable within academia. Indeed, just because 'queer' appears in the title of an academic paper, one should not necessarily expect to hear anything about queer theory à la Sedgwick, Warner, or Butler; nor should one expect a discussion of queer politics or activism.

Now it is becoming clearer why I may sound old-fashioned. So let me go ahead and lay my cards on the table. In this essay I wish to do more than maintain, I wish to insist upon a distinction between lesbian and gay identities, on the one hand, and a queer relation to norms, on the other. Noreen Giffney makes the point powerfully by putting it so succinctly: 'lesbian and gay studies does not equal queer theory' (Giffney, 2004: 73). Today, however, in addition to a continuing tendency to falsely equate lesbian and gay with queer, we find a new trend to *include* queer within LGBT identity, i.e. to literally add it on. I reject as a rather monstrous construction this new trend of using LGBTQ (not to mention LGBTQQ) as a catch-all to describe the identity of any and every individual who somehow is not now, or someday will not be, heterosexual.[1] This means, most significantly, that I depart fundamentally from the idea that, over recent years, seems to have grown popular in implicit and subtle ways. This is the notion that 'queer' is a term of inclusivity – that what queer designates is an overcoming of everything that might divide lesbian women, gay men, transgender and transsexual individuals, bisexual men and women, and all of those who are unsure about their sexual orientation. Queer has become the 'etc.' that used to appear in feminist analysis when authors – often still working within a second-wave epistemological frame committed to and presupposing a certain universality of women's experience – wanted to avoid leaving anyone out.[2] I contend, however, that queer does not and should not name an attempt to include anyone and everyone.

I use 'queer' here in a way that I think is consistent with the argument of those thinkers in the early 1990s who now often serve as the 'canon' for queer theory (we could add de Lauretis, Halperin, and others to the list started above). In doing so, I am not merely rejecting the idea that queer designates a politics of inclusiveness. Much more than this, I wish to argue that queer politics is a politics that both identifies and remains committed to *the impossibility of inclusivity*. To put it in overly stark terms: LGBT politics is a politics of inclusiveness of diverse categories of gender and sexuality[3]; queer politics is a challenge and resistance to dominant and debilitating norms of gender and sexuality. *This does not mean that the aims and goals of LGBT politics do not often intersect, overlap, and remain intermeshed with those of queer politics.* It does mean, however, that we cannot collapse queer theory and politics into the frame of LGBT politics and identity-based liberal political theory. It means that the acronym LGBTQ must be refused, not arbitrarily or pedantically, but precisely because it serves to enervate queer theory and activism.

To make the case for this particular approach to queer theory and politics, I attempt in this paper to map some queer dimensions in the thought of a writer who certainly has no place now, nor even in the future, in that queer theory canon. To trace this queer conjunction, I bring together the seemingly unrelated resources of a Queer Nation political chant, on the one hand, and Jacques Rancière's conception of democratic political speech, on the other. Andrew Parker (2007) has already spotted, but not elaborated on, this connection. While I call the weaving together of Rancière's logic of politics with the Queer Nation political chant a 'queer conjunction,' Parker calls it 'ironic' – given Rancière's own too-easy dismissal of sexual politics – 'that one of the best approximations of what Rancière defines as "properly" political is the emergent Anglo-American model of queer politics' (Parker, 2007: 75). Parker goes on to conclude his short essay with two provocative claims: first, that queer politics is 'anti-identitarian, anti-statist, [and] anti-normative' to the extent that it resists the language and logic of LGBT politics, and second, that to understand "'We're here, we're queer, get used to it" [as] something other than a claim on behalf of an identity' queer theorists ought to turn to Rancière as a resource for such thinking.

By way of a much fuller explication of the logic of the chant (mapped onto a reading of Rancière's work) and in an effort to thwart the move toward inclusiveness, this essay implicitly argues for the limits of any politics of representation or inclusion; thus, it articulates the *limits of representation* itself. The idea of that which cannot be included or represented proves to be a slippery one; every attempt to name it seems to make it representable and therefore to exceed or transcend the very limits being argued for. The danger of performative contradiction emerges at every turn. For this reason, the names vary: Davide Panagia (2006) calls it 'a politics of unrepresentability' and I sometimes refer to it as a politics of unrecognisability or a politics of inaudibility.[4]

Primarily, however, I develop this idea through the resources provided by Rancière and queer theory – analysing, in particular, some dimensions of Judith Butler's thought. I focus most closely on Rancière's understanding of democracy as the fundamental miscount of politics, complemented by Butler's concept of unintelligibility. Taken on their own, I would suggest, each conception is easily misunderstood. Just as queer resistance can be subsumed by lesbian and gay identity politics, so Butler's notion of unintelligibility is quickly reduced to a call for liberal inclusion. And like much of queer theory, Rancière's conception of democracy is hastily dismissed as out of touch or simply too abstract. In this essay, to the contrary, I demonstrate that each conception can productively illuminate the other. Thinking these terms together, and thereby bringing to the surface the queer intersection that I mentioned above, not only produces a trenchant critique of interest-group liberal pluralism but also articulates a powerful vision of a queer politics – a politics irreducible to either identity-politics or the call for inclusiveness.

