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Claiming the Century

The Promise of Social Movements and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Occupy leaves an enigmatic legacy for those studying collective action. It challenged capital and sought to overcome the crisis of democracy, but was short lived. The inability of the movement to endure and enact substantive change highlights the impasse reached by today’s left. A critical appraisal of Occupy—of its strengths and weaknesses, of how it reflects the wider social situation of which it is a part—is desperately needed if the left is to overcome its current shortcomings. Unfortunately most studies of the movement offer only general observations, focus on particular issues and encampments, or overemphasise the role of social media. As yet no satisfactory answers have been offered as to what direction future action might take. The limited scope of most existing studies can be rectified by adopting a Marxist perspective. Occupy needs to be situated historically and seen as the latest iteration in a long arc of contestation. In addition, the restricted range of social movement studies can be expanded through considerations of political economy. Taking account of the dynamics of capital explains the structural factors driving contestation today. In addition, an appraisal of current left political theory provides strategic insights with which to assess movements’ actions. Analysis of all online material produced by four Occupy encampments (Wall Street, Oakland, Melbourne and London), supplemented by the voluminous body of literature produced on the movement, provides a view that is unique in its breadth. The hegemony of anarchism within the movement—with its emphasis on horizontal organisational structures and rejection of the state—undermined its capacity to persist. The adoption of the ‘99%’ moniker signalled the desire for a collective subject capable of challenging capital, but the slogan was too diffuse to anchor such an actor. The movement was primarily orientated toward physical space, not cyberspace, but the temporary nature of encampments limited Occupy’s capacity to reimagine everyday life. A post-Occupy politics needs to recognise (as suggested by Nicos Poulantzas) the need to struggle both within and against the state. A rejuvenated class based communist party is needed; only then might social movements from below be able to claim the twenty-first century.
For Anna Taylor
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Introduction: 
Facing the Crisis of Democracy

Our is a time of turmoil. The supposed triumph of liberal democracy over communism following the fall of the Soviet Union prompted Francis Fukuyama (1992) to famously declare the ‘end of history.’ The upsurge of popular protest in 2011—from Tahrir Square in Cairo to Zuccotti Park in downtown Manhattan, from Syntagma Square Athens to City Square Melbourne—made it look like anything but the end of history. Perhaps, following Alain Badiou (2012b), it is more accurate to think in terms of ‘a rebirth of history.’ If history were reborn, then what might it grow into?

As things currently stand history reborn comes from a broken home. Society is riven with conflict and inequality. Those who wish to see history develop toward a lessening of conflict and inequality cannot let this newly born, fragile, historical opportunity be whisked away behind the walls of a gated compound to be raised under the watch of the growing super-elite and then set to do their bidding. Those who believe history needs to embody egalitarian virtues, to show favour to the many rather than the few, must engage in a ferocious battle for custody of history reborn.

The pages that follow are concerned with how the twenty-first century could be claimed by those who seek to rejuvenate democracy and realise substantive equality.
Social movements will most likely be the central actors in the fight to overcome the crisis of democracy within developed countries. Following Marx and Engels (2012, p. 49) social movements are seen to be ‘historical movements’, drivers of social change. The states in which we live have been made and remade constantly through the actions of social movements (Cox and Nilsen, 2014, p. xi). As Jackie Smith and Dawn Wiest (2012) argue:

> History has shown that major social change only comes when those excluded from power and privilege rise to challenge the existing social order. Moreover, it is in times of crisis that elites are most vulnerable to pressures from social movements and more radical change becomes possible.

Crisis generates the conditions for profound change, the course of history can swerve and new forms of social organisation come into being. What constitutes ‘a social movement’ will here be treated in a deliberately diffuse manner. In the pages that follow social movements are seen to be organised groups seeking to influence the ‘movement of history’—both political parties and protest movements can be seen to fall into this category, provided they challenge the status quo. The current moment is marked by a deep crisis spanning political, economic and ecological dimensions. Questions as to how social movements can form, organise, endure and imagine alternative futures, so as to overcome this crisis, are in urgent need of answers.

This involves taking account of the ‘big picture’, something most studies of social movements fail to do. The historical dimension of social movements and the structuring effects of political economy are dialectically entwined and must be accounted for. Left theory’s search for effective political strategy—as it reacts to new forms of social movement contestation and the changing manifestations of capital—must be interrogated. Theory, contestation, political economy: to think all three together provides a solid basis from which to interrogate today’s social movements. A successful analysis of movements can contribute toward effective political strategy for future movements.

