

This chapter considers the notions of political space and representation, and their connections, in the light of recent theoretical debates and direct political interventions. It highlights the accounts of political space and representation offered by Ernesto Laclau on the one hand, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the other. Through a consideration of UK Uncut and Occupy, it argues that while both accounts capture elements of contemporary developments, the former is more convincing.

### **The space of democratic politics: an outline**

This section outlines a necessarily schematic and brief historical overview of the space of politics vis-à-vis democracy. Its express purpose is to provide historical contextualisation of recent developments, and not to enter debates or engage with the extant literature in this field.

In ancient Athens, democracy and space were clearly delineated: politics had its own *topos*, and that *topos* was the Assembly. Everywhere else was considered to be the site of non-politics, and was populated by non-politicians – slaves, women, non-natives, minors. In the Assembly, politics occurred, and it proceeded dialogically, polylogically. The Assembly was the site where democratic discussion and debate was conducted by the *demos*. The scope of politics in Athens was widespread, its

consideration and implementation of issues was unrestricted within its boundaries, and every issue was subordinated to the consideration, deliberation and decision of the *demos*. There were two spatial supplements to the Assembly: the democratic institutional structure – the Council, Committee, Courts, and so on – which accompanied the Assembly throughout the history of Athenian democracy;<sup>1</sup> and an additional spatial extension that was temporal, the *agora*. This served as a supplementary discursive space in which issues were identified and discussed, and positions negotiated and planned.

In the modern period, representative democracy was instituted, starting with the American revolution in the late eighteenth century. These American revolutionaries did not favour democracy, and suggested an alternative to the dominant conception of political organization favoured by political philosophy. This proposed a threefold classification of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. To this, these American revolutionaries added a fourth: representation.<sup>2</sup> They differentiated representation from democracy because they were fully aware that politics proceeds differently under these two different forms of organization; they required different spaces in which politics could be conducted.

---

<sup>1</sup> This institutional structure is well illustrated by Figure 1.1 in Held (2006: 18).

<sup>2</sup> This fourfold classification is made by, among others, Thomas Paine in chapter 3 of *The Rights of Man*, and James Madison in number 10 of *The Federalist Papers*.

Representation – now widely known as representative democracy – sought to expand the space of politics, before quickly enclosing it. It seized power from the ‘absolute’ monarch on behalf of the people, and enclosed it within parliament – a term derived from the French *parler*, to speak, and has come to be associated with the place of (political) discussion (by representatives) – and its related institutions. It sought to take care of politics, to unburden politics from the *demos*. In order to differentiate representative democracy from other forms of representation – such as absolutism – there was a temporal incursion into this enclosure of political space by representatives, when every four or five years the represented chose and elected their representatives. This temporal incursion raises the questions of how and where the represented were to exercise their choice. The liberal utopia of the expanding and benevolent private sphere conceived and promoted the mediation of the electorate via the media into this private sphere. This was done first through newspapers, and then through broadcast media forms such as newsreels, radio and television.

This liberal utopian account of political space came under challenge throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Political parties solidified as the key mechanisms of representation and, with the extension of the franchise and the rise of collectivism and labour, the phenomena of political meetings and related events steadily developed, expanding the space and

opportunity for political debate to be aired and engaged with. This process was halted and turned into reverse during the last third of the twentieth century, as a result of technological developments within the broadcast media, and the increasing ascendancy of neoliberalism which rejected any intrusion of the public sphere, while trumping notions of individualism and the sanctity of the private sphere.

Marx and much subsequent Marxist theory and practice also rejected this account, by identifying class conflict as the motor of history. This conflict occurred at the point of production – at the economic level – and all other levels, including politics, were determined by this according to the base-superstructure model. The accounts of both Laclau and Negri originated in the Marxist tradition, which they have subsequently adapted and developed. It is to these two theorists' consideration of political space, representation and their combination that we now turn.

### **Laclau, political spaces and representations**

The concept of representation has been a prominent feature of Laclau's thought, whereas that of political space has not received extensive consideration. This section maintains that there is, however, an overlap between these two concepts, and I will argue in the final section that Laclau's theorisation of them illuminates

recent political practice. This section begins by focusing on the unexamined notion of political space in Laclau.

Laclau's vocabulary is littered with spatial metaphors and related terminology. These include 'neutral terrain', 'new political frontiers', 'territory', 'anchorage', 'fault', 'fissure', 'horizon', 'ground', 'topography of the social', 'field of discursivity', among others. These terms are not deployed to refer to discrete objects in an empirical manner, but are conceptual tools used to embellish Laclau's theoretical analysis of politics.

This analysis is premised upon a critique of both Marxist and liberal accounts of space. Laclau's theoretical trajectory to post-Marxism involves an extensive and increasing critique of, and distancing from, Marxism and, in particular, its theorisation of essentialist notions of class, which positioned economic categories in a precise location in space to which politics was subordinated. Liberalism viewed space through the prism of the public-private distinction in a zero-sum manner, and sought to protect and expand the latter at the expense of the former. Laclau's critique of liberalism's political spatial theorisation is outlined in his consideration of, and comparison with, the approach of Richard Rorty (Laclau 1996b). For Rorty and other liberals, the public is conceived of as a singular space, and the boundary between the public and private is rigid. Laclau's understanding of democratic societies – and their democratisation – challenges both these

premises: 'the condition for a democratic society is that these public spaces have to be plural: a democratic society is, of course, incompatible with the existence of only one public space. What we should have is a multiple 'civic republicanism'.' (Laclau 1996b: 120)

This amounts to both a pluralisation and a complexification of political space, but one that should not be understood as the inauguration of an undifferentiated or *smooth space*.<sup>3</sup> Rather, this points to what Laclau refers to as 'the unevenness of the social'. This allows for the continuation of what liberals regard as public space, but this is supplemented by alternative – and perhaps even competing – sites: 'the liberal institutions – parliament, elections, divisions of power – are maintained, but these are one public space, not *the* public space.' (Laclau 1996b: 120)