## I. Queer Relationality, Queer Resistance

*We're here!*

*We're queer!*

*Get used to it.*[5]

How do we read this slogan and chant, popularised first by Queer Nation and used widely throughout the 1990s during marches, protests, demonstrations, and other events? How can we *hear* the words and what might they tell us about so-called 'queer theory' today? Could the best-known slogan of queer activism actually offer some genuine insight into the possibilities for queer theory and politics? It would be easy enough to dismiss any such suggestion.[6] The logic is simple enough: rallies and marches need slogans and chants, and Queer Nation came up with a catchy one – easy to remember, easy to yell, and offering a nice combination of political force and humour. But, this logic continues, there is no need to go much beyond this analysis, since the Queer Nation chant resonates closely with the most popular protest chant of them all – the one that takes the formula, 'What do we want? \_\_\_\_! When do we want it? \_\_\_\_!' The first blank can be filled by all sorts of demands: peace, equality, freedom, equal-pay, shorter hours, health care, etc. The second blank, almost invariably, is filled by the word 'now,' which serves to intensify and add urgency to the demand.[7] Completing the logic, then, is also easy: just as women and blacks demanded their rights, so gays and lesbians demand theirs.

There is a seductive simplicity to this analysis, but, I will argue, it does not do justice to the chant. While the logic that links the Queer Nation chant to 'What do we want?' proves compelling, it proceeds only on the basis of an almost complete disregard for the content of the chant. For, if we look closely at the Queer Nation chant we must notice the stark difference between the two. Most importantly, *we find no demand here*. There is nothing that these queers 'want' and thus no timeline for their wanting it. There are no specific claims whatsoever being made in this chant. This is not, in short, a claim for inclusion (Jagose, 1997: 112).

The chant does identify some hard-to-describe subject – 'we're queer.' And it gives it a geo-temporal location – 'we're here,' where 'here' denotes both the geographical and political space (at this march, on these streets, in this polity) and also echoes the temporal 'now' of earlier protest chants. But the last line does not fit the script. Rather than, 'we're here; we're queer; give us our rights,' rather than 'we're here; we're queer; we demand equality,' we find nothing at all *claimed* by this 'queer' subject, and nothing at all *demand*ed from the other. *Get used to it.*[8]

I think that we can creatively and productively read the Queer Nation slogan as tapping into a number of the most crucial elements of the conceptualisation of 'queer' as it emerged in the literature of the early 1990s. At the time, the importance of queer pivoted on the difference between it and a fixed, given (gay) identity. I place gay in parentheses here because one of the texts that played a crucial role in establishing 'queer theory' was Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, a work that did not address itself directly to a lesbian and gay audience or subject, and that made no explicit effort to reconsider sexual identity. Moreover, Butler's work, like the similarly-influential books by Sedgwick and Halperin – all of which were published in the same year, 1990 – made no use of the term queer.

Butler wrote as a feminist, but she did so in order to challenge the heterosexist assumptions built into second-wave feminism's commitment to the universal(isable) 'experience' of women. And her argument proceeded by way of a deconstruction of the sex/gender distinction. To be clear, a 'deconstruction' does not level or erase the distinction; it is not a *destruction* that would tear down what has been built. Rather, the deconstruction *shows how* the construction works. It reveals *that* there is construction going on in the first place. In the case of sex/gender, this means exploring the mechanism through which the distinction is produced and maintained. Thus, it was not that Butler wished to return to that 'pre-feminist' time in which there was no difference between sex and gender (this is what a literal destruction or erasure of the sex/gender distinction would accomplish). Rather, she sought to challenge the idea that the difference between sex and gender mapped on to a difference between nature and culture. Butler countered - and she did so with great rhetorical force - the typical narrative (it remained typical even if it often stayed in the background, implicit). This narrative tacitly attributed to sex the capacity to serve as a natural foundation from which (multiple) contingent gender would then develop - a development carried out through politics, through culture, and through historical variation. Butler's most powerful set of rhetorical questions (as any reader of Butler knows, she *loves* rhetorical questions) took this form: how do we get at this idea of natural sex? Do we have any access to 'sex itself,' or does 'sex' only emerge within and through the discourses of gender? Thus, must we say not just that gender is socially constructed, but that the very distinction between sex and gender is itself constructed?

Perhaps these questions beg one more: what does this have to do with queer? But this last question is not rhetorical: its answer lies in the *content* of Butler's deconstruction of sex/gender. The distinction between sex and gender is constructed, and the binary of gender difference is maintained, through a series of regulatory norms and mechanisms that Butler names 'the heterosexual matrix,' and which today we might refer to as *heteronormativity*.<sup>[9]</sup> Binary gender only gets produced in the way that it does because of a primary presumption of heterosexual desire that lies at the centre of the matrix. And heteronormativity is just another name for heterosexuality

when it functions as a normative and normalising force (O'Rourke, 2005).

Moreover, the problem of heteronormativity remains irreducible to the problem of homophobia. Putting the psychological problems of homophobia to one side, the political problems of homophobia can be dealt with just fine using a combination of identity-theory and liberal political theory. A theory of lesbian and gay identity would serve to locate and specify that 'minority group,' i.e. lesbians and gay men, that would be subject to the threat of homophobia. Liberalism would offer a theory of minority rights and equality before the law designed to avert or lessen acts of discrimination or violence against such a minority group. *But none of this would necessarily challenge or offer resistance to heteronormativity.* Moreover, the effects of heteronormativity cannot be reduced to the idea of a homophobic discrimination against lesbians and gays. The entire liberal approach starts with the idea that there is a given and known subject of discrimination or oppression.