An analysis of Occupy’s rise and fall offers an opportunity to find a way past the current crisis of democracy within developed countries. This crisis needs to be viewed in conjunction with the rise of neoliberalism. Before outlining the structure of this thesis the contours of this crisis will be outlined so as to frame the work to come.
The Crisis of Democracy and the Rise of Neoliberalism

Liberal democracy is in a state of ‘crisis’ (Castells, 2005, p. 402, Coleman and Blumler, 2009, p. 1). One of the most visible signs of this crisis is the widespread disengagement of citizenry from political processes in developed countries. In practice, liberal democracies overwhelmingly rely on representative democratic processes. People are losing faith in these practices (Touraine, 1997, p. 8). Research conducted between 2001-2007 across 37 countries—a mix of developed, developing, and ex-Soviet territories—found that one third of people did not feel represented; only 49 percent considered elections to serve representation well; and in 20 of the countries surveyed the performance of elections was considered poor, with less than half of the respondents in these countries feeling representation served their interests (Wessels, 2011, p. 119). An online survey conducted in the UK in 2003 (which drew on a representative sample of 2,273 respondents) found that 72 percent of respondents felt ‘disconnected’ from Parliament, with nearly half of the respondents stating they felt ‘very disconnected’ (Coleman and Blumler, 2009, p. 71). A US survey conducted in 1999 found that almost two-thirds of the population agreed with the statement ‘I feel distant and disconnected from government’ (ibid, p. 73).

The effects of such dissatisfaction can be seen in the steady decline of political party membership and voter turnout (Touraine, 2008, p. 215, Keane, 2009, p. xxxiii). Contributing to the decline in party membership, and toward the more general disengagement from the institutions of representative politics, is the sense that political parties have been captured by an elite that aims to govern rather than represent their electorate (Mair, 2013, pp. 96-97). Accompanying the decline in party membership is a decreased voter turnout. From as early as the 1950s, studies conducted within western democracies reveal increasing levels of voter indifference, apathy, and even hostility towards politics (Bryan et al., 1998, p. 3). The decline of the welfare state—with its ability to mediate between the demands of democracy and capitalism—is also conjectured to have contributed to the concomitant decline of participation and representation (see Santos and Avritzer, 2005). Overall, then, the picture emerging is one where liberal representative democracies are increasingly prone to citizen disengagement, bringing us to the point where the words ‘politics’ and ‘cynicism’ are almost synonymous (Bilakovics, 2012, p. 2).
The increasing disaffection of youth with liberal politics and voting is considered another symptom of democratic decline. Traditional mechanisms of political socialisation are failing to introduce future generations to the institutions vital for the continuance, and contestation of, democratic governance (Loader, 2007, pp. 1-4). The decline of democracy is conjectured to be intertwined with that of civil society. Rampant individualism is seen to have given rise to atomised societies in which people fail to engage with one another (Putnam, 2000, pp. 4-6), and the rise of consumer culture is seen to intensify this alienation (Barber, 2001, p. 10). The dominant subjective type to have emerged in the late twentieth century, it is argued, is narcissistic (Lasch, 1978, p. 50). The explosion of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, can be seen as intensifying narcissism in the early twenty-first century (Adams, 2012, p. 287, see also, Buffardi and Campbell, 2008, Mehdizadeh, 2010), as it allows everyone to be a ‘celebrity’ and to project an idealised self-image to the world that can be quantifiably validated (or not) depending on the number of ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ an individual attracts. Friends, like everything else, can be commoditised. For US$299 ‘Facebook Fan Center’ offers 25,000 Facebook friends.\(^1\) Life within core countries can be viewed as marred by increasing disengagement from political life and an obsession with self, all of which contributes to the deepening crisis of democracy.

The media also contributes to this crisis (Bagdikian, 1997, Barber, 2001). Mainstream media is charged with turning elections into tightly controlled spectacles, of manipulating a ‘passive, quiescent, even apathetic’ public in an ‘electoral game’ (Crouch, 2004, p. 4). The capacity for the wealthy to pay for electoral advertising as a means of influencing public opinion and electoral outcomes threatens democracy (Karlan, 2014, pp. 139-140). A media saturated with the ethos of advertising is considered to have forgone communicating the complexity of politics. It seeks to encourage emotional reactions rather than rational deliberation. Politics is personalised, with the focus on charismatic individuals rather than larger political issues (Crouch, 2004, p. 5). It is an era of ‘informational politics’—politics conforming to media logic—lapsing into sound bites, scandal and personalities (Castells, 2005, pp. 162-164) with mainstream media portrayed by some theorists as being a means of controlling the population (Harnecker, 2007, pp. 74-77, Stiegler, 2010, pp. 96-97).