It is not merely that the public/private distinction is undermined and blurred, but that this spatial multiplication also severs and complexifies the divide between society and politics. With the modern age and the inauguration of the democratic revolution, politics is no longer located within a separate and distinct sphere within society, but begins to invest the entirety of the social:

---

<sup>3</sup> The notion of smooth space was initiated by Deleuze and Guattari, and will be considered in the ensuing section on Hardt and Negri. It is not merely that the social is differentially structured by the increasing encroachment of the political for Laclau, but also that not everything within the social is political. This is due to residual factors and sedimented practices that predate the democratic revolution: '[n]ot everything in society is political, because we have many sedimented social forms which has blurred the traces of their original political institution.' (Laclau 2005: 153)

the overdetermination of effects linked to the democratic revolution begins to displace the line of demarcation between the public and the private and to *politicize* social relations ... Thus what has been exploded is the idea and the reality itself of a unique space of constitution of the political. What we are witnessing is ... a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces. (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 181)

This theorisation, in turn, entails a shift in political strategy, best described by the distinction Laclau forges between 'capturing the state' (as advocated by Lenin) and 'becoming-State' (as advocated by Gramsci). Laclau favours the latter over the former:

The multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point are, then, preconditions of every truly democratic transformation of society ... This requires the autonomization of the spheres of struggle and the multiplication of political spaces, which is incompatible with the concentration of power and knowledge that classic Jacobinism and its different socialist variants imply. (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 178)

This plurality, pluralisation and complexification of political space is linked to the poststructuralist notions of the constitutive outside (originally conceived by Derrida) and dislocation. The former problematises any conceptualisation that considers spaces to

be discrete, readily identifiable and self-contained entities:

'[h]eterogeneity inhabits the very heart of a homogeneous space ...

The opaqueness of an irretrievable 'outside' will always tarnish the very categories that define the 'inside'.' (Laclau 2005: 152) Laclau is referring to the structure itself in this comment, but it follows that different political spaces continually adapt to 'tarnish' those outside through articulatory processes. Put another way, such spaces are never purely self-contained – they are never a pure particularity – but, rather, attempt to establish relations with other political spaces and directly engage in the social through articulation; the choice is not to remain silent, but to intervene directly in political debates.

Laclau uses dislocation to theorize a decentred structure constituted by antagonistic forces:

That is what is meant by a decentred structure: not just the *absence* of a centre but the *practice of decentring* through antagonism ... centres can exist only because the structure is decentred ... in as far as the structure is dislocated, the possibility of *centres* emerges: the response to the dislocation of the structure will be its recomposition around particular nodal points of articulation by the various antagonistic forces. (Laclau 1990 40)

This dislocation and decentring leading to the diffusion of the centre into centres results in the extension and/or intensification of politics: the multiplication of these centres signifies the expansion

of sites on which politics occurs, leading to a society that is more political.

This decentring and expansion of political space is, in turn for Laclau, akin to the temporalization of space. This does not amount to the eradication of space but, rather, its complexification and the impossibility of its mediation. Laclau conceives pre-modern peasant communities as 'simple' spaces shorn of the intrusion of temporality, and governed by cyclicity and repetition. 'The representation of time as a cyclical succession, common in peasant communities, is in this sense a reduction of time to space.' (Laclau 1990: 42) In contrast, space in dislocated modern societies is infected by politics, that is, time: 'dislocation is the very form of temporality.' (Laclau 1990: 41) Such a consideration of time and space is in line with Laclau's account of contingency and necessity: these are not to be considered as mutually exclusive, as the latter categories operate within the former in dislocated structures. We can thus speak of contingency *within* necessity, and time *within* space. 'There is a temporalization of spaces or a widening of the field of the possible, but this takes place in a *determinate* situation.' (Laclau 1990: 43)

Laclau also considers this 'pure spatiality' to be one from which myth is entirely absent:

A society from which myth was radically excluded would be either an entirely 'spatial' and 'objective' society – where any dislocation had been banished ... – or one in which dislocations lacked any space for representation and transcendence. In other words, either cemetery or the lunatic asylum. (Laclau 1990: 67)

It is this intrusion of myth into space that constitutes the politicization of that 'pure space', as '[p]olitics only exists insofar as the spatial eludes us.' (Laclau 1990: 68) As a result of the scientific revolution and the development of positivism, myth was increasingly conceived to have been eliminated from the modern world. Laclau challenges this view, and his critical – though by no means unsympathetic – account of modernity involves the reinsertion of myth into the contemporary world.

The disruption of space through politics is achieved by this insertion of myth into the field of objectivity, or through the antagonistic attempt to represent that space. Representation, as a consequence, becomes unavoidable and integral to politics:

The constitutive role of representation in the formation of the will, which was partly concealed in more stable societies, now becomes fully visible ... This means that we cannot escape the framework of representative processes, and that democratic alternatives must be constructed that multiply the points from and around which representation operates rather than attempt to limit its scope and area of operation. (Laclau 1996a: 99)

Laclau, then, conceives representation in a positive light – in stark contrast to Hardt and Negri, as we will see in the next section – and it is to a consideration of Laclau’s account of representation that attention now turns.

Initially in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe distance themselves from the notion of representation in favour of that of articulation. They conceive of representation as the representation of interests, in which there is a ‘transparent’ relationship between the representative and those they represent, whereby the former accurately identifies and promotes the interests of the latter. This presupposes that the represented possess fully-fledged and fixed identities that the representative can accurately reflect in relevant fora. Such ‘transparent’ relationships are no longer valid, for Laclau and Mouffe, in those modern and contemporary societies characterised by dislocation and hegemony. Instead, such relationships are affected by the process of articulation, which transforms the field and contributes towards the construction of the identities of always-incomplete subjects. This conceptualization, ‘replaces the principle of representation with that of *articulation*. Unity between these agents is then not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political construction and struggle.’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001: 65)