But, I want to argue that it is precisely this assumption that a queer approach does, and must, challenge. And the recent writings of Rancière and Butler converge in their insistent thwarting of this liberal assumption and in their effort to theorise the remainder (that which can never be recuperated by interest groups) of the liberal, identity-based approach.[10] At this point in the analysis, however, the relevance of Butler's famous early work on sex/gender becomes clear, since she shows most powerfully in *Gender Trouble* that the category of woman cannot be presumed in advance. Therefore a feminist theory cannot stubbornly insist that politics only comes after the subject. If the category of woman – and even the 'experience' of woman – only emerges within the terms of politics, then feminism must concern itself with the production of that category.

Queer theory, I would insist, surely cannot be reduced to a mere analogy to feminism. Yet there can be no doubt that the third-wave feminist critique of second-wave feminism parallels and illuminates the queer critique of lesbian and gay identity politics. Whereas lesbian and gay (and also, in their own way, transgender and bisexual) both name identities based upon sexual orientation, queer points to no such fixed position. Lesbian and gay are identities; queer is a relationality. That is, queer describes a particular, relative, position in relation to norms of sexuality. There is therefore nothing fixed, nothing permanent about queerness; it is always context-dependent (although heteronormativity almost always makes up a significant part of the context in contemporary cases).

On my reading, no one has stated this point more clearly yet forcefully than David Halperin. While Halperin's formulation is almost 15 years old, it now seems more urgent to recall it and consider it with all seriousness, rather than move beyond it.[11] And it seems worth noting the context of Halperin's definition of queer: it emerges most

strikingly not in his work on historiography or in his exploration of ancient Greek erotic practices, but rather in his explicitly political exegesis of Foucault's work. In articulating the 'queer politics' of Foucault, Halperin argued for a thinking of queer in the following terms:

Unlike gay identity, which, though deliberately proclaimed in an act of affirmation, is nonetheless rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality. As the very word implies, 'queer' does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer', then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or feels marginalized because of his or her sexual practices. (Halperin, 1995: 62, emphasis in original)[12]

Working from this quote we can see that the question of queerness will depend upon the force of heteronormativity. Given the power and dominance of heterosexuality as a norm in contemporary European and North American societies, it seems safe to say that most lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people find themselves in a *queer* position relative to the norm. But to see that many gay people are queer in this way is not to eliminate the difference between gay identity, on the one hand, and queer relationality, on the other. Let me enumerate just a few of the most important potential distinctions:

1. Even if being gay makes one queer, this does not reduce the dramatic difference between *identifying* oneself based upon the fixed, essential identity of gayness or *identifying* oneself with the non-essential positionality of queerness instead. Thus there remains a significant political difference between gay and queer precisely as a matter of political articulation, and even when a gay individual asserts or accepts his or her queerness (or vice versa).
2. Some who are gay, may wish to deny their queerness. They may wish to reject the entire queer project precisely because what they seek is normalness itself – to insist on the non-marginal (hence non-deviant) nature of their sexual identity. Here the debate between Andrew Sullivan and Michael Warner proves powerfully illustrative, since what Sullivan (a self-identified gay man) wants is a normalised gayness that eliminates queerness, while Warner (a self-identified queer) rejects normality and refuses fixed gay identity in favour of a radically politicised queerness.

3. There are many who are queer, but not necessarily gay. Halperin lists married couples without children or married couples '*with naughty children*' (Halperin, 1995: 62, Halperin's emphasis). But the list can obviously be extended to non-married couples (who are queer at least to the extent that they refuse the telos of marriage that is operative within heteronormativity). And Warner extends it to sex-workers, non-monogamists, and really to any sex that goes on outside the sanctity and politically-constructed 'privacy' of heterosexual, state-sanctioned (and perhaps religiously-sanctioned pro-creative) marriage.[13] There can be no doubt that those who fit into this positional category will often not be subject to radical political disenfranchisement and will not be exposed to physical violence in the way that many LGBT individuals are. We must therefore be vigilant in refusing to diminish the danger of gay-bashing and homophobia, and in struggling against efforts to deny lesbian and gay men their civil rights. Nevertheless, it should also be clear that queer positionality is not a 'badge of victimisation' to be claimed, and to insist upon both the importance of queerness and its difference from gayness, is – as should be obvious – *not* to equate the two nor to perversely 'privilege' (as in the ranking of victimisations) one over the other. It is simply to maintain that the power of heteronormativity serves to render *queer* a variety of sexual practices, performances, and behaviours, not all of which are reducible to gay identity. And finally, the *wrong* of heteronormativity cannot be subsumed by the *wrong* of homophobia – the latter simply cannot capture the effects of the former.

This elaboration of the difference between gay identity and queer relationality brings us back to the chant: 'we're here! we're queer! get used to it'. I argue that the slogan makes most sense as an expression of a queer resistance to the norm. While it has surely, and quite often effectively, been used as a device of LGBT politics, the slogan itself conveys a queer struggle with the norm. It does not assert an identity and demand recognition or rights. Instead, it articulates a positionality with respect to dominant norms, and it expresses a certain defiant resistance to those norms.

None of this should come as much of a surprise to those who know the history of Queer Nation, a group that emerged out of ACT-UP (the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power). ACT-UP still today describe themselves as 'a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals ... committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis' (ACT-UP NY website). Queer activism surely preceded queer theory, as the response to the AIDS crisis quickly demanded a 'coalition,' a 'diverse group' who would act in the face of the challenges that AIDS posed – challenges that affect a wide swath of the population far exceeding the communities of gay men who were most likely, especially early on in the epidemic, to be the direct victims of the syndrome.