In sum, the narrative of democratic and civil decline is attributed to: crises of participation and representation; increased social atomization; all of which are fuelled by a mainstream media that operates under a market (capitalist) ethos rather than a democratic one. All of these phenomena need to be situated against the backdrop of neoliberalism: an intellectual, economic and political project that has caused profound social change over the last forty years.

The term ‘neoliberalism’ is often used in a vague, inexact way, frequently deployed as a catch-all denunciatory category (Flew, 2014, pp. 51-52). Here the term is used to denote an ideological and political shift that has attended the transition from the Keynesian state form to the more market-friendly form prevalent today. As argued by Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin (2013, p. 195), it is:

- a set of ideas designed to make people more clearly aware of their own and their states structural dependence on capitalist markets. In practice this involved state’s actively engaged in broadening the reach and deepening the meaning of “free trade,” so that ever more facets of life became subject to market relations, and more and more subject to the discipline of the free movement of capital across national borders.

Neoliberalism refers not to a decline in state power, as such, but rather the prominence of a state form which places the provision of collective social goods under the economic bar of the (supposedly) free market. State power has not diminished in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism, but is rather directed toward different outcomes, which is why the downplaying of the state as an analytical category in the study of social movements should be opposed.

As an ideological project neoliberalism’s aim has been to dis-embed capital from any constraints (Harvey, 2005, p. 11, Konings, 2010, p. 6). The most influential theoretical expositors of the neoliberal project, Friedrich A. Hayek (awarded the Noble Prize in Economics in 1974) and Milton Friedman (awarded the Nobel in 1976), heralded a return to the tenets of classic-liberalism (Friedman, 1981, pp. 7-8, Friedman, 2007, p. 260, Hayek, 2007, p. 238). The recognition accorded their thought with the Nobel’s coincided with the crisis of Keynesianism and ensured a rising audience for neoliberal ideas in the 1970s. By the early 1980s neoliberalism was firmly cemented under the political leadership of Margret Thatcher.
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and Ronald Reagan; each of whom prevailed in ferocious battles with unions. Reagan smashed an air traffic controllers strike through mass layoffs and military intervention, while Thatcher broke the back of the British mining industry as a means of defeating striking miners. The early years of neoliberalism were marred by intense class battles in which the working-class were defeated.

Neoliberal thought does not broker interference from collective popular bodies such as unions, rather—through drawing on the work of Adam Smith and his famous metaphor of the ‘invisible hand’—the market is praised as the ideal arbiter of social life. For Hayek (1975, p. 42) the market is a ‘subtle communications system’ that is a ‘more efficient mechanism for digesting dispersed information than any that man has deliberately designed’. The efficiency of the market relies on individuals being at liberty to pursue their own ends free from external interference (Hayek, 2007, p. 101). Such freedom, it was argued, could only exist within a ‘minimal state’; the purview of which is restricted to the protection of individuals from internal or external threats to their liberty, and the provision and enforcement of a legal framework protecting their right to private property (see Nozick, 1974).

In seeking to curb the power of the state neoliberal theory occupies an ambivalent position toward democracy. If not restricted in the scope of its application, it is held, democracy threatens to suborn minorities to the will of the majority and thus undermine freedom, a position leading Hayek (2007, p. 110) to argue against ‘making a fetish of democracy.’ Better to live under an autocratic regime, he asserts, than a democratic one seeking to direct the economic system, as the latter would ‘destroy personal freedom as completely as any autocracy has ever done’ (ibid, p. 110, see also Hayek, 2011, p. 166)—a point Friedman put into practice by assisting Augusto Pinochet. Friedman characterised Pinochet’s seventeen years of rule in Chile—despite its military underpinning, executions and the torture of tens of thousands of people—as one where free markets did their work in ‘bringing about a free society’ (as cited in Klein, 2007, p. 117).