Following on from his collaboration with Mouffe, Laclau recuperates the concept of representation, and rephrases his earlier account as one that is not between representation and articulation but, rather, one that is between mediation and articulation. Mediation here refers to a correspondence between the full identities of the represented and representative, much the same as realism portrays a direct correspondence between a word and a thing. Representation in Laclau's analysis becomes an expanding feature of hegemonic societies, and is aligned with the represented-representative relationship. Laclau's solo work is consistent in portraying representation as the '*fictio iuris*' that someone is present and stands in for someone else who is absent (Laclau 1990 38-9, 1996 97-8). According to the terminology just considered, this is always an articulation (which, for Laclau, is synonymous with *representation*), not a mediation (which, for Laclau, is synonymous with *presentation*). 'If the representative and the represented constitute the same and single will, the 're-' of representation disappears since the same will is present in two different places.' (Laclau 1990: 38-9)

He identifies two dual features of this process. In the first place, there is a spatial disparity between the place in which the represented-representative relation is cemented (an electoral campaign, for example), and the place in which the representative negotiates policy decisions with other representatives (a

parliament). These two different places are not only structurally and procedurally different but also comprise different techniques and tactics in order to persuade other members (Laclau 1996: 98, 2000: 212). The second duality refers to the two-way process between the represented and the representative. In contrast to Habermas, who conceives of a one-way movement whereby the represented transmits their will which dialogically converges on the representative, Laclau insists there is a double movement in will formation between represented and representative. (The fascistic conception, on the other hand, is of a one-way movement in the opposite direction, whereby the representative constitutes and transmits the will of those he represents.) Thus, Laclau writes:

The function of the representative is not simply to transmit the will of those he represents, but to give credibility to that will in a milieu different from the one in which it was originally constituted ... It is in the nature of representation that the representative is not merely a passive agent, but has to add something to the interest he represents. This addition, in turn, is reflected in the identity of those represented ... Thus, representation is a two-way process. (Laclau 2005: 158)

A society devoid of the process of representation, for Laclau, is one that is fully emancipated. Such a society is also characterised by the eclipse of power relations and, as such, Laclau draws a direct connection between power and representation. Power and

representation, then, are signs of not only a society that is partially emancipated, but of one that lacks a foundational act that could usher in a fully emancipated society. In rejecting full emancipation, Laclau delineates his project from those modern accounts that attempted to inaugurate such a fully emancipated society. Power and representation increase in importance due to 'the unevenness of the social' in contemporary complex societies. This follows directly on from the fragmentation of the social, which prompts the need to construct collective identities. The intensification of politics in such societies corresponds to an increasing role for representation. When speaking of the represented and representative, Laclau writes, 'the gap between the two terms of this duality will necessarily increase in present-day societies and that the role of the 'representatives' will be ever more central and constitutive.' (Laclau 1996: 100) This quotation comes from a book entitled *Emancipation(s)*. Laclau presents this in the plural form to announce the impossibility of a fully emancipated society, that is, emancipation, but the continuing efficacy of partial emancipations. He does not regard this as a cause for despair but, rather, one that must be met by a pluralising strategy seeking emancipations, as opposed to emancipation.

In a similar manner, the alternative to this failure of emancipation is not representation but, rather, representations.

Thus, we can speak of representations in the plural, rather than representation in the singular. This necessarily entails the spatial expansion of the process of representation, and also indicates that representations will always be partial ones. 'What about representability?', Laclau asks. 'It is clear that if there is no rational ground of the social, total representability is impossible. But in that case, we could speak of 'partial' representations.' (Laclau 1996a: 103) This expansion of representations challenges the ongoing growth of the political party, which witnessed an impressive rise during the earlier years of modernity and representative democracy. The era of the political party's growth was one based on distinct parties transparently mediating the interests of the mediated. The eclipse of mediation and rise of representations does not spell the death knell of the political party, however, but rather their supplementation by alternative political forms (Laclau 1990: 230-1). When Laclau formulated this in the last decades of the twentieth century, 'new social movements' provided this supplementation, but the final section argues that recent political developments – such as Occupy and UK Uncut – serve this supplementary function in the contemporary political scene.

A brief comment must be stated regarding the central thrust of Laclau's theory, and regarding the consideration of representations and partial representations. The new situation means that strategically, these can never remain as partialities,

because to do so would condemn them to irrelevance. It would not so much render them incommunicable, as to extract them from the sphere of articulation. Instead, these partial representations should seek to coalesce with others into an equivalential chain. The elaboration of concepts such as 'chain of equivalence' (Laclau 2005: 73-88, 129-132; Laclau and Mouffe: 127-134) – along with related ones such as 'empty signifiers' (Laclau 1996a: 36-46) – is the core concern of Laclau's intervention in, and contribution to, political theory. In the formation of such an equivalential chain, the chain itself constitutes the construction of something new, and the chain itself becomes the representative of its partial representations. We can thus refer to the relationship between the equivalential chain and its partial representations as 'the representation of representations'. It is the role of this 'representation of representations' that constitutes the primary point of difference between Laclau on the one hand, and Hardt and Negri on the other. The following quotation outlines this divide:

The constitution of a 'people' requires an internal complexity which is given by the plurality of the demands that form the equivalential chain. This is the dimension of radical heterogeneity, because nothing in those demands, individually considered, announces a 'manifest destiny' by which they should tend to coalesce into any kind of unity – nothing in them anticipates that they should constitute a chain. That is what makes the homogenizing moment of the empty signifier

necessary. Without this moment, there would be no equivalential chain, so the homogenizing function of the empty signifier constitutes the chain and, at the same time, represents it ... The conclusion is clear: any popular identity has an inner structure which is essentially representative. (Laclau 2005: 162-3)

The allusion to 'manifest destiny' in this quotation is an implicit reference to the account proposed by Hardt and Negri, which seeks to resist any return to a politics based around those 'homogenizing moments' provided by an equivalential chain. It is to a consideration of their account of politics that we now focus on.

### **Undifferentiated space and non-representational politics**

Antonio Negri's work devotes more attention to temporality than spatiality (Negri 1999, 2003). One of his most stimulating suggestions in this regard is his alignment of the French Revolutionary period with time, and the American Revolution with space, in his most important solo book, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Yet, despite this primary focus on temporality, a theorisation of political space is an integral aspect of Negri's account of contemporary politics and philosophy.