Heteronormativity rendered the AIDS crisis invisible; ACT-UP therefore mobilised in reaction to the AIDS crisis, and this mobilisation required a resistance to heteronormativity (first and foremost, in the form of making the crisis visible).

But ACT-UP did not seek any form of inclusion into a form of interest-group politics.[14] Indeed, Warner would loudly insist that the choices, strategies and actions of national gay interest groups like the Human Rights Campaign have often been decidedly un-, if not anti-, queer (Warner, 1999). I want to stress here that the Queer Nation slogan, in continuing the politics of ACT-UP, cannot be reduced to a claim for equal inclusion. But this brings us back to the original question: how do we hear the chant? If it calls not for a liberal politics of demands for inclusion, then how can we elucidate the 'queer politics' that it evocatively suggests?

## II. From Demands to *Wrongs*

Rancière would be quick to point out that the question of *what* and *how* we hear – a certain question of visibility as audibility – is the original question of politics, at least according to Aristotle. Aristotle opens his discussion and founds his argument in the *Politics* with perhaps his most famous lines:

For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well ... but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from other animals. (Aristotle, 1996: 1253a)

On its face, and as traditionally read, this would seem to be an argument not about hearing, but about speaking. Aristotle says that we can distinguish *anthropos* (the human) from *zoon* (the animal), because the latter have only *phone* (mere voice), while the former are endowed with *logos* (reasoned speech). This looks on its surface like an ontological distinction, one which precedes politics; hence Aristotle completes his logic by showing that *anthropos* is precisely a political animal because his possession of the *logos* gives him the ability to deliberate and to judge – fundamentally political acts. And Aristotle even links this argument to a certain anthropology: we always find the *logos*-possessing *anthropos* living not just in a social group (a family or a village) but in the *polis*, a political community. Unlike the beasts or gods, from which he is fundamentally distinguished – and whom might be found in nature or the heavens – *anthropos* lives in the *polis*.

Rancière, however, contests the ontological argument by showing that the difference between *phone* and *logos* cannot be constituted pre-politically, and this, because the speaking animal must be heard. There is a politics of audibility that interrupts Aristotle's neat distinction

between man and animal, between ontology and politics. Rancière disrupts the tidy Aristotelian logic by identifying a 'practical difficulty':

how one can be sure that the human animal mouthing a noise in front of you is actually voicing an utterance rather than merely expressing a state of being? If there is someone you do not wish to recognize as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is an utterance coming out of their mouths. (2001: par. 21)

The question of speech and voice cannot be determined by a pre-political account. It can only be determined politically through the act of hearing, of recognition. This is a politics of (in)audibility ('those that one hears and those that one does not hear'); it is a politics of (in)visibility ('those that one sees and those that one does not see'), (Rancière, 1999: 22). *Logos* cannot be taken as that tool that makes politics possible, since it is precisely the *logos* that will provide a 'hearing' for any political articulation. Rancière puts it this way: 'the speech that causes politics to exist is the same that gauges the very gap between speech and the account of it' (Rancière, 1999: 26). Aristotle's *logos* is thus not a ground, but a paradox. And Rancière's politics, like a queer politics, proves to be both paradoxical and groundless.

To draw out the substantive links between Rancière's account and the project of queer theory and politics requires engaging and activating this paradox in Rancière's argument. Rancière's re-reading raises the question of where the 'account' will come from? How do we read, hear, or see a creature as human or animal? If we cannot make the political/non-political distinction prior to politics, then the difference will only emerge within politics. And for Rancière, this means that the political account only comes about through disagreement, through the staging of a conflict, through the declaration of a wrong. 'Parties do not exist prior to the conflict they name *and in which they are counted as parties*' (1999: 27, emphasis added). Only a political conflict can determine the parties to the conflict, but this means that there are no parties prior to the conflict.

Rancière does not resolve this paradox.[15] Rather, he repeatedly re-states and re-animates the paradox itself by demonstrating the ultimately contingent basis of politics: 'politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law regulates human society' (1999: 16). This oft-quoted passage from *Disagreement* is echoed in both earlier and later writings where Rancière explains, through a reading of Plato's *Laws*, the difference between democracy and all other political forms. In that canonised text, Plato lists seven different 'titles' to rule. Rancière focuses his reading on the seventh, final, and apparently 'extra' title: 'a title that is not a title, and that ... is nevertheless considered to be the most just.' It is the drawing of lots, the principle of randomness as the principle of rule (Rancière, 2006: 40). This final claim to rule has no basis in a *principle* at all. It is not an

*arkhe* (a principle of rule), but a *kratos* (a mere prevailing) (Rancière, 1995: 94). Rancière's argument here crosses with Butler's queer deconstruction of sex/gender, discussed above. Just as Butler refuses to allow the contingency of gender to be grounded in the solidity of sex, so Rancière resists the temptation to give politics any ontological grounding. At bottom, we find nothing but sheer contingency. Yet for both Rancière and Butler this is not a nihilistic conclusion, but one which demands responsible action since social orders – contingent though they may be – are also hierarchical, exclusionary, and often violent.

