

Quintana, Laura. 2020. *The Politics of Bodies: Philosophical Emancipation With and Beyond Rancière*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield [267 pp.]

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Laura Quintana's *The Politics of Bodies* argues that the concept of the body has a central but largely unrecognized role in the political thought of Jacques Rancière. Her book, however, is not of the academic "here's another concept by this thinker we need to understand" variety. Instead, it is an entire re-reading of Rancière's thought through the lens of the corporeal and its aesthetic role. As such, it is one of the more enlightening texts on the work of this important thinker to appear in recent years.

If so, though, why has the concept of the body been so neglected? Mostly, this has to do with Rancière's own writings. Although he refers to the body, and although one can see how important it might be (or at least Quintana did), his overt references to it are few and far between. It is ever-present in his thought, although mostly implicitly. Quintana's book makes that role explicit, and in doing so offers us a new reading of this seminal thinker.

So what is the body, as Rancière conceives it? Quintana defines it as follows: "a body is a heterogeneous assemblage of discourses, gestures, routines, affects, forms of rationality, and spatializations that experiences itself in its movement and forms of perception, but can also *reexperience* itself by creating disjunctions and new arrangements in those assemblages" (2020, 73). There are three elements of this definition which are worth examining in greater detail.

First, the body is not just a thing. It is a participant in a social world, a social world that is discursive, affective, and spatial. Second, it is not simply an unconscious participant in the social world; it can experience itself in its own participation. Third, and crucial, it is not passive. It can reexperience itself in a different way from the way in which it does so currently. And in reexperiencing itself, it can emancipate itself from a current social arrangement or —more accurately, as Quintana points out— it can reexperience itself *within* a current social arrangement, and thus challenge the nature of the social arrangement itself.

This possibility of reexperiencing brings Quintana to the Rancière's well known but often misunderstood distinction between *police* and *politics*. That distinction, as she points out, is not between two different arenas within the social world, or even two different aspects of it. It is a distinction between two different logics that operate with the social world. Police logic is hierarchical, exclusive, and consensual. Political logic —what Rancière also thinks of as the logic of democracy— is egalitarian, common, and dissensual. Moreover, both logics are logics of bodies, of where they are with one another (a cartographic issue) and their intellectual and affective interaction (an aesthetic issue). And, bodies can, as she points out, "de-identify with respect to the functions and capacities attributed to them" (2020, 27) by a particular police logic, and thus enact a political logic instead.

However, this can only be possible within a police order if the order itself is heterogeneous. In other words, although there may be certain ways of being that are encouraged

within a police order, they are not the only ways of being that are possible within this order. There can be other ways as well, but those other ways can only be revealed through the experimentation of bodies.

How, then, does a police order—a police logic—impose itself? Largely through consensus, a consensus that allows for certain social arrangements while seeking to exclude others. Although Quintana’s discussion of this issue, and of the neoliberal police order specifically, is more nuanced than can be presented here, we can think of it roughly as follows. We are all asked to agree that certain opinions are worth entertaining, while others are not; certain people are worth listening to, while others not; certain policies are worth considering, while others are not; certain ways of being together are worth pursuing, while others are not. And within the neoliberal police logic, these opinions, people, policies, and ways of being are, in Quintana’s term, “immunitarian.” That is, they foster an individualism that immunizes us from others rather than drawing us together in a common social world. Thus, hierarchy and immunization go hand in hand with neoliberal consensus.

In order to break this pattern, a democratic movement has to be more inclusive, which requires an egalitarian and communitarian (in the broad sense, rather than the specific sense of communitarian philosophy) logic. Moreover, that logic is not only a matter of thought; it is instantiated in ways of being enacted by bodies. Quintana offers a rich array of examples of such ways of being, many (but not all) of them from her native Colombia. One of these, the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, is a Colombian group that resisted the “for us or against us” logic of the Colombian civil war, opting instead for a dissensual logic of collectivity among the peasants. Another, the water and gas struggle in Bolivia of the early 2000s, involved the refusal to recognize the consensus around private ownership of important resources (a very neoliberal consensus).

However, one might ask, how does this dissensus work within a particular police order? Here Quintana points out one of Rancière’s most original ideas. It is not a matter simply of refusal, or alternatively of demanding recognition. It is instead a matter of acting as though the dissensual logic were already operative within the social order. The dissensus of commonality is enacted rather than requested. As Quintana puts it, egalitarian “arguments” (by which we should understand not simply sayings but collective ways of being) “are capable of producing ‘polemical scenes’ that exist in the mode of *as if*” (2020, 146). Rather than relying on the police order to recognize or assimilate these movements, they are corporeally enacted through ways of speaking and acting together that in their very existence pose a challenge to a given police logic. And, in our neoliberal world specifically, they challenge the immunitarian consensus with its particular hierarchies and exclusions.

There is much more that could be said about this original and timely book, including for instance, Quintana’s view (with which I agree) that, contra a common critique of Rancière, he does allow for the institutionalization of democratic movements. However, that goes beyond the scope of this review. Suffice it to say, one who seeks an engagement with Rancière’s thought—and indeed with the current neoliberal structure of our world—could do much worse than start with *The Politics of Bodies*. It should be essential reading for both academics who want to understand the subtleties of Rancière’s often elusive writings and activists who want to challenge the current police order.

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