Homelessness is a prominent public policy issue in Canada, where an affordable-housing crisis has unfolded over the past two decades (Gaetz, Gulliver, and Richter 2014). This crisis is particularly acute in the country’s biggest cities, where street homelessness has become an everyday feature of the urban landscape (Laird 2007). Alberta’s prodigious prosperity has not exempted the province from these trends. In fact, Alberta has experienced some of the worst affordability problems and sharpest increases in homelessness in Canada, all in the midst of recent resource development booms (Calgary Homeless Foundation 2012). In the summer of 2007, the housing crisis became so severe that a large encampment of the homeless, which came to be called “Tent City,” formed on a vacant lot in Edmonton’s inner city (Ruttan 2007). Over several months, Tent City grew to a population of several hundred people. Although the encampment was initially tolerated, safety concerns and public pressure forced the hand of the City of Edmonton, and Tent City was dismantled. Camp residents were moved into emergency shelters and transitional housing units. But the encampment caught national media attention, exposing the underside of Alberta growth.

In October 2008, the Province of Alberta introduced an ambitious program to end homelessness in ten years (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2008). At the time of writing (April 2015), Alberta is the only province in Canada with such a plan; however, Ontario’s poverty reduction strategy, initiated in 2014, includes “ending homelessness” as a long-term goal. The provincial strategy pledges investments to the tune of $3.316 billion, with the goal of moving eleven thousand individuals and families out of homelessness by 2019. Central to this strategy is the Housing First (HF) model developed in the early 1990s in New York City to meet the housing and health needs of
chronically homeless populations (Falvo 2009). HF is based on the theory that rather than making permanent housing contingent on abstinence-based treatment in a shelter or transitional setting, permanent housing should be provided to chronically homeless individuals at the outset because this creates a better foundation for the recovery process (Tsemberis 2010).

The ambitious policy outlined in 2008 in *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in Alberta in 10 Years* is no doubt made possible by Alberta’s abundant resource endowments. Alberta’s carbon-fuelled exceptionalism is the backdrop to rather bold social policy objectives in this regard, a pattern not uncommon in other oil-rich states (Karl 2004). But when it comes to what these policy developments say about the relationship between oil and democracy, it is imperative to scrutinize the type of democratic action they represent.

In this chapter, I examine democratic politics in the oil-rich province of Alberta through the lens of homelessness policy, employing a definition of democracy developed by philosopher Jacques Rancière. Here, rule (*kratos*) by the people (*demos*) is understood as action that springs from the realization that politics lacks any natural foundation capable of justifying oligarchic government—that is, the rule of a minority over a majority. Democracy is grounded upon an anarchic presupposition of innate equality: that we are all similarly capable and worthy of participating in the political community. Equality is the basic fact that we have in common. This radical presupposition of equality is perpetually at odds with hierarchical orders instituted along lines of gender, race, and class. It is the *mésentente*, the disagreement, between equality and hierarchy that constitutes politics. As Rancière (2007, 94) argues, there is politics because there is democracy. Democratic politics can thus be conceived as actions, taken by or on behalf of those who have no part—no share—in a prevailing order, that demonstrate how equality has been wronged by hierarchies. In Rancière’s estimation (1999), democracy—and by extension, politics—very rarely occur, particularly in the industrialized world, which is increasingly dominated by approaches to government that Rancière pejoratively characterizes as “postdemocratic.”

Rancière’s view on democratic politics invites a particular examination of policies purporting to “end” homelessness. Can they be read as democratic, as actions that denaturalize prevailing hierarchies in the housing system and demonstrate how equality is fundamentally wronged by homelessness? Or are these policy developments better read as postdemocratic solutions to the collateral damage wrought by years of welfare state retrenchment and oil-fuelled

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economic booms and busts? In this chapter, I address these questions through a discursive examination of homelessness policy, using an approach that draws attention to how discourse shapes what can be said, and in turn understood, about homelessness. I argue that the discourse of “ending homelessness” is an economically rationalized, technocratic, and consensual mode of governing that aims interventions toward particular subpopulations of homeless people and, in doing so, neglects systemic problems in the housing system that perpetuate affordability problems. Such a policy environment effectively hampers democratic action around housing justice and thus invites comparisons to what Rancière calls postdemocracy.