And Rancière also exposes the full force of such a paradoxical politics by insisting that politics is not the articulation of demands, not the claims of interest groups. Politics is not the announcement or claim of identities (LGBT, or any other) by pre-given parties. Politics is the declaration of wrongs, the staging of disagreements that serve to constitute the very parties of politics. This is why he can write, as he does in the quote above, and then later in the text, that 'parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong' (Rancière, 1999: 39). Logically, the declaration of the wrong must precede those parties who would declare it. The declaration comes before they exist. This is not mere double-speak. Rancière uses this paradoxical language in order to insist upon his deconstructive reading of Aristotle. We will only know if the chant we hear is the slogan of a political group, *if we hear that chant as a political articulation* and not as mere babbling. And the slogan itself, that which declares the wrong, will also constitute the party to the wrong. But the process cannot be guaranteed in advance, and Rancière's politics leaves ample room for the possibility of failure. This means that sometimes, perhaps often, a slogan or chant constitutes nothing more than mere noise (*phone*). Sometimes, however, a claim is heard as a political claim (as *logos*), and it thereby serves to articulate a wrong. When this occurs, at precisely this political moment, we have the miscount that, for Rancière, defines democratic politics. In the next and final section I will use Rancière's understanding of democracy as a miscount in order to argue not only for the specificity of queer theory, but also for queer politics as a democratic politics in Rancière's sense.

## II. The Queer Miscount

Rancière's approach resonates most strongly with queer theory on precisely the question of identity. If, as Rancière insists, the wrong is itself that which constitutes the party that would declare it – and if both the constitution of the party and the declaration of the wrong come about through the action of politics – then the politics involved here can never be based on identity. Identity, and with it interests, demands and claims, can never precede the political declaration of a wrong. Identity is therefore relational for Rancière, just as it is in queer theory. Whereas queer identity must always be grasped in relation to norms, Rancière thinks identity in relation to the political moment. And just as queer theory can easily accept and account for a lesbian and

gay identity as articulated on a model of fixed sexual orientation, so Rancière's understanding of the police makes space for a conception of social identity as given, fixed, and hierarchical. As is well-known and much discussed in the literature, Rancière calls this order in which identities, roles, and positions are distributed, a 'police order' (Rancière, 1999: 28; cf. Rancière, 2001: pars. 19–21). Rancière defines politics in contrast to all that the police order subsumes, and this includes legislation, policy-making, and all of interest-group competition and compromise. Politics is the interruption of the police order *through a declaration of a wrong*; politics occurs when a logic of domination is confronted by a logic of equality. And the presumption of equality that is demonstrated through political action amounts to a queering of the police order. The political moment, in Rancière, is a queer moment.

Rancière's radical and polemical rendering of the original Aristotelian political scene can thereby be used to throw into stark relief the distinction between a lesbian and gay identity politics, on the one hand, and a queer politics, on the other. As I have argued previously, a gay identity can be established through an expressive act – the declaration of coming out, literally saying, 'I am gay.' But a queer identity can only be articulated within the context of particular norms, particular sets of power relations – that is, within a specific political context.[16] Rancière's argument also highlights the difference between a (mis)reading of the Queer Nation chant as a set of demands by a given interest group, and an interpretation of this slogan as a queer political articulation – a declaration of wrong that brings into existence the queer party to politics. The Queer Nation chant must be seen as the articulation of political voice *by the voiceless* – a declaration of a wrong that brings about a party that does not exist beforehand. The slogan must therefore be heard as a resistance to heteronormativity, given that heteronormativity would, on first reading, render queerness invisible or impossible. 'We're here! We're queer!' makes the invisible or impossible queers, visible. But it does not bring out the visibility of this new human animal with *logos* merely to have that animal articulate a demand; rather, it insists on a certain distance from the norm – get used to it – and thereby refuses to be absorbed within the terms of that norm.[17]

Of course, one could plausibly argue that 'getting used to it' names precisely a process of normalisation, wherein that which was once 'at odds with the normal' becomes less so precisely because we are 'used to it'. But I would insist that, when chanted on the streets, the illocutionary force of the phrase resists this process of normalisation. 'Get used to it' is not a call for *recognition as normal*, but rather an insistence that *deviation from the normal will persist*. After all, what 'we,' as those who hear the chant, are supposed to 'get used to' is precisely the fact that 'they' are *queer* – not that they are like us but that they never will be. What 'we,' who yell 'get used to it,' are announcing is our deviance from the normal, our distance from 'them,' who hear the chant and who are thought to occupy a place closer to the median point on the normal curve. If queer is that which resists

normativity,[18] then getting used to it must mean not normalisation but a persistence of queerness.

There is therefore something about the Queer Nation chant that does not add up. It introduces a new term into the equation, but without balancing out the equation; indeed, it establishes the new variable precisely so as to throw the equation out of balance. For Rancière, such ‘fuzzy math’ is the very stuff of democracy. Democracy, we might say, is the regime that can’t count properly. This is precisely what makes democracy a space or moment of impropriety, and it is also why democracy, in truth, is not a regime at all (Rancière, 2006: 69–73). Rancière describes the democratic subject (thus, the political subject *par excellence*) as ‘*le compte des incomptés*’ – the count of the unaccounted-for. Democracy is a miscount because democratic politics only comes about when those who have no part in the social order stake a claim, and take a part, within it. ‘There is politics’ argues Rancière, only ‘when there is a part of those who have no part, a part or party of the poor’ (Rancière, 1999: 11, with a different translation of *le compte des incomptés*).