With its ambivalence towards democracy the ascendancy of neoliberalism has paved the way for the rule of a capital-focused elite (Crouch, 2004, pp. 1-5, Santos and Avritzer, 2005, p. 453, Robinson, 2006, p. 18). While, theoretically, neoliberalism argues for the curbing of state power and the play of free competition within the market, in practice the state has remained
an ‘active player.’ Despite arguments from globalisation theorists at the turn of the century about the hollowing of the state (see Held, 2000), neoliberalism has always relied on a strong state for both its implementation and its persistence as the dominant ideology of our times (Harvey, 2005, p. 84), just as capitalism, in all its guises, has always relied on the state in some capacity or other (see Wallerstein, 1991a) for such things as the enforcement of contracts or guarantees of private property. Further, despite arguments as to the importance of a free market for promoting efficiency through competition, capital tends towards monopolisation and centralisation in a deregulated environment. Which brings us to the point, argues Colin Crouch, where ‘actually existing neoliberalism is ... devoted to the dominance of public life by the giant corporation,’ whose power undermines democratic political processes (Crouch, 2011, pp. viii-ix, see also Krugman and Wells, 2012, p. 10). Despite the rhetoric, capital’s recurrent crises make it apparent just how important the state is for sustaining capitalism (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 247)—the bailout of banks following the financial crisis of 2008 offers a vivid example of this.

It is important to separate neoliberal discourse from practice (Konings, 2010, p. 7). It is only on the ideological level that neoliberals have advocated for less state power and a free and competitive market. The neoliberal era should be seen as one where institutional control has grown, affording ‘increased flexibility for financial elites and their enhanced capacity to control and steer the dynamics of social life’ (ibid, p. 7). The state has not disappeared; rather it has become increasingly dominated by ideologues committed, first and foremost, to the furtherance of capital’s interests. Further, the power of corporate sponsored ‘think-tanks’ and lobby-groups has had a pernicious effect on democratic procedures within many developed nations, particularly within the US (see Schweickart, 2011). Neoliberalism needs to be seen as ‘a political response to the democratic gains that had been previously achieved by working classes and which had become, from capital’s perspective, barriers to accumulation’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 15). The deregulated market has not become a hotbed for efficiency and competition, but rather the habitat for oligopolistic corporations. The ambivalence toward democracy present within neoliberal theory goes some way to explaining, what is on the face of it, the contradictions of ‘actually existing neoliberalism.’ With its emphasis on the individual, hostility to collective action and ambivalence towards democracy, neoliberalism has contributed to the decline of democracy.
Thesis Overview
This thesis has three broad aims: (I) To use Marxism to strengthen the field of social movement studies, which involves drawing on the history of contestation, political economy and left political thought as a means of effectively contextualising movements. (II) To undertake original research on the Occupy movement so as to assess its strengths and weaknesses. And (III) to draw on this research to develop a set of strategic reflections able to guide social movements in the struggle to overcome the crisis of democracy. The structure of the thesis reflects these aims.

Part I contextualises the study of social movements. Chapter One considers the long arc of contention spanning the modern area—from the French Revolution through to the alternative globalisation movement earlier this millennium. Nineteenth century radicals were faced with questions as to how best form enduring organisations (with class treated as an important subjective vector for grounding collective action). Questions as to whether or not the state presented the surest means of achieving the left’s goals led to a split between anarchists and Marxists. Marxists successfully pursued the capture of state power (after undergoing splits between reformist and insurrectionary currents), but failed to achieve the ‘total transformation of society’ hoped for. By 1968 the ‘old left’ faced sustained challenges from new social movements. Class was rejected. Identity politics prevailed. Anarchism (with its rejection of the state) became, again, an influential political ideology. Its horizontalist ethos prevailed within the alternative globalisation movement.

Chapter Two turns to the study of social movements. While historically important for the study of social movements, Marxism has become marginalised within this field—echoing its fate within the political sphere. North American social movement studies, as a discipline, has undergone a number of iterations. In general, however, it can be characterised as tending toward narrow models, where historical context is downplayed and political economy ignored. The European study of new social movements has a wider scope, suggesting changes in contestation are inextricably bound to wider social change, although political economy is still marginalised. The ‘activist perspective’ has recently come to prominence in the study of movements. Studies are conducted by ‘activist scholars,’ many of whom operate within the anarchist tradition. While an important development due to the ‘thick description’ it offers, it tends toward narrow studies of movements. A return to Marxist forms of analysis—with a
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wider historical scope and an appreciation of the dynamics of political economy—presents a
means of rejuvenating the field of social movement studies, offering an approach that is both
‘an argument about movements, and an argument within movements’ (Barker et al., 2013, p.
13). Importantly, a Marxist approach emphasises the connection between the dynamics of
capital and social movement contestation.