Policy, Politics, and Democracy

Rancière’s writings invite social scientists to think about politics and democracy differently. His novel political ontology rests on a distinction between the “police” and “politics,” two contradictory logics. “Police,” for Rancière (1999, 28), does not refer to law enforcement or the state apparatus; rather, it refers to a logic that “arranges that tangible reality in which bodies are distributed in a community.” The police (or policy) is an order in which bodies are counted and assigned to a proper place. These hierarchical orders function as epistemological grids, systems of seeing and hearing, that establish the conditions for governance. Rancière (1999, 2010) discusses the establishment of a police order as one aspect of le partage du sensible, “the distribution of the sensible.” The term partage refers to sharing out, dividing, or apportioning. Hence, the distribution of the sensible is simultaneously to make something common, to classify, and to allocate. Public policy is grounded in particular distributions of the sensible that—by rendering populations visible, problematizing them, and building a discursive world around them—evoke particular police orders (Dikeç 2005).

Politics also takes on a different meaning in Rancière’s (1999, 2010) framework. Politics is the disruption of the police order by what is unaccounted for, by unnamed parts of the whole that have no proper place in the sensible field, parties outside of established orders rendered invisible within prevailing distributions. Their voices heard as noise, they are thus unrecognizable and unaccounted for. As Dikeç (2005, 176) puts it, politics “is the disruption of the police order—the sum of the fully counted, rightly named, and properly placed parts—by a part that has no part in this particular counting, naming and
partitioning.” Politics is the struggle for recognition by a party that has no part in an established police order, a struggle launched in the name of radical equality. In this sense, politics is conflict over who is recognized, whose voice is heard as speech rather than noise, and the divisions by which these relationships are established and changed. Politics is not a matter of recognizing an additional group that is not counted in society—this simply establishes another police order—but those moments that reveal the radical equality of anyone and everyone (for example, Edmonton’s Tent City). It is the enactment of this equality, by identifying how it is systemically wronged within a police order, that functions as the (negative) ontology of politics (Rancière 1999).

Rancière’s unique perspective on politics invites different ways of thinking about democratic politics. Rancière (2010, 50) views democracy as “neither a form of government nor a form of social life. Democracy is the institution of politics, of politics as a paradox.” By paradox, he means that politics is the enactment of how equality is wronged. Politics “consists in blurring and displacing the borders of the political. This is what politics means: displacing the limits of the political by re-enacting the equality of each and all” (54). Rancière stresses how democracy implies this practice of displacement, a practice he calls “dissensus,” which is continuously muted by budding police orders.

In Rancière’s estimation, political dissensus is continuously thwarted in Western democratic politics by what he labels “consensus thinking”: the “pre-supposition of inclusion of all parties and their problems that prohibits the political subjectification of a part of those who have no part, of a count of the uncounted” (1999, 116). Rancière calls the resulting postpolitical state of consensus building “postdemocracy,” which he describes as “the consensual practice of effacing forms of democratic action” in the name of democracy. As he goes on to explain, “Postdemocracy is the government practice and conceptual legitimization of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests” (101–2).

Rancière contends that postdemocracy is itself a distribution of the sensible, a “regime in which the parties are presupposed as already given, their community established” (102). Postdemocracy is the evaporation of any gap between the excess that has no part and the order in which everyone is assigned to their proper place, the disappearance of any gap between politics and the police.
The Discourse of “Ending Homelessness”

Michel Foucault’s (1972) archaeological approach to knowledge offers a useful means to examine the discourse of “ending homelessness.” Foucault conceptualizes discourse as contingent formations of knowing and thinking that make up specific domains of knowledge and practice (Murdoch 2005). The archaeological method focuses on discursive discontinuities and ruptures that make possible the emergence of formal domains such as policy models (Scheurich 1994). The elementary unit of analysis when using the archaeological method is the statement (enoncé; Foucault 1972). Statements are not equivalent to sentences or propositions insofar as the meaning of the statement is not reducible to grammatical rules, logical formulations, or a single referent. Statements acquire their meaning on an enunciative level: “whatever it is that makes people at a certain period take certain speech acts seriously” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 58). Analyzing statements on an enunciative level involves describing those rules and conditions that enable or constrain what registers as sensible, comprehensible, or thinkable about people, relations, places, or experiences at a given point in time.