I have previously glossed this argument of Rancière’s by referring to ‘democratic politics as the taking-part of those who have no part’ (Chambers, 2005: par. 1). This translation has the benefit of expressing the point in its properly paradoxical form (those who have no part, take part), but it flirts with the danger of overstating the willed participation of a party prior to politics. In other words, it runs the risk of returning us to the liberal interest-group politics that I have been at pains throughout this essay to distinguish from Rancièrian politics. And as Rancière stresses, the ‘party of the poor’ that has a part only when ‘there is politics’ does not initiate political action but rather is brought about *by political action*. In other words it is only politics ‘that causes the poor to exist as an entity’ (Rancière, 1999: 11, emphasis added). And this paradoxical formulation can be elaborated (if never quite ‘explained’) when we see that unlike any other political system, democracy involves a form of rule in which there is no title to rule. It is not aristocracy, rule by the best; it is not oligarchy, rule by the rich; instead, democracy is rule by anyone at all. The title to rule in democracy is the lack of any title whatsoever (Rancière, 2006: 41; cf. Rancière, 1995: 94). But this is why democracy always involves a miscount, since it always amounts to ‘counting’ those who do not, who ought not, count – *inscribing* ‘the part of those who have no part’ (Rancière, 2007: 99).

As Rancière stresses in the epigraph to this article, ‘the part that has no part’ must not be ‘*misunderstood* as the part of the excluded’ (2008: 15, emphasis added). To include the excluded would be merely to count differently; it would not amount to a ‘fundamental miscount’ (Rancière, 1999: 6). For this reason, Rancière describes the proletariat – the excluded, the poor – as ‘the class of the uncounted that only exists in the very declaration [account] in which they are counted as those of no account’ (Rancière, 1999: 38). This ‘miscount’

is therefore not a failure to count properly, and it surely is not that which calls for a recount. The miscount names an irreducible remainder; it points to a persistent unaccounted-for within *any* count.[19]

Like Butler's theory of unintelligibility, the miscount demands a more rigorous understanding of 'the problems' of democracy. Democracy cannot solve all problems merely through inclusion or recognition (cf. Deranty, 2003). The struggle against oppression will surely be an important one, but democratic politics both precedes and exceeds the problem of oppression. In line with the thinking of queer that I articulated in the opening section, Butler frames the issue in terms of norms. Norms, Butler shows, render some lives (some genders, some sexualities, some races, some nationalities) legible and intelligible. And certain norms create a zone of indiscernibility that goes beyond a question of recognition. Butler calls this 'unintelligibility'. She writes:

To be oppressed means that you already exist as a subject of some kind, you are there as a visible and oppressed other for the master subject ... *To be oppressed you must first become intelligible*. To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always as if you were human, but with the sense that you are not. (Butler, 2004: 30, emphasis added)

And we can easily draw the connection that Butler leaves implicit here: to find yourself rendered unintelligible, is surely to find yourself in a queer relation to dominant norms. To be unintelligible means to exist in a zone of inaudible, invisible marginality, such that norms of gender and sexuality make one illegible. Butler's own theory of unintelligibility emerges within the specific concept of theorising marginalised genders and sexualities, particularly trans-genderism. But it seems to me that Butler's specific arguments here fit well with the broader and more abstract frame in which Rancière theorises politics, and Butler herself has recently expanded her theory to think about 'rogue viewpoints' that are rendered unthinkable and unspeakable by norms of legitimacy as well as by governmental policy (Butler, 2009: 795). When politics occurs – and Rancière consistently reminds his readers that such occurrences are infrequent – the conflictual conjunction of the logic of equality with the logic of domination serves, on the one hand, to render that order of domination visible and, on the other, to expose (as intelligible) the very subject of politics that had previously remained unintelligible (cf. Butler on dissent). But, put in the language of queer theory, this means that politics both exposes the norm and questions its dominance in the name of that which it would make queer. Thus, as Rancière says, politics occurs through the democratic miscount. We can add: politics occurs when the unintelligible make themselves intelligible.

It is precisely his insistence on the miscount that makes Rancière's a very queer thinking of politics. By refusing any conflation of *le compte des incomptés* with the excluded, the marginalised, or the victimised, Rancière consistently queers democracy. What I mean by this is that in maintaining a fidelity to dissensus, to the possibility of disagreement – a situation of conflict not over the object of speech but 'over what speaking means' (Rancière, 1999: xi) – Rancière also maintains a fidelity to queerness, to a marginality that cannot merely be included within the dominant frame of the current police order.[20] The democratic miscount is a queer form of counting and a queer form of politics.

These claims can make sense, of course, only if we maintain the distinction for which I argued at the outset: between a lesbian and gay identity politics, and a queer theory of both relational identity, and – it would now seem, also – politics itself. But just as the argument for 'queering' Rancière's arguments, for reading them with and through the lens of this queer understanding of norms and relational identity, just as this approach depends upon the distinction between LGBT and queer, so too does the reading offer further independent support for holding on to such a distinction. This is the case to exactly the extent that LGBT politics can and should, from Rancière's perspective, be subsumed under the category of the police. And there can be no doubt that much of what travels today under the name of mainstream LGBT politics, especially in the USA through the institutions of Human Rights Campaign and Lambda Legal, fits Rancière's definition of police perfectly. This serves as neither an explicit nor an implicit critique of these groups in particular, or of LGBT politics in general; instead it serves, again, to remind us of the importance of maintaining a space for a potential moment of politics that might disrupt and thereby rearrange the police order. Such is the promise, even if often (and necessarily so) unrealised, of queer politics.