The core development occurred in the early 1970s with the shift from *operaismo* to *autonomia*. Accompanying this shift were two transformations in Negri's theorization that has continued to

imbricate his account, one at the level of social analysis, the other with reference to political organization. In terms of social analysis, *operaismo* was committed to a 'collaborative research project' that aimed to analyse the 'class composition' of the working class. Negri and *operaismo* regarded post-war Italian society to have become simplified, bifurcated into the two core classes of capitalism. The *operaismo* investigation into the proletariat's class composition constituted a consideration of the working class as a pure and distinct entity, shorn of any relationship with either capital or 'representative' institutions, such as political parties (predominantly, the PCI) and trade unions. Negri provided his analysis of the workers' class composition in an important and influential essay entitled *Keynes and the capitalist theory of the state post-1929* (1968). In this, Negri differentiates between the *professional worker* and the *mass worker*. The former is identified to the period between the middle of the nineteenth century and the twin crises of capitalism of the early twentieth century, caused by the Russian Revolution and the Wall Street Crash. The engineer was the exemplar of the *professional worker*, and this component exercised leadership over the remainder of the working class in the factory, akin to the vanguard element provided by the Leninist party. Negri regards that these twin crises forced capitalism to reorganize in order to avert the threat posed by the sway of the *professional worker*. Their response was Fordism, Taylorism and

Keynesianism, which ushered in the era of the *mass worker*, a relatively undifferentiated composition, characterised by semi-skilled as opposed to specialised labour, and its mass activity both in the realms of production and consumption. The spatial focus of Negri's analysis, therefore, converges on the industrial zones, which were expanding both in number and scale. This concentration identifies the large-scale factory as the core space of politics, to which other levels (such as parliament) were subordinated.

Soon after writing this essay, Negri regards that the upheavals of 1968 and the subsequent stagflation provoked by the oil crises leads to the decomposition of the *mass worker*, and its replacement by the *social* or *socialized worker*.<sup>4</sup> This shift is aligned with a spatial transformation with fundamental consequences for social analysis. The *topos* of both the *professional worker* and the *mass worker* had been confined to the four walls of the factory. The *topos* of the *social worker*, by contrast, explodes these boundaries, and invests the entire realm of society. With this shift, the crucial factors of production, exploitation and conflict are no longer restricted to the realm of the factory, and their relocation expands considerably as they spread throughout society. With this broadening of locus, attention shifts from an exclusive focus on the

---

<sup>4</sup> Negri theorises the breakdown of Keynesianism – and its key figure, the *mass worker* – in two articles entitled Reformism and restructuration: terrorism of the state-as-factory command (Negri 1974a), and Theses on the crisis: the working class multinational (Negri 1974b). In these articles, Negri refers to the *mass worker's* successor as the *multinational worker*, but subsequently amended this to the *social* or *socialized worker*. This replacement first occurs in Archaeology and project: the mass worker and the social worker (Negri 1982).

worker in the factory – the industrial labour-force – to a wider gaze throughout society, involving other subordinated and marginalised groups including women, students, migrants (especially those emigrating from the south to the north of Italy) and the unemployed. In other words, while the *mass worker* features exclusively in the realm of production, the *social worker* cuts across the divide between production and reproduction. Negri's identification of the *social worker* is informed by a distinction Marx forged between *formal subsumption* and *real subsumption* in the *Grundrisse* (1993). The latter signifies the moment when the *formal subsumption* of capital is surpassed, and the entirety of society is subsumed under the rule and logic of capital.

With these transformations, then, there is a shift from a clearly delineated locus of political space in the factory, to one that enlarges throughout the entire realm of the social, such that the space of politics becomes undifferentiated. The *social worker* is the precursor to, and bears many of the features of, the multitude, the political subject of Negri's collaborative project with Michael Hardt. Their collaboration conceives spatiality in a similarly undifferentiated manner, and in *Empire*, they deploy three concepts associated with Gilles Deleuze to illustrate this absence of differentiation: the society of control, smooth space and deterritorialization. The society of control is contrasted with and succeeds Foucault's disciplinary society. Disciplinarity is associated with the array of institutions

(prisons, asylums, hospitals, barracks, and so on) that Foucault investigated, which all share with the factory the notion of enclosure. Similar to Negri's earlier theorisation of the shift from the factory to society, in the society of control these walls break down, not in order to eliminate discipline but, rather, to disseminate control throughout society (Hardt and Negri 2000: 329-330). The Deleuzian notion of smooth space was controversially adopted by Hardt and Negri in *Empire* to express the disintegration of the defunct theoretical distinction between first, second and third worlds, and to support their characterisation of empire as decentred and deterritorialized. 'The space of imperial sovereignty ... is smooth ... In this smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power – it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a non-place.' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 190)<sup>5</sup> While presenting empire as a deterritorialized space, devoid of an outside, they specifically align the notion of deterritorialization with communication:

sovereignty seems to be subordinated to communication – or actually, sovereignty is articulated through communications systems ... The deterritorializing capacities of communication are unique:

---

<sup>5</sup> There is also a sub-section entitled A smooth world, where Hardt and Negri expand on this (Hardt and Negri 2000: 332-60). This concept received much critical attention in the commentaries on *Empire*, prompting Hardt and Negri to distance themselves from it in *Commonwealth*: 'Recognizing that imperialism is over and a new imperial world is materializing does not in any way imply the end or even a lessening of division and hierarchy between and within societies. The claim by some proponents of capitalist globalization that the world is becoming "flat", that the global economy is becoming one smooth space ... is pure ideological mystification' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 228).

communication ... attacks the very possibility of linking an order to a space. It imposes a continuous and complex circulation of signs. Deterritorialization is the primary force and circulation the form through which social communication manifests itself ... The space of communication is completely deterritorialized. (Hardt and Negri 2000: 346-7)

This deterritorialization of space through communication bears similarities with Laclau's account of incomplete subjects temporarily supplemented by articulatory practices, but such *logics of difference*, are theorized alongside *logics of equivalence* producing the equivalential chain in Laclau. This provides a more convincing account of the role of communication and its effects on political space than the notion of undifferentiated – or smooth – space theorised by Hardt and Negri.