Chapter Three unpacks the key dynamics of capital (dispossession, class divisions, alienation,
the appropriation of surplus value and the quest for endless accumulation) so as to better
contextualise the study of movements. The state plays a crucial role in stabilising capital’s
contradictory tendencies. This brings us to concrete considerations of the financial crisis of
2008, the causes of which are traced from the crisis of Keynesianism, through financialisation
of the economy, toward a rentier form of capital grounded in the proliferation of debt. The
recent financial crash illustrates the important role states play in stabilising capitalism and
underscores the ‘crisis of democracy,’ insofar as the mass of people were subjected to
austerity while the elite were ‘bailed out.’ The financial crisis fuelled the rise of the Occupy
movement.

Chapter Four considers the intellectual shift—following the rise of post-structuralism in the
1960s—that has attended the changing nature of left contestation. How is political strategy
to be thought today following the ‘crisis of Marxism’? Through reviewing (and tentatively
synthesising) the work of Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière, Ernesto Laclau and
Chantal Mouffe, it is argued that left thought today is undergirded by an ontology of
multiplicity. A number of themes follow from this: a rejection of totality in relation to the
social; power is approached as a diffuse field, with theorisation of the state suffering
accordingly; power seeks to maintain an illusion of totality, a result of which is the production
of ‘inexistent’ elements within the social with which radical politics should seek to ally. For
Laclau and Mouffe this signals the need to form a ‘chain of equivalences’ between movements
and push for the realisation of ‘radical democracy’ within existing liberal parliamentary
institutions. Badiou and Rancière call for actions against the state, while Žižek councils that
effective action begins on a subjective level. The autonomist Marxism of Michael Hardt and
Antonio Negri is then considered—a strength of which is their focus on the economic
dimension of contestation, although their argument as to the efficacy of ‘exodus’ as the most
effective form of political action is found to be unconvincing. Taken together, the theorists
considered here present three courses for political action: a reform of existing liberal democracy driven by social movements; actions taken against the state to force change; and a total disengagement from the state through exodus. The latter is seen to have prevailed in the case of Occupy, although a synthesis of the first two positions—when bound to a concrete theorisation of the state and political economy—would have been of more strategic use.

Part II of the thesis turns to a study of Occupy’s strengths and weaknesses. Through drawing upon a Marxist approach to social movements—one informed by developments in contemporary critical theory—a holistic integrated study of Occupy is pursued. This approach takes account of the dialectical entwinement of political economy, the state, and contestation. Three lines of enquiry are pursued in relation to Occupy: what constitutes effective political strategy today; what would a contemporary collective subject capable of challenging capital look like; and on what spatial terrain does/should it stand?

Chapter Five is concerned with the question of political strategy. Occupy may have begun as a response to an economic crisis, but this came to be seen, simultaneously, as a crisis of democracy. It sought to challenge the financial elite’s capture of political power. While there was widespread agreement as to the nature of the problem faced, the question of ‘what is to be done’ proved vexing. Arguments between reformist and ‘revolutionary’ tendencies within Occupy echoed those of the nineteenth century; although this time the anarchist emphasis on spontaneity, horizontal organisation and total disengagement from the state proved hegemonic. These ideals were not necessarily shared by the majority of Occupy’s participants, but the consensus based decision model used by the movement favoured those who pursued a radical line (and those able to spend more time within encampments). Pursuing the consensus approach came at the cost of the movement’s capacity to build an enduring popular base. Further, it proved all too compatible with the reigning neoliberal emphasis upon individualism.

Chapter Six turns to questions as to who the collective subject capable of carrying contestation forward might be. Some considered Occupy a ‘class building’ movement, although the movement itself tended to shy from such a designation—opting instead for the notion of it being the movement of the ‘99%’ opposed to the ‘one percent’; a designation that, in the long run, proved too diffuse to construct an enduring collective identity around.
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The youthful composition of the movement, and the widely shared state of indebtedness, offered better avenues through which to foster collectivity. As it was, Occupy struggled to effectively hold its diverse social base together, and its culture of radical inclusivity proved unmanageable. Further, it struggled with divergent internal tendencies, as exhibited, for instance, with the appearance of a Black Bloc (a tactic, rather than ‘a group’, that involves dressing all in black and engaging in violent forms of protest, usually against private property) in a movement where most participants championed non-violence.