**Samuel A. Chambers teaches political theory at Johns Hopkins University. He has recently published *The Queer Politics of Television* (IB Tauris, 2009). His previous publications include the monographs *Untimely Politics* (NYU 2003) and *Judith Butler and Political Theory* (with Terrell Carver, Routledge 2008), edited volumes on William Connolly and Judith Butler, respectively, and numerous journal articles. He is currently writing a book on the politics of social orders.**

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### Notes

1. For just one prominent example from current work, see Carolyn Dinshaw (2006) 'The History of *GLQ*, Volume 1: LGBTQ Studies, Censorship, and Other Transnational Problems,' *GLQ* 12.1: 5–26. I cite Dinshaw not as an object of critical scrutiny, but simply as a banal instance of the normalised usage of LGBTQ. For those unfamiliar with the term, LGBTQ stands for 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning.' While this extended acronym has yet to appear regularly in academic literature within lesbian and gay studies, it has grown in usage and popularity among lesbian and gay support groups. As of 22 January, 2009, a Google search for 'lgbtqq' turns up 8,780 hits; compare with 483,000 for 'lgbtq' and 10,700,000 for 'lgbt.' For spurring me to think about this acronym, I thank Kathryn Trevenen (Trevenen, 2009).

2. The 'feminist etc.' appears in a variety of works in the 1990s, but it seems most prominent within the theory of 'intersectionality,' which posits the 'intersection' of gender and gender oppression with race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, *etc.* (see Collins, 1990, 1992, 2000). I do not believe the phrase 'feminist etc.' – used to identify and criticise the epistemology of this approach – is mine, but my concerted search for the original source has come up empty.

3. Indeed, LGBT needs the 'etc.' that 'queer' has recently come to stand in for – it needs to become the ungainly LGBTQ precisely to achieve the goal of including everyone.

4. The project developed here has important affinities with, and therefore takes shape against the background of, a significant body of recent work in contemporary political theory that converges on a critique of liberalism. For example, both Wendy Brown's interrogation of the discourse of tolerance and Benjamin Ardit's engagement with populism develop important critiques of interest-group pluralism (Brown, 2006; Ardit, 2007). My argument operates in parallel with works such as these, but it emphasises a dimension that has been overlooked: the crucial contribution that queer theory and politics can play in this broader project.

5. From here on I offer an extended reading of these seven words, but I am certainly not the first to analyse this slogan. Duttman (1997)

provides a detailed and lengthy exegesis in the context of theorising the politics of recognition, while Arditì and Valentine (1999) draw from Duttman's own work to help them render their crucial distinction between polemic and polemicisation. Both texts offer rich accounts from which I see no need to take a critical distance. Nonetheless, my emphasis remains very much distinct; Arditì and Valentine interpret Duttman (rightly, I think) as arguing that 'on the surface, this is a demand for recognition' (Arditì and Valentine, 1999: 1). But I would contend that even 'on the surface' the Queer Nation chant resists this reading. Duttman explores a certain negative dialectics of recognition through his extended meditations on the chant, but on my account the slogan itself refuses the dialectical game of recognition in the first place. To read it otherwise is to run the risk of reducing it to the standard formula of minority identity politics, as I discuss in detail in the text below.

6. Some would argue, and many more would implicitly assume or tacitly imply, that the realms of academic theory and direct action on the street remain irreconcilably distant. Their proof for this position often appears to amount to the evident fact that essays and arguments published in journals and books are not the same as the passing of legislation, the signing of laws, the issuing of executive orders, or the judgement of judges. That, of course, is true. But what I'd like to call the 'academic political lament' – the enunciation of the worry that writing and argument never changes anything – always seems to constrict the realm of the political and to severely constrain the concept of 'change.' After all, who wants to cede politics to politicians? If they are our only hope, then there's not much hope at all. Moreover, aren't the best politicians the ones who refuse precisely this move, the ones who think that politics *does* have something to do with the people? From JFK's 'ask not what your country can do for you...' to the slogan that ran for over a year on candidate Barack Obama's website, which tells its visitors that it is *they* who hold the power of change, we see in certain political leaders a vision of politics as something that greatly exceeds the actions and decisions of those in power. Thought from the other side of the equation, we might also recall the 'unscientific study' conducted by Halperin of ACT-UP activists who unanimously reported the inspiration and argument provided to their politics by the writings of Foucault (Halperin 1995: 15-16). In either case, and in other words, if those *doing* the politics can refuse a radical theory/practice dichotomy, shouldn't we theorists be able to resist it as well?

7. For an interesting, hands-on illustration of the tactical uses of this slogan, see the *Rolling Earth, Movement Education* website, and its blog post on 'What do we want? When do we want it' (accessed 29 October 2008, <http://www.re.rollingearth.org/?q=node/131>). The strategic arguments about using the chant provide good evidence for my reading of its politics in the form of demands for equal rights and inclusion.

8. However, this is surely not to say that the statement 'get used to it' *does* nothing. Indeed, I would argue that it does a great deal *more* than to assert the claims or demands of interest-group liberalism. Rather than making a claim of inclusion, rather than requesting something of the dominant power structure, 'get used to it' declares a powerful distance between those who occupy the dominant position and those who chant the slogan, and it refuses an opportunity to close down that difference. It signals a refusal by those on the margins to move to the centre. 'Get used to it' is also, notably, an imperative sentence; it tells others what *they* have to do. And the changes within the norms that are announced by the imperative must be brought about by those who occupy the centre of the norm. It asserts that those on the margins will continue to be who they are – namely, queer – and argues that any alterations will have to come about by way of broader changes to the norm. This is therefore a potentially subversive claim, since it refuses to reify or even respect heteronormativity.