In *Commonwealth*, they clarify this spatial undifferentiation, albeit in a minor way. As opposed to their earlier claim that politics was diffused throughout the entire realm of the social, Hardt and Negri now locate the site of the common to the metropolis. 'The metropolis is the site of biopolitical production because it is the space of the common, of people living together, sharing resources, communicating, exchanging goods and ideas.' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 250) They regard there to be two key qualities that define the metropolis, firstly this immersion in the common, and secondly, 'the unpredictable, aleatory encounter or, rather, the encounter

with alterity.’ (Hardt and Negri 2009: 252) These two qualities are somewhat schematic and under-theorised, especially as they are clearly referring to the biopolitical activity of the multitude as opposed to a compelling account of the political spaces through which the multitude’s nemesis, empire, operates. It is certainly the case that Hardt and Negri formulated a rich account of the layers and level of imperial sovereignty in *Empire*, but this becomes difficult to integrate with other aspects of their theory, most notably, that of smooth space and deterritorialization. This lack of clarity is reinforced by their eventual rejection of the notion of smooth space, without indicating how this rejection affects other concepts (such as the contrast between the ‘horizontal’ struggles of modernity and the ‘vertical’ struggles of postmodernity). Might Hardt and Negri’s rejection of smooth space leave a *topos* characterized by ‘the unevenness of the social’, as theorized by Laclau?

The second theoretical transformation Negri developed with the move from *operaismo* to *autonomia* in the 1970s occurred in political organization. The PCI was the most successful communist party in post-war Western Europe. This success, alongside its strategy of pursuing class alliances through its allegiance to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, created a gap on the left of the political spectrum which *operaismo* and *autonomia* occupied. *Operaismo*’s response was to replicate the traditional hierarchical

party structures associated with communist and socialist parties. Structurally, Leninist principles such as vanguard, discipline and organization suffused the party form of *operaismo*. Such Leninist organizational principles were abandoned with the emergence of *autonomia*. One of *autonomia's* aims was to abolish any remaining hierarchies *within* the working class, and they adopted a horizontal organizational – as opposed to a vertical or hierarchical – form in order to achieve this. *Autonomia*, then, was effectively a political party characterised by a ‘non-party’ form, an ‘organization’ without hierarchies aiming to dissolve hierarchies in the working class, in which means become ends. Rather than having representatives, mediating forces or even delegating responsibility, Negri thought the working class should seize control of its own internal organization: ‘there can be no working class conception of the party unless it is a working class desire for reappropriation of organization.’ (Negri 1974c: 61) With this, the national focus and hierarchical party structure of *operaismo* turns in favour of local initiative and the autonomous (non)organization of *autonomia*. The intention is for the latter to entirely replace the former. The space of politics, as a consequence, ceases to be clearly delineable, and becomes more diffused throughout the realm of the social. This is a logic that points towards a smooth space.

Hardt and Negri's account of representation is related to this move away from hierarchical party structures. They consistently

cast representation in a negative light and seek to develop a politics for the multitude shorn of any representational features. They express the 'two modernities' through a variety of dichotomies: sovereignty versus democracy; transcendence versus immanence; the people versus the multitude; Hobbes versus Spinoza; and, the projects of Hobbes, Hegel and Rousseau versus those of Machiavelli, Spinoza and Marx. In this explication of the two modernities, representation is one of the key weapons of sovereignty. For Hardt and Negri, Hobbes provides the foundation for modern accounts of sovereignty, and Hobbes conceives that sovereignty displays two key features: transcendence and representation (Hardt and Negri 2000: 84). Irrespective of whether the notion of representation is dressed up in democratic clothing – as is the case with Rousseau's general will – it ultimately establishes a transcendental schema, whereby the members of the political community are entirely subordinated to the One that secures their representation – or, in Rousseau's terminology, whereby the will of all is abandoned in favour of the general will. 'Rousseau's notion of direct representation is distorted and ultimately overwhelmed by the representation of the totality that is necessarily linked to it – and this is perfectly compatible with the Hobbesian notion of representation.' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 85)

Hardt and Negri regard that the two themes of this chapter – political space and representation – are brought together by

Hobbes. They explicitly align Hobbes's project of sovereignty with spatiality: 'Hobbes establishes the spatial metaphor of sovereignty for all modern political thought in his unitary Leviathan that rises above and overarches society and the multitude. The sovereign is the surplus of power that serves to resolve or defer the crisis of modernity.' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 325) In other words, sovereignty constitutes the delineation of a territorial space, and simultaneously unifies a political space in the figure of a Leviathan which controls and orders that wider territory. That control operates through representation, whereby the decision(s) of the sovereign represents the will of the people.

In *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, Hardt and Negri characterize representation as a 'disjunctive synthesis' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 241—4). It is a disjunctive synthesis because it simultaneously connects and separates. The connection would be the 'moment' of sovereignty initiated by the social contract or, in Hobbes' terminology, the transformation of a multitude into a people. The separation occurs immediately after this foundational moment, and is ongoing thereafter. It comprises the separation of the sovereign from the people such that he can direct the latter, and the establishment of a hierarchical polity. Hardt and Negri state, 'we can recognize the essence of representation: it connects the citizens to government and at the same time separates them from it. The new science is based on this

disjunctive synthesis.’ (Hardt and Negri 2004: 244) Representation, thus, in Hardt and Negri is inevitably an overarching strategy that enables sovereignty to achieve transcendence. There are never representations in the plural according to Hardt and Negri; the concept of representation is necessarily associated with that of the transcendent One.