Chapter Seven turns to spatial considerations of the movement. Much has been made of Occupy’s use of new media—with cyber-optimists imaging this usage is an example of the Internet’s capacity to rejuvenate democracy. A sceptical position needs to assumed in relation to such claims. The logics fostered by the Internet (the fetish of speed, consumeristic individualism, impersonal aggregation) are too consistent with those of neoliberalism for it to be, in and of itself, an ‘agent’ capable of inducing substantial democratic change. The characteristics the Internet supposedly brings to activism are synonymous with the precepts of anarchism—a point often overlooked. The Internet needs to be viewed as a secondary feature of Occupy. An analysis of the movement indicates it tended toward analogue forms of organisation and action. It was grounded, after all, in the occupation of city squares. Occupy pointed, positively, to the importance of resistance grounded within everyday life, of face-to-face encounters, and attempts to ‘reclaim the city’; although the temporary nature of encampments placed a limiting factor on this aspect of the movement.

Following the eviction of encampments in late 2011 and early 2012 Occupy was largely spent, although some activists continued to operate under this moniker. For the most part post-eviction actions persisted with horizontal practices and continued to eschew any engagement with the state, favouring, instead, localised actions. Strike Debt offers, however, a systemically orientated post-Occupy current, although it came too late and consequently lacked a mass support base.

Having analysed Occupy, Part III asks what might constitute effective action for those seeking to realise substantive democracy. Chapter Eight turns to the work of Nicos Poulantzas to approach this question. Through offering a sophisticated theory of the state, Poulantzas is able to effectively argue for the importance of developing a political strategy that
simultaneously pursues actions both within and against the state; and which takes account of the importance of class conflict and the dynamics of capital (going beyond the limits of Badiou and Rancière’s position, as well as that of Laclau and Mouffe, whilst showing the inadequacy of Hardt and Negri’s work and the limits of contemporary anarchism). If the left is to effectively rejuvenate democracy within core countries it must offer alternatives to neoliberalism, it needs to fight for ‘economic democracy.’ Occupy was a powerful opening salvo in this fight. To take this further, however, a return to communism is needed—radical change requires escaping the logics of capital. As already signalled by Latin American experiences, and the more recent (tentative) successes of Syriza and Podemos, this involves striking a balance between movements and parties. In the absence of such a balance—if protest movements persist in their outright rejection of the state, and if parties continue to be dissociated from the wider populace—the dynamics of capital will continue to claim the century to come.
Part I: 
Situating Contestation
Chapter One: The Arc of Contention: The subject who challenges capital

A long arc of struggle and contestation trails behind contemporary social movements. The values fought for today have a long pedigree, so too the tactics used within these battles. The issues faced by contemporary social movements are the topic of long-standing debates. Indeed, it is striking when reviewing the arc of the left and its struggles just how much history seems to repeat itself.

The French Revolution saw the emergence of ‘the people’ on to the world stage, launching the fight for substantive democracy (as opposed to the narrow formal democracy advocated by liberals). While the focus of this thesis falls primarily on the fight for democracy within core states, the arc of contention traced in this chapter spans the globe. An understanding of the ‘new left’ and new social movements, for instance, gains much from considerations of the fate of the Russian Revolution; which, in turn, explains the prevailing hostility contemporary social movements express toward engagement with the state.
The following pages are chiefly concerned with the rise and fall of redistributive movements within the core. While feminism, the LGBTQ movement, and environmental movements, to name just a few, have had profound impacts within core countries, space restrictions prohibit a full exploration of their import. Further, such movements tend to figure largely within contemporary social movement literature (as will be explored in Chapter Two), whereas redistributive movements have fallen largely to the wayside. Beginning with the Global Justice Movement in the late twentieth century, and escalating with the protest movements of 2011, questions of redistribution are back at the forefront of social movement activity. Much can be gained, then, from recalling their history so as to better orientate discussions of the present.

Exploring the history of contention—with an especial focus on class-based redistributive movements—provides context for the assessment of Occupy in Part II of this thesis. The problems of today are also those of yesterday: should the state be directly engaged; does capitalism threaten the realisation of democratic goals; is communism possible; can movements develop spontaneously within horizontal organisational structures; is the party the most successful means of furthering movement goals over time; how should movements account for the inevitable backlash (often violent) their successes engender? Any serious challenge to the current crisis of democracy benefits from recognising that today's mobilisations are the latest in a long arc of contestation. Movements need to be able to learn from what has come before, stretching as far back (at least) as the French Revolution.