The discourse analysis on which this chapter is based focuses on major policy documents on the issue of homelessness at provincial and municipal levels in Alberta. This section identifies five statements—statistical, biographical, economic, planning, and philosophical—that together constitute Alberta’s enunciative environment. This environment of speech acts and discursive events both enables and constrains what registers as thinkable (i.e., Rancière’s “the distribution of the sensible”) with regard to homelessness in Alberta. This enunciative environment, established through the relations between statements, makes it possible to declare that an “end” to homelessness is within the realm of governmental possibility and responsibility. It is therefore pivotal for understanding the nature of policy shifts as well as their democratic relevance.

Statistical Statements
Statistical statements are indispensable discursive events when it comes to homelessness policy-making. Enumeration, tabulation, and categorization play constitutive roles in the social categorization of temporarily unhoused people as a distinct and measurable group: it is through statistical statements that people, united primarily by their lack of permanent housing, appear as a “homeless population.” How many people are homeless? Who is homeless?
How long are people homeless? By answering these questions, a “homeless population” finds expression—in the form of tables, graphs, and pie charts—across research reports and policy documents. The conversion of people into a quantifiable population, in terms of their housing history and sociodemographic characteristics, is a noteworthy event insofar as it produces the objects of intervention for homelessness policy.

Statistical descriptions of homeless populations are central features of Alberta’s policy discourse. As far back as the early 1990s, authorities in both Calgary and Edmonton formalized programs to enumerate the homeless using “point-in-time” (or “snapshot”) census counts that collected data on the size and social characteristics of the homeless. Over time, these statistical statements evolved from simple charts and graphs to more complex population models, forecasts, and service utilization rates (see Sorensen 2010). These changes represent fundamental shifts in the enunciative environment. Two in particular are notable.

First, the “systems of classification” (Foucault 1972) used to define homeless persons became more complex over time. In Calgary and Edmonton, for instance, early counts drew upon the classic United Nations distinction between “absolute” and “relative” homelessness. Over time, classificatory schemes in both cities multiplied in terms of scope and specificity. In 2006, Calgary adopted the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). The ETHOS typology designates four conceptual categories—roofless, houseless, insecure, and inadequate—which are broken down into a total of thirteen different operational categories. These classification schemes permitted policy-makers to speak about the homeless population with more precision and accuracy. Alberta’s strategy to end homelessness, as laid out in A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2008, 7), identifies three major categories of homeless Albertans—the chronic homeless, the transient homeless, and the employable homeless.

A second shift occurred when the “authorities of delimitation” (Foucault 1972), those individuals and groups empowered by society as a whole to address homelessness, began to favour individuals and groups with professional expertise. In the early years, task forces, committees, and working groups were privileged speakers. These coalitions of elected politicians, appointed civil servants, private sector philanthropists, academics, and nonprofit representatives were granted authority over enumeration programs; however, over time social researchers, and social research units in particular, were accorded a special role.
in determining the size and characteristics of homeless populations. Today, research units coordinate the count of homeless populations, and it is common to contract out such research activities to professional research consultants and academics. Together, these shifts in systems of classification and authorities of delimitation reflect the consolidation of a research agenda, the adoption of more sophisticated data management systems, and the accumulation of additional research capacity and resources.

Biographical Statements
While statistical statements constitute one part of the enunciative environment for producing knowledge about the homeless as a population, homelessness policy is also replete with statements about homeless individuals. In this sense, another object, the homeless person, is constructed. But rather than offering objective statistics about housing status, age, or gender, biographical statements individualize the experience of homelessness through direct quotations, third-person narratives, and photographic images.