9. In previous work I have made the full case for reading Butler's concept of the 'heterosexual matrix' through the later-developed language of heteronormativity. In *Gender Trouble* Butler shows that it is the heterosexual matrix that binds together sex, gender, and sexual desire, and she articulates the workings of this matrix through the complementary concepts of 'regulatory practices' and 'gender intelligibility.' I argue that these concepts can be fleshed out with the language of heteronormativity, as coined by Warner (1993). See Chambers (2007); cf. Chambers and Carver (2008).

10. For a great deal more on the 'remainder,' especially as it distinguishes distinct approaches to the political within the field of political theory, see Honig (1993).

11. This serves as a partial explanation for why I myself return again and again to this now-famous Halperin quote. For some of my earlier explications, in distinct contexts, see Chambers (2003) and Chambers (2009).

12. In a potentially tangential line of inquiry, I would ask directly at this moment: how, then, could the positionality of queer be included within the identity space of LGBT? I would argue that the 'Q' in LBG~~T~~Q functions in an utterly antithetical manner to the 'Q' in the journal title, *GLQ*. As Dinshaw explains when discussing their decision not to call the journal 'Queer Quarterly': 'we did hang on to one Q in the title, *GLQ*, to let queerness do whatever work it could. The name of the journal, then, is not an acronym. The G and the L do stand for gay and lesbian, but the Q is a sliding signifier' (Dinshaw, 2006: 9). It slides, as Halperin and Dinshaw explain in their original editorial statement, between *quarterly* and *queer* (Dinshaw and Halperin, 1993: iii–iv). And one might go on to argue that in letting the Q slide, Halperin and Dinshaw make it queer in a more significant way: by refusing to let its position be fixed, by refusing to make it correspond

to *any* particular name. But rather than queering what comes before, as is the case with the sliding Q of *GLQ*, the Q in LGBTQ serves as an all-inclusive remainder. It is a broad and loose category, a placeholder for everything else, but in becoming a placeholder it loses its positionality. It cannot queer anything. Dinshaw's own article illustrates this point, since she carefully explicates the sliding signifier in *GLQ* while repeatedly, consistently, and always unproblematically using LGBTQ as an identity category.

13. And well before folks like Warner and Halperin helped to make the distinction in this language, Gayle Rubin laid the groundwork for it in her pioneering work on normalisation and/of sexuality (Rubin, 1999 [1984]).

14. As Arditì and Valentine argue, 'any reliance on a topography of minorities and majorities as the referent of the dispute becomes counterproductive. It simply reduces the incommensurability of the opening to a common measure, *and thus eradicates it*' (Arditì and Valentine, 1999: 2–3, emphasis added).

15. The insistence on resolving the paradox always diminishes any effort to think beyond inclusion; it reduces it to a politics *of* inclusion. Butler and Rancière converge at exactly the paradoxical formulation of politics that animates Spivak's famous, and broadly misread, essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak, 1988) Spivak was formulating a critique of the politics of inclusion (within the context of post-colonialism), but her question and answer title and essay led to a misreading of her work within the terms of a politics of inclusion. Butler and Rancière formulate their own paradoxes. For Rancière, we might say that the paradox amounts to 'counting' those who do not count; or better, it means, in Rancière's own words 'conceptualis[ing] democratic practice as the inscription of the part of those who have no part' (Rancière, 2007: 99). For Butler, it means coherently discussing the unintelligible (i.e. without thereby rendering them simply intelligible).

16. For a much more detailed account of this distinction, particularly as it relates to theories of language, see Chambers (2003).

17. As an anonymous *Borderlands* reviewer has insightfully and helpfully pointed out to me, the case of queer/LBGT poses in specific form an important general question to Rancière's work: is the effect of politics merely to constitute a new police order? I see such a question as crucial to any exploration of Rancière's work on politics, and I would elaborate it as follows: does the irruption of politics into the police order – the emergence of parties to a wrong, of 'the part that has no part' – simply lead to a new police order that can now count those who were previously of no account? And, as the reviewer also asks, haven't Rancière's own privileged examples of parties that declared a wrong ('workers' and 'women') simply become part of the police order? In this light I would suggest that my own effort in this

essay to maintain a distinction between queer politics as a Rancièrian disruption of the police order, on the one hand, and LGBT 'identity politics' (the phrase is a contradiction in terms when thought through Rancièrè's political logic), on the other, can therefore be thought as an attempt to prevent consolidation of a new police order – to keep the possibility of queer politics alive.

18. Here it should be noted that queer resists not just heteronormativity but *all normativity*, and in many contexts this means that queer stands opposed to homonormativity as well - perhaps even more so. Thanks go to an anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this important point.

19. For pointing me toward these passages in Rancièrè and for insisting on the unassimilable nature of the unaccounted, I again thank an anonymous reviewer.

20. Here my language echoes the title to a conference on Rancièrè's work, held in London in 2003, 'Fidelity to the Disagreement.' The name for this conference offered more than a placeholder for various academic engagements with Rancièrè's writings; it attempted to articulate an element of Rancièrè's writing in which he not only describes politics as dissensus, but himself attempts to honour, and maintain space for, such dissensus. The argument contained within the conference title and blurb can probably be attributed to Benjamin Arditì.

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