From the French Revolution to the First International—genesis of a movement
The French Revolution looms large over modern political thought. It was the first ideological revolution (Nisbet, 1970, p. 33), one nurtured by Enlightenment principles—most prominently the universal capacity for reason (Lipson, 1993, p. 170). Reason overflowed the abstract realm and entered the stream of history. As argued by Wallerstein (2004, pp. 3-4), two radical ideas were normalised by the revolution: ‘that political change was not exceptional or bizarre, but normal and thus constant’; and that sovereignty resided in neither a monarch nor legislature, ‘but in the “people” who, alone, could legitimate a regime.’ The French Revolution—with its famous demands for equality, liberty and fraternity—served to inspire struggles throughout Europe; its effects rippled outwards further still, inspiring
Claiming the Century

struggles for the decolonisation of the Americas and Haiti’s slave revolt (Wallerstein, 2000, p. 457).

Profound economic and social crisis in France had awakened those normally excluded from the exercise of power to the idea of liberation within France (Hobsbawm, 1964, p. 83). Hannah Arendt (2006, p. 38) evocatively captures their emergence onto the world stage of history:

We can still see and hear the multitude on their march, how they burst into the streets of Paris... this multitude, appearing for the first time in broad daylight, was actually the multitude of the poor and the downtrodden, who every century before had hidden in darkness and shame. What from then on has been irrevocable, and what the agents and spectators of revolution immediately recognised as such, was that the public realm—reserved, as far as memory can reach, to those who were free, namely carefree of all the worries that are connected with life’s necessity, with bodily needs—should offer its space and its light to this immense majority who are not free because they are driven by needs.

While the American Revolution was radical in eschewing the rule of the British and founding a secular liberal state, it remained under the direction of the powerful and propertied (see Losurdo, 2014). The French Revolution, on the other hand, was the first ‘mass social revolution’ (Hobsbawm, 1964, p. 75).

The alliance between the radical middle-class Jacobin party and the sans-culottes presents a now classic revolutionary formation: a party aimed at the heart of the state, borne aloft the shoulders of a mass-movement on the streets. The sans-culottes pushed the revolution beyond shallow liberal platitudes grounded in the ‘right of property’ (Harman, 2008, p. 292). Their influence explains, also, the Revolution’s infamous Reign of Terror. As explained by Chris Harman (ibid, p. 294),

The impetus for the terror came from below—from people who had suffered under the old regime, who knew they would suffer even more if it came back.... It combined the emotional desire for vengeance with the rational understanding, under conditions of civil war, [that] opponents of the regime would seize every opportunity to do it damage.

It is here, in struggling with conditions of civil war, that the French Revolution presents a timeless lesson: every revolution must be prepared to face reaction. Established regimes
maintain themselves through steady ongoing acts of violence and repression, the everyday nature of which renders them all but invisible to the majority of the public. Revolutions, on the other hand tend to involve intense spectacular periods of violence between those seeking to overturn the old order and those wishing to maintain it. Further, it is common, as seen in the conflict between the Jacobins and Gironde faction, that revolutions suffer from internal schisms between radical and moderate factions.

The French Revolution met with the Thermidorian Reaction. Alain Badiou (2005b, pp. 128-29) argues that this reaction entailed a turn from a politics inspired by virtue—by a universal address which ‘refers to no objective determination’—to one ‘conditioned by the objective figure of property.’ The ‘Thermidorian subjectivity’—which Badiou considers an ideal historic type, one that re-emerges time and again in reaction to revolution—seeks to terminate and obliterate a radical emancipatory sequence in favour of the calculable interests of property and the security of those with property, with the state being the means of securing such order. Despite its mass social underpinning the French Revolution became, ultimately, a bourgeois revolution that entrenched a liberal view of society (Hobsbawm, 1964, p. 80). This in turn fell prey to the conservative restoration of the monarchy (albeit within a constitutional setting) in 1815. While defeated in the French Revolution, the radical-socialist ideology that developed through the alliance of the Jacobins and the sans-culottes signified the emergence of a substantive notion of democracy which, Wallerstein (2000, p. 418) argues, received its first clear articulation in the ‘world revolution’ of 1848.