Biographical statements are relatively rare in early policy documents. For instance, the 1999 report of the Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness, Homelessness in Edmonton: A Call to Action, contains only a single direct quote from a “former homeless” person (5). This dearth of biographical information is addressed over time. More specifically, a new type of biographical statement—the case study—surfaces in later policy documents. Consider, for instance, the following statement from A Place to Call Home, a report written in 2009 by the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness:

Take Charles. He is 42 years old, HIV positive, and has spent most of the last 25 years sleeping on the street or in crack houses. But Charles’ life changed the day he went into the Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre for a cup of coffee and a shower: he developed a relationship with the staff at the Centre, who were able to give him the tools he needed to get an apartment of his own. They were there when Charles filled out the form for his lease, they helped him with the security deposit, and they assured the landlord that they would be responsible for the apartment if anything went wrong. The assistance and encouragement did not end there: a support worker went grocery shopping with Charles to help him stretch his dollar as efficiently as possible; he helped Charles out with furniture and learning to cook. Then when Charles decided to deal with his cocaine habit, the Centre gave him the resources he needed. The Housing First principle does work. (29)
Using third-person narratives, biographical statements tell a “success story” about interventions. These success stories represent a fundamental shift in the enunciative environment—namely, the formation of new “enunciative modalities” (Foucault 1972) governing who can speak, from where, and in what situation. Two aspects of these narratives are notable.

First, these biographical statements emanate from specific institutional sites in the community, including research and evaluation sites associated with Housing First programs (such as Calgary’s Pathways to Housing or Edmonton’s Jasper Place Health and Wellness Centre). Through biographical statements, these sites become embedded within broader multistakeholder policy processes. Second, biographical statements can be described in terms of the situations that bring a subject and object into a relationship. The success stories presented above evoke a new situation: “clients” are followed, monitored, and managed over time via highly synchronized case management approaches to mental health service delivery. The Edmonton report A Place to Call Home (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness 2009, 64) defines case management as follows: “A collaborative process of assessment, planning, facilitation, and evaluation of the options and services required to meet an individual’s health and human service needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and creative resource management to promote quality, cost-effective outcomes.” In this sense, relationships between subjects (such as the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness and the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness) and objects (“Charles”) in these stories are mediated by actual HF programs and their requisite case management orientations. In this way, biographical statements are no longer simple snapshot descriptions that personalize homelessness. Instead, they are narratives that tout the economic efficiency of the professional case management process. These homeless stories give a different inflection to “success.”

Planning Statements

Statements referring to specific policy models and their procedures are prominent features of discourse surrounding homelessness policy. These planning statements diagram why and how interventions should work in practice. They presuppose a set of actors, each with specific roles and responsibilities, and prescribe a set of actions designed to achieve policy goals.
The planning statements that appear in early policy documents convey a particular set of policy goals. Foremost among them is rehousing the homeless. As late as 2005, Edmonton’s community plan evoked this very premise:

The Plan is built on the premise that Edmonton needs an integrated system that enables and encourages people to “move up” through various housing options, and ultimately, if possible, into the private housing market. This requires a sufficient supply of different types of housing units at each stage, along with support services that encourage and enable people to become as independent as possible. (Edmonton Joint Planning Council on Housing 2005, 2)

Planning statements at that time evoked a particular conceptual formulation: a service orientation called the “linear residential treatment” (LRT) continuum (Tsemberis 2010). Until 2007, the LRT continuum was a prominent feature of policy documents. This model of rehousing the homeless encompasses a range of services and supports, including street outreach and emergency accommodation, transitional housing, and independent housing. In this model, transitional and independent (and in some cases emergency) housing is provided on the condition that consumers participate in job training and psychological counselling and maintain sobriety. It is therefore sometimes referred to as the treatment first (TF) model (Tsemberis 2010).