While this account of representation is readily comprehensible, it throws up difficulties when it is applied to contemporary political developments. Specifically, it becomes difficult to appreciate what a politics devoid of representation – a non- or anti-representational form of politics – would constitute. For Laclau, this attempt to disassociate representation – and, hence, power – from politics would constitute its eclipse. Hardt and Negri argue that a strategy celebrating withdrawal, exodus and flight constitute this alternative to representation. But this fails to address how these would be articulated or, put another way, how a strategy of withdrawal would be expressed in a non-representational form within a context in which representation is a key political process. Laclau responds to *Empire* in an important article entitled Can immanence explain social struggles? (Laclau 2004). In this, he attacks Hardt and Negri for imagining that the multitude will coalesce spontaneously, and insists that any political transformation occurs through a political project characterized by articulation. Although they don’t directly acknowledge this, Hardt and Negri have

taken this criticism on board, as they have abandoned certain conceptual features associated with a politics of spontaneity. Most prominent here is what they termed 'the incommunicability of struggles' in *Empire*, in which the struggles of the multitude against empire could never coalesce because the local conditions – their singularity – were untranslatable (Hardt and Negri 2000: 52-9).<sup>6</sup>

The thesis that struggles are incommunicable has been superseded by the delineation between the 'always-already' ontological multitude and the 'not-yet' political multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004: 219-27) and the project to recognize, reappropriate and produce the common that was the pivotal goal of *Commonwealth*. They believe that the common can be articulated through the horizontal distributed network that pertains to the multitude. The recent rise and proliferation of social media certainly points in this direction, but in *Declaration* they also voice clear concerns with this form. They note that, 'control over information and communication networks have created *the mediatized*' and also recognize that horizontal decision-making is 'often extraordinarily slow'. (Hardt and

---

<sup>6</sup> The incommunicability thesis was grounded on the distinction between struggles in modernity and those in postmodernity. The former were 'horizontal' in that they sought to forge connections both between different organizations and over time in order to unite, and ultimately overpower, domination and exploitation. The latter, by contrast, erupted violently and leapt up to pose a singular and 'vertical' challenge to empire: 'what the struggles have lost in extension, duration and communicability they have gained in intensity.' (Hardt and Negri 2000: 54) In *Commonwealth*, there is no reference to postmodernity as an historical epoch that succeeds modernity. Instead, the contemporary period is still characterized as modernity, but one in which there are 'two modernities', the major line of modernity, and the minor line of alter-modernity (Hardt and Negri 2009: 67-128).

Negri 2012). This follows on, in turn, from their account of empire as a networked form. Negri's methodological approach has often been to isolate and identify tendencies and, with this issue, Hardt and Negri's position can only be verified in time.

For the moment, however, the application of a non-representational form of politics remains problematic when what Hardt and Negri regard to be its instantiations are considered. It is towards such a consideration that we now turn.

### **Occupy and UK Uncut**

This chapter began with a schematic historical overview of political space. While the dominant liberal conception of representative democracy conceives of the space of politics as enclosed within parliament and related institutions, a number of practical political interventions and theoretical interpretations have challenged this view. Laclau and Hardt and Negri are two prominent theorists, although there are a number of alternative accounts who challenge this liberal conception, most systematically, Pierre Rosanvallon (2008). In terms of practical political interventions, Laclau focused on the emergence of new social movements in the 1980s in his collaboration with Mouffe, whereas Hardt and Negri have pointed to the Zapatistas, the alterglobalization movement at the turn of the millennium, and those opposed to the war in Iraq. This section

concentrates on two political movements that have emerged in response to capitalism's latest Great Depression and financial globalization, UK Uncut and Occupy. It considers their approaches to space, representation and their relationship with conventional party politics, while also focusing on their organizational structures, in order to cast light on the two theoretical approaches considered in this chapter. It argues that while both approaches capture recent developments, Laclau's is more in tune with the structures, aims and methods of these movements.

UK Uncut emerged in response to the austerity programme – dominated by public service cuts – initiated by the incoming Coalition government in 2010.<sup>7</sup> UK Uncut began as a Twitter hashtag, but quickly attracted media interest and support from the public, swelling its activity to fifty-five towns and cities across the UK. It highlights tax avoidance by multinational corporations, arguing that tackling this avoidance – both through new legislation and appropriate funding and enforcement of existing legislation – would obviate the necessity for the cuts. Although their array of activities have evolved and developed, primarily they target retail outlets of these corporations, often re-enacting scenes from hospital wards, libraries, nurseries, and so on to make a direct connection

---

<sup>7</sup> To view UK Uncut's structural organisation, past activities and events, and guides for future actions, see [www.ukuncut.org.uk](http://www.ukuncut.org.uk). All ensuing quotations dealing with UK Uncut are taken from this website. For a consideration of UK Uncut's relevance, see Finlayson (2011), and Mason (2012: 54-7). UK Uncut's analysis has been influenced by the Tax Justice Network ([www.taxjustice.net](http://www.taxjustice.net)), whose positions can also be found in Murphy (2011) and Shaxson (2011).

between the company's tax avoidance and the range of services being cut. Organizationally, most of their activity is channelled through their website and other social media forms, and their networked structure is loose and informal – 'we do not have formal membership' – with actions proposed, organized and enacted by an 'army of citizen volunteers' throughout the country: 'UK Uncut is your movement. If you have an idea for an action, or want one on your high street, it's up to you to make it happen.' Through a powerful and prolonged 'grassroots' campaign, UK Uncut seeks to pressurize government and opposition representatives to reverse their approach to tax collection and deficit reduction:

We cannot wait until the next election. If we want to win the fight against these cuts (and we can win) then we must make it impossible to ignore our arguments and impossible to resist our demands. This means building a powerful grassroots mass movement, able to resist the Government cuts at every turn.

While this indicates a rejection of the slow rhythms of electoral-representative politics, it also suggests that UK Uncut do not conceive of themselves as an alternative to party politics and parliamentary representatives but, rather, as a supplement to them. They seek to influence and transform policies adopted by parties and representatives, but also to intervene and fundamentally shift public debate, by providing a framework

through which actions can be proposed, planned and enacted. Their website and use of social media serve to attract citizen volunteers to perform actions. The aim of these actions is to enter into the political debate. Those affected by this include the witnesses to such activity, and those exposed to the coverage these actions generate. This coverage, in turn, not only exposes UK Uncut's agenda, but also serves as a recruiting ground for future actions.