While the nominal head of government in France was, by 1848, following the restoration, a King, the real rulers—as some would argue is also the case today—were, in Marx’s (1962b, pp. 139-40) scathing words, the ‘finance aristocracy’: ‘bankers, stock-exchange kings, railway kings, owners of coal and iron mines and forests, [and] a part of the landed proprietors associated with them.’ This faction manipulated the state in order to secure their own interests, such that even ‘the smallest financial reform was wrecked due to the influence of bankers’ (ibid, p. 142). Their grip on power was firm, only one percent of the population was enfranchised and the state actively stifled political fraternisation (ibid, p. 143). The rule of the bankers did not prove propitious, however. Europe at this time was suffering from the first economic crisis in which unemployed surplus labour and surplus capital were standing side
by side (Harvey, 2012, p. 7). Economic hardship stimulated political unrest. The promise of the French Revolution was not forgotten.

In February 1848 ‘a revolution for popular sovereignty’ emerged, seeking to reclaim the ground lost to the counterrevolution of 1815 (Arrighi et al., 1989, p. 97). It began, essentially, as a quest for electoral reform in order to curb the power of the financial aristocracy (Marx, 1962d, p. 253)—disgruntled republican students and sections of the middle class took to the streets in protest and were met with a police violence. This, in turn, sparked spontaneous uprisings from workers in the poorer sections of Paris, who overpowered the police and occupied sites of power within the city (Harman, 2008, p. 335). The Parisian workers then urged middle-class groups to cobble together a Provisional Government and declare a republic (Mason, 2012, p. 171). The notion that the ‘masses’ could exercise power, that the flame of revolution first lit in 1789 could be rekindled, spread fast. Uprisings took place throughout Europe and spread outwards to Latin America (Weyland, 2009, p. 392). Revolution, again, had global diffusion.

Victories for the revolutionaries of 1848 were, however, unstable. Unsteady coalitions between radical and liberal factions contributed, in part, to this instability. Mike Rapport (2008, p. 406) argues, from a liberal perspective, that the radicals’ use of force undermined an emergent liberal order. The moderates had wanted parliamentary government, but not necessarily with full suffrage, while radicals wanted the immediate realisation of full democracy and the implementation of deep social reforms (ibid, p. x). Also known as the ‘springtime of nations,’ 1848 suffered from the divisive issue of nationalism. As Rapport (ibid, p. 113) notes:

> All too soon the hard iron of national self-interest invariably won out over the more fragrant universal principles of 1848. Consequently, in the many places where the ‘national question’ arose, Europeans would experience the brutalities of ethnic conflict, setting the revolutionaries against each other and providing the conservatives with the opening into which they could pour the hot lead of counter-revolution.

The radical potential of 1848 was all too quickly shut down, it too had its Thermidor. In France the working-class' demands were treated as ‘utopian nonsense’ and the moderate middle class factions ultimately sided with conservative forces. More than three thousand supporters
of the radical line were killed, and numerous others deported (Marx, 1962d, p. 254). Radicals met a similar fate in Germany where, with no military power of their own, they were soon crushed by Bismarck’s conservative backlash (Rapport, 2008, p. 402).

While the revolutions of 1848 were short-lived, they proved that popular social movements could be serious political players. There were many lessons to be learnt in defeat. Radicals found they could not depend upon liberals, and also that spontaneity, a major feature of the uprisings, could not be relied upon in the long run (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 64-5). It was necessary to develop long-term strategies if substantial political change was to be achieved. It is at this point that ‘a sociological innovation of profound significance for the politics of the world economy’ appeared, as ‘groups of persons involved in antisystemic activity began to create a new institution: the continuing organisation with members, officers, and specific political objectives’—antisystemic movements became organised for the first time (Arrighi et al., 1989, p. 30).² As Engels (1962b, p. 123) noted in 1895—when reflecting on the failed spontaneous revolt of the Parisian workers—it was clear ‘the mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect’ (and yet has returned today!—as will be explored in later chapters).

The construction of an enduring worker’s movement depended, importantly, upon the development of a shared identity: class consciousness. The formation of class consciousness was, in no small part, an organic process. As argued by E. P. Thompson (1991, pp. 9-12), ‘class’ is a relational concept that develops in response to relations of exploitation. In ‘the years between 1780 and 1832 most English working people came to feel an identity of interests as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers’. This shared set of interests based upon class became increasingly political in the nineteenth century. An example being The London Working Men’s Society’s ‘People’s Charter’ of 1837, which called for the (then) radical reforms of