Beginning in 2008, planning statements began to change with the adoption of an alternative model, the Housing First (HF) model, which calls for immediate access to permanent housing regardless of clients’ commitment to treatment or sobriety. For example, Edmonton’s A Place to Call Home (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness 2009, 27) states: “The primary goal is finding a permanent home for people who are without a place to live, regardless of their past or present issues. This includes accessing rent subsidies and potentially negotiating leases with landlords, on behalf of the client.”

Alberta’s ten-year plan to end homelessness (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2008, 17) is even more explicit, stating: “Top priority is given to rapid re-housing of homeless Albertans into permanent housing. Permanent housing doesn’t mean a shelter. It means a secure home using a housing option that’s appropriate for the circumstances of the individual or family.” This conceptual reformulation evokes a different style of reasoning. Rather than simply provide the opportunity to “move up” through various housing options, and ultimately, if possible, into the private housing market (Edmonton Joint Planning Council on Housing 2005, 2), as in the case of the TF model, these later...
planning statements direct service providers to house individuals immediately in the private housing market (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness 2009, 27).

This conceptual reformulation reflects significant shifts in the enunciative environment. First, in the case of the HF concept, planning statements are organized around the presupposition that homeless individuals inherently deserve housing regardless of personal problems or behaviour. Housing is a human right and should be provided with no strings attached. A Place to Call Home (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness 2009, 8) summarizes this basic premise of the HF concept:

The Housing First approach says the first step in solving the problem is to find people permanent homes and give them the support they need to be successful in those homes. This philosophy represents a shift away from the theory that people have to be “prepared” or “transitioned” into housing by first dealing with mental health and addiction issues or finding a job. It recognizes that the best place to deal with those issues is not living on the street but in safe, secure housing.

In contrast, TF typically takes as its premise that homeless people are disproportionately sick or troubled and must be made “housing ready.” The conceptual reformulation accomplished by planning statements in recent plans and reports is based on a recalibration of deservedness.

Second, this enunciative environment extends beyond Edmonton, Calgary, and Alberta to other places in the world. The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness cites specific studies on the effectiveness of the HF approach in US cities:

The principles and strategies at the heart of Calgary’s 10 Year Plan have been put to the test in other communities, with encouraging results:

- In the short space of 18 months after the implementation of Portland, Oregon’s 10-year plan, the city reduced its chronic homeless population by 70 per cent.
- Denver, Colorado has seen an 11 per cent reduction in overall homelessness and a 36 per cent reduction in chronic homelessness since the city implemented its plan in 2005.
- Hennepin County, Minnesota has seen a dramatic decline in family homelessness since it implemented its 10-year plan. From 2002 to 2004, the community saw family homelessness decline by 43 per cent, from 1,819 to 1,046. (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness 2008, 6)
When it comes to the HF concept, planning statements are constituted by flows of knowledge from sites around the world. These distributed sites serve as instrumental points of reference in legitimizing this particular style of reasoning.

**Economic Statements**

Economic concerns regarding housing systems have long been prominent features of policy discourses dealing with homelessness. Alberta research reports and policy plans contain numerous references to the hardships of poverty, the affordability of housing, and the costs associated with maintaining an adequate housing continuum. Questions and recommendations relating to funding levels for housing and support programs are prominent and generally take the form of a “gap analysis.”

Over time, a different type of economic statement emerged, focusing on the indirect, or “spillover,” costs of homelessness and the financial implications of different service models. *Calgary’s 10 Year Plan* (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness 2008, 7), for example, points out some of the social and economic costs of homelessness:

> The social costs of homelessness are many and well understood. We know that people with mental illness or addictions get worse when they are unhoused and unable to receive treatment, and they often end up in ambulances and emergency wards. Citizens and visitors to Calgary are often disturbed by seeing so many people experiencing homelessness on our streets. Many don’t feel safe downtown at night, particularly in and near the East Village and along the Bow River pathways. But we’ve also begun to realize that homelessness is exacting a terrible economic toll. Our own analysis shows it costs taxpayers more to manage homelessness than it would to end it. . . .