UK Uncut, as a consequence, is a complex organization which has both a representational and participatory function. Participation occurs through the various events and actions it organizes, whereas its relationship to representation is more complex and varied. On the one hand, UK Uncut seeks to offer an alternative representation – on the issue of tax avoidance and its effects on public service cuts – to affect the political debate and public opinion. In this sense, it serves as an example of the expansion of representation that Laclau theorises. On the other hand, it seeks to intervene directly in the traditional realm of representation, by seeking to transform the policies of representatives in parliament.

UK Uncut serves as yet another example of the expansion of political space, and subverts the function of retail outlets, turning them from zones of shopping into sites of political action, intervention and spectacle. There are two further features we can associate with UK Uncut. In the first place, they have a clear goal with which they are associated. Next, they have achieved temporal

continuity, with further activities planned at the time of writing, thereby maintaining their organization and its profile for over two years.<sup>8</sup> This endurance indicates that the organizational form and the activities it seeks to engender can prove to be a novel and persistent feature of political life, which can be replicated by other political movements.

Occupy and its slogan – ‘we are the 99%’ – speak directly to the two themes this chapter considers: political space and representation. In terms of political space, Occupy has a straightforward position: it seeks to expand it. In fact, its very name announces such an expansion. In this, it proved extremely successful, rapidly expanding over six continents and, according to a number of estimates, nearly a thousand cities. Occupy sought to (re)appropriate public space, primarily through encampments which aimed to practice and promote open, participatory democratic forms and debate. As one participant noted:

We sought to create the most horizontal and democratic space possible, using the assembly as our primary tool ... what is most important is to open space for conversations – for democracy – real,

---

<sup>8</sup> This is no small achievement considering the establishment’s repeated attempts to intimidate them, most notably the mass arrest of 138 activists. Mason (2012: 60) asks why police chose to arrest these peaceful activists while, at the same time, failing to tackle a group of black bloc protesters. Establishment hostility and crackdowns are a feature of both groups under consideration. The dedication to *Occupy* in Chomsky (2012: 7) is made to the 6,705 people that have been arrested for supporting Occupy.

direct and participatory democracy ... We organize in decentralized but connected working groups. (Taylor et al 2011: 8)

As this quotation demonstrates, the language, methods and aims of Occupy share clear affinities with the decentred, leaderless, networked approach that Hardt and Negri theorise with the multitude.

It is not only that the assemblies and various fora of Occupy seek to expand political space, but they also aim to provide an alternative spatial form of politics. The form of 'real, direct and participatory democracy' referred to in the quotation is posed in direct contrast to, and a clear challenge for, the traditional liberal account of political space provided by representative democracy. Occupy, however, are not thoroughgoing in their rejection of representation. A comparison can be drawn between the direct, participatory methods that are *internal* to Occupy, and its approach to the outside of this internality. The encampments and its participants claim to represent – to be the representative of – those that are *external* to them. Their widely adopted slogan of 'we are the 99%' not only neatly illustrates the effects of neoliberal financialization whereby a few gain at the expense of the many, but also makes the claim that the Occupy movement speaks for, and represents the interests of, the 99%. Such representation of the interests of the 99% was most manifest in the plethora of

communicational forms Occupy deployed to broadcast its presence and message. It proved extraordinarily adept at deploying a whole armoury of new social media to communicate with its intended audience.<sup>9</sup> In reviewing two swiftly published collections on Occupy, Andrew Ross indicates:

On the face of it, any book about Occupy might have been superfluous. After all, the movement has been so meticulously documented by its own participants through a variety of media-official websites, blogs, tweets, livestreaming and other social media channels, in addition to alternative radio and TV, and a steady flow of pamphlets, gazettes, journals and other print outlets. Never has a protest movement documented and broadcast its doings in real time with such utter transparency and to such a far-flung audience. In some respects, the sheer volume of self generated media has even pre-empted the need for conventional media coverage. (Ross 2012)

This sheer volume of output to 'the represented' contrasts starkly with the reluctance or refusal of Occupy to issue demands to traditional representatives in parliament. This strategy was adopted to avoid co-option by such representatives, and to symbolize and differentiate Occupy's approach to politics from that of

---

<sup>9</sup> Two recent accounts that consider the interaction between the proliferating forms of new social media and politics are Castells (2011) and Mason (2012). Hardt and Negris' 'empire trilogy' deal with this theme, especially *Commonwealth* (2009).

representative democracy.<sup>10</sup> The numerous Occupy encampments endured for no more than months and the combination of its existential intensity and novel impact make it difficult to fully appreciate or assess its political effects. Occupy were by no means pioneers in practicing durational occupation, and introducing new spaces of politics, and alternative modes of expression of opposition than rallies and demonstrations. Commencing in September 2011, Occupy followed on from a wave of occupations including by student groups in Chile, the UK and beyond in 2010, the indignados of Puerta del Sol and hundreds of other public squares in Spain, replicated in Syntagma Square and throughout Greece, that characterised the summer of 2011. These, in turn, followed on from the revolutionary scenes in early 2011 throughout north Africa and the Middle East, most prominently symbolized by Tahrir Square, a strategy which secured the overthrow of regimes in both Tunisia and Egypt, and protracted civil wars in Libya and Syria. This 'Arab Spring' was itself predated by similar tactics adopted in Independence Square during the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and other colour revolutions throughout the region. What differentiates Occupy from these, however, is the global scale of its impact. The rapidity of this impact which was enabled and

---

<sup>10</sup> The issuing of demands was discussed at various General Assemblies including Occupy Wall Street, where the proposal was rejected. Non-ratified demands have, however, been issued: see, for instance, <http://www.99declaration.org>. Judith Butler's contribution is perhaps the best expression of Occupy's refusal of demands, see Butler (2011: 193).

facilitated by new social media, in turn, sets Occupy apart from earlier struggles with effects on the world stage – such as the alterglobalization movements at the turn of the millennium, and the mass mobilizations against the Iraq war – which required greater coordination.