> If Calgary’s current homelessness growth rate continues into the next decade, we estimate that the number of people homeless on any given night could reach 15,000 and cumulative spending could be more than $9 billion.

Statements such as these constitute the first half of the “business case” concept. This business case has also been taken up by the province and other cities. In a quintessential arrangement of economic statements, the provincial strategy (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2008, 8) enunciates it as follows:
If Alberta continues its current approach of simply managing our current homeless population, it’s estimated that the Alberta government will incur costs of $6.65 billion over 10 years. This is because managing homelessness is extremely costly to taxpayers. The Alberta government incurs direct costs relating to homelessness, such as the emergency shelter system, services for homeless Albertans, and programming to homeless-serving agencies. The government also incurs expenses through indirect costs—that is, spending in other government systems such as the health system, corrections system, and justice system. Homeless Albertans utilize these systems in multiple ways that result in higher costs to the taxpayer.

Citing Steve Pomeroy’s 2005 study for Canada’s National Secretariat on Homelessness, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness (2009, 27) employs this same style of economic reasoning in A Place to Call Home:

Studies across Canada have shown that institutional responses (detention, prison, psychiatric hospitals) for a person experiencing homelessness cost taxpayers between $66,000 and $120,000 each year. Emergency shelter costs average between $13,000 and $42,000 per person, per year. (In Edmonton, an average of $15,000.) The price of supportive housing for that person would be between $35,000 and $40,000 per year.

The last statement here is key: the business case not only accounts for the full societal costs of homelessness; it also employs a comparison of alternatives—in this case, supportive housing. This administrative style of cost-benefit reasoning is a prominent feature of economic statements.

This pattern of concept formation reflects additional shifts in the enunciative environment. First, as in the case of the HF model, it is clear that statements originating from outside Alberta are highly influential, particularly those emanating from the United States. Anecdotes such as the following, from Calgary’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (Calgary Committee to End Homelessness 2008, 44), are common:

Into that atmosphere stepped Mr. Philip Mangano, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Mangano spoke to a September 2006 breakfast meeting arranged by the Calgary Homeless Foundation. At that meeting, Mangano spoke passionately about the economic case for addressing chronic homelessness and about a new 10-year planning model that was showing some remarkable results south of the border.
Edmonton is no different. In *A Place to Call Home*, the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness (2009, 24) observes that “where the Housing First model has already been fully implemented in the United States, evidence is emerging of social and financial benefits.” Judging from these Alberta documents on homelessness, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) significantly influenced the genesis of the business case in Alberta.

Second, underlying the business case concept is the tacit assumption that not all policy is created equal. Within Alberta, the notion of “best practices” governs how the business case concept has been translated and rendered into local models for implementation. “Best practices” connotes the “expectation that an intervention has been successful according to some criteria and that it is better than something else” (Oyén 2009, 1). In Alberta, the translation of the US business case is underpinned by networks of policy learning spanning an ever-expanding evidentiary landscape of HF research in North America.

*Philosophical Statements*

A final statement constituting Alberta’s policy discourse is the philosophical statement. Philosophical statements communicate broad-based, overarching policy themes. In Alberta, a new theme emerged, beginning in 2007. *A Plan for Alberta: Ending Homelessness in 10 Years* (Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness 2008) was distinguished by a clear emphasis on putting a definitive end to homelessness. In a section titled “Setting the Vision,” the report states:

Homelessness is unacceptable in a province as prosperous as Alberta. No Albertan should be forced to live on the streets or remain in a shelter for an extended period of time. Albertans have the resources, the creativity and the compassion to effectively address homelessness in their communities. For a province built on great achievements and innovation, and a people who don’t shy away from big challenges, the Secretariat has set a bold vision for its Plan: Homelessness is ended in Alberta by 2019. (14)

This emerging theme surfaces in the titles of other major policy documents as well. For instance, the titles of plans in Edmonton evolved from *Homelessness in Edmonton: A Call to Action* (Edmonton Task Force on Homelessness 1999), to *Edmonton Community Plan on Housing and Support Services* (Edmonton Joint Planning Council on Housing 2005), to *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton’s 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness* (Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness 2009). A
thematic pattern is discernible, moving from “taking action,” to “managing accordingly,” to “ending homelessness.”

This pattern reflects a fundamental shift in the enunciative environment that was shaped by a number of conditions. First, these thematic choices derive from the coexistence of statistical, biographical, planning, and economic statements: together, they yield a particular theoretical option that was not possible before. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, advocates, policy-makers, and service providers were working within an enunciative environment that afforded a managerial style of reasoning focused on gaps in service. It was through the interrelationships established between new ways of representing homeless populations, portraying their lives, planning interventions, and rationalizing costs and benefits that previous policy approaches became subject to critique as “managerial” in a pejorative sense. The very opportunity to juxtapose “ending homelessness” with “managing homelessness” is itself a product of these emergent relations. The philosophical statement is the mode in which these strategic contrasts emerge.

### Table 12.1. The discourse of “ending homelessness”

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<tr>
<th>Rules of formation</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objects</td>
<td>Statistical</td>
<td>Homeless populations</td>
<td>Data management systems</td>
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<td>Mode of enunciation</td>
<td>Biographical</td>
<td>Success stories</td>
<td>Professional case management</td>
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<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Housing First</td>
<td>Evaluation studies</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
<td>Business case</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Philosophical</td>
<td>Ending homelessness</td>
<td>Quasi-public planning process</td>
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In summary, a close examination of the shifts in Alberta’s policy discourse reveals a significantly modified discursive formation (see table 12.1). The statements discussed above—statistical, biographical, planning, economic, and philosophical—are insinuated in the formation of new objects (a homeless population) and speaking positions (“success stories”), and they are mobilized together to form novel concepts (“Housing First” and the “business case”) and
strategic possibilities (‘managing homelessness’ versus ‘ending homelessness’). These statements, along with their conditions, constitute a renovated enunciative environment (or ‘distribution of the sensible’) for homelessness policy-making in the province, one in which it becomes possible to declare ‘the end of homelessness.’

A Refashioned Police Order

Following Rancière (1999), this enunciative environment can be theoretically interpreted as a new distribution of the sensible and, by extension, a refashioned police order. Policing encompasses the configuration of a perceptible field that functions as the basis for governing understood in the widest possible sense. As Dikeç (2005, 19) states:

The police, therefore, is both a principle of distribution and an apparatus of administration, which relies on a symbolically constituted organization of social space, an organization that becomes the basis of and for governance. Thus, the essence of the police is not repression but distribution—distribution of places, people, names, functions, authorities, activities, and so on—and the normalization of this distribution.

“Ending homelessness,” therefore, can be taken as a police order, a mode of perceiving predicated upon the identification of a whole (a homeless population) and the distribution of parts (homeless individuals) according to qualifications (recently homeless, periodically homeless, and chronically homeless), competencies (mental illness, substance use problems), and places (street, shelter, independent housing).

In tracing the discursive turn toward “ending homelessness,” we are left with a clearer picture of Alberta’s reorganized police order. This enunciative environment is constituted by the following:

- Evolving modes of classifying and categorizing homeless people (statistical statements);
- The substitution of new speaking positions, such as the “success story,” from which homeless voices are heard (biographical statements);
- The introduction of new styles of reasoning such as “housing first” (planning statements) and the “business case” (economic statements);
- The deployment of new modes of critique (philosophical statements).
Within this new perceptual field, the homeless appear as a governable object of a different sort—a measurable population having particular social characteristics, personal problems, service utilization rates, and economic costs. As a network of statements that transform what can be said about, and done to, the homeless, the discourse of “ending homelessness” supplies a new police order for targeting the subpopulation representing the greatest costs—the chronically homeless.