Jodi Dean has described UK Uncut and Occupy as ‘vanguard activists’, adding ‘[t]heir work is the work of parties: not the parties of electoral democracy, but the responsive and revolutionary parties of the previous century.’ (Dean 2012) Vanguardism is most often associated with Lenin, but these contemporary political forms differ in at least two ways: in their organizational form, the discipline and tight control of Lenin’s revolutionaries has been abandoned in favour of looser, decentralized structures enabled by new social media (as Negri recognized in the passage from *operaismo* to *autonomia*); in no way can their goal be described as capturing the state as is outlined in *State and Revolution*, but is one far closer to the ‘becoming-state’ (that Laclau associates with Gramsci). Their vanguardism, however, hails from their critique of, and refusal to accept, the logic of neoliberal financialization, their commitment and their experimentation. Whether the organizational forms, the practices, the communicational and representational methods of UK Uncut and Occupy prove to be a vanguard development remains to be verified. What their arrival clearly announces, however, is both the continuing expansion – perhaps even the verification of such

expansion – of the space of politics, and a more nuanced and complex approach to the notion of representation.

Such a nuanced and complex approach militates against both liberal approaches to representative democracy, and also Hardt and Negris' critical, yet somewhat straightforward, account of representation. In their latest brief collaboration, *Declaration* (2012), they repeat their earlier portrayal of representation as a disjunctive synthesis that increasingly appears outdated. In response, they celebrate what they consider to be the anti-representational methods deployed by the Occupy movement. Yet, in attempting to connect Occupy with concurrent struggles and revolutionary activities, they concede: '[t]he struggles of 2011 ... took place in sites far apart, and their protagonists have very different forms of life. Some overthrew tyrants and demanded the right to vote in free and fair election, whereas others criticized and refused political systems of representation.' (Hardt and Negri 2012). Despite Occupy's adoption of direct and participatory democratic forms, their central slogan – 'we are the 99%' – constitutes a representative claim, which poses the problem of what a post- or non-representational form of politics would comprise. UK Uncut, by contrast, reject the representative-represented relationship associated with parliament as the sole form of politics, and act to supplement and limit, rather than overturn and replace, this parliamentary form. Laclau's theoretical account of the expansion of

political space and the increasing role for, and plurality of, representations constitutes a more convincing portrayal of contemporary developments. This account also emphasises that these expanded political spaces, and their representative role, serves as an addendum to the traditional form of representation associated with liberal democracy. Laclau would add that, in order to enhance their efficacy, the partial representations offered by UK Uncut and Occupy need to enter into a chain of equivalence – or, a ‘representation of representations’.

## **Bibliography**

The 99% Declaration, available at [www.99declaration.org](http://www.99declaration.org)

[accessed: 1 February 2013].

Butler, J., Laclau, E., Zizek, S. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. London: Verso.

Butler, J. 2011. Bodies in public, in *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, edited by A. Taylor et al. London: Verso, 192–93.

Castells, M. 2011. *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chomsky, N. 2012. *Occupy*. London: Penguin.

Dean, J. 2012. Occupy and UK Uncut: the evolution of activism. *The Guardian*, 27 December, 34.

Finlayson, A. 2011. The philosophical importance of UK Uncut. *Open Democracy*. Available at:

[www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/alan-finlayson/philosophical-significance-of-ukuncut](http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/alan-finlayson/philosophical-significance-of-ukuncut) [accessed: 1 February 2013].

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2000. *Empire*. London: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2004. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2009. *Commonwealth*. London: Harvard University Press.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. 2012. *Declaration*. New York: Argo Navis.

Harvey, D. 2012. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London: Verso.

Held, D. 2006. *Models of Democracy*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Polity.

Hirst, P. 2005. *Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture*. Cambridge: Polity.

Keane, J. 2009. *The Life and Death of Democracy*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Laclau, E. 1990. *New Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. 1996a. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. 1996b. Community and its paradoxes: Richard Rorty's 'liberal utopia', in *Emancipation(s)*, by E. Laclau. London: Verso, 105—123.

- Laclau, E. 2004. Can immanence explain social struggles?, in *Empire's New Clothes*, edited by P. Passavant and J. Dean. London: Routledge, 21—30.
- Laclau, E. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 2001. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Verso.
- Lefebvre, H. 2003. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Madison, J. 1966. *The Federalist Papers*. New York: Doubleday.
- Marx, K. 1993. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin.
- Mason, P. 2012. *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*. London: Verso.
- Murphy, T. 2011. *The Courageous State: Rethinking Economics, Society and the Role of Government*. London: Searching Finance Ltd.
- Negri, A. 1968. Keynes and the capitalist theory of the state post-1929, in *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1976—83)*, by A. Negri. London: Red Notes, 5—42.
- Negri, A. 1974a. Reformism and restructuration: terrorism of the state-as-factory command, in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, edited by Red Notes. London: Red Notes, 33—37.

Negri, A. 1974b. Theses on the crisis: the working class multinational, in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, edited by Red Notes. London: Red Notes, 39—54.

Negri, A. 1982. Archaeology and project: the mass worker and the social worker, in *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1976—83)*, by A. Negri. London: Red Notes, 199—228.

Negri, A. 1999. *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Negri, A. 2003. *Time for Revolution*. London: Continuum.

Paine, T. 2008. *The Rights of Man, Common Sense and Other Political Writings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rosanvallon, P. 2008. *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ross, A. 2012. Occupy!: scenes from occupied America, by Astra Taylor, Keith Gessen et al – review. *The Guardian*. 28 January, 9.

Shaxson, N. 2011. *Treasure Islands: Tax Havens and the Men who Stole the World*. London: Vintage.

Tax Justice Network. Available at [www.taxjustice.net](http://www.taxjustice.net) [accessed: 1 February 2013].

Taylor, A. et al. 2011. *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*. London: Verso.

UK Uncut. Available at [www.ukuncut.org.uk](http://www.ukuncut.org.uk) [accessed: 1 February 2013].