It is vital to recognize that “ending homelessness,” as a discourse and police order, is co-emergent with a number of enunciative conditions. For instance, statistical statements and the formation of homeless populations co-emerged with the consolidation of social research units, data-gathering activities, and increasingly complex data management and information systems. Biographical statements and the new speaking positions from which they emanate co-emerged with the formation of professionalized client-management systems. Planning statements and economic statements, along with the concepts of “Housing First” and the “business case,” co-emerged with distended policy networks connecting sites of experimentation and evaluation around the world. Finally, philosophical statements, and thematic distinctions between “managing” and “ending” homelessness, co-emerged with technocratic public policymaking processes. The public expression of the goal of “ending homelessness” reflects not only a significant transformation in Alberta’s policy discourse but also a reconfiguration of Alberta’s institutional landscape. This marks a significant event with implications for democracy in the province.

(Post)Democracy in Alberta?

Drawing on Rancière’s theoretical framework, Erik Swyngedouw (2009, 605) usefully describes the intrinsic link between politics and equality: “Politics is the arena where the principle of equality is tested in the face of a wrong experienced by ‘those who have no part.’ Equality is thereby axiomatically given and presupposed rather than an idealized-normative condition to move towards.” Swyngedouw goes on to emphasize that equality is the necessary precondition of democracy:

In other words, equality is the very premise upon which a democratic politics is constituted; it opens up the space of the political through the testing of a wrong that subverts equality. Equality is, therefore, not a sociologically verifiable concept or procedure that permits opening a policy arena which
will remedy the observed inequalities, but the ontologically given condition of democracy.

Distinguishing between “the police” and “politics”—and more specifically, between the “policing of homelessness” and the “politics of homelessness”—is useful when considering the democratic implications of Alberta’s recent policy shift. Rancière’s (1999) theoretical framework gives us pause when interpreting policy changes in Alberta. Housing First (HF), as a historical event, can be interpreted as more democratic than the treatment first (TF) approach in that HF challenges the hierarchy (i.e., deserving versus undeserving) that precludes access to housing under the TF model. In the HF model, equality (specifically in terms of the right to housing) is a presupposed given rather than a condition to move toward. In this sense, HF can be read as an expression of the politics of homelessness.

While recognizing this democratic impulse, it is hard to dismiss the wider characteristics of “ending homelessness” as a new police regime. Here, “ending homelessness” can be read as an economically rationalized, technocratic mode of consensual governing where power is centred outside of democratic accountability in the hands of experts and elites who target expensive subpopulations to minimize their “spillover” costs. Moreover, this new discursive formation circumvents systemic hierarchies in the housing system that precipitate housing crises. Thus, while taking extraordinary steps to house the chronically homeless, this regime normalizes housing inequality. This approach could be interpreted as an attempt to manage inherent contradictions in the housing system while keeping it tightly fastened to the marketplace.

What will authorities make of housing problems in 2019, after “homelessness” has been “eradicated”? In other words, what form will the politics of homelessness take after the supposed end of homelessness? If politics is a mode of action that enacts dissensus, then what form can politics take in the face of political consensus that a wrong no longer exists? In light of the inequalities that will still exist in the housing system, taking this policy turn—“ending homelessness”—at its word forecloses upon the properly political; it replaces dissensus with consensus, and in doing so, it imposes a type of closure on questions relating to housing justice. Paradoxically, therefore, “ending homelessness” can be read as a postdemocratic moment in the province.

In conclusion, one theoretical argument developed in this chapter is that democracy is stifled when issues of equality are subsumed within the realm of the police and out of the reach of democratic struggle. It is the stifling of
dissensus through consensual practices that forecloses upon democratic action. If one accepts Rancière’s definition of politics, then it is difficult to read Alberta’s shift toward “ending homelessness” as a democratic move. While these policy developments have undoubtedly expanded access to housing and services for a subset of homeless people, they also constitute a strategy to end a specific type of homelessness (i.e., chronic homelessness) rendered perceptible in terms of economic spillover costs. Alberta’s policy turn risks silencing conversations about homelessness as an expression of social injustice. The Alberta government’s recent policy response to homelessness nicely illustrates the “paradox of plenty” as it relates to democracy: oil wealth provides states with extraordinary abilities to mute the social dissension and discord that is itself symptomatic of systemic social inequalities.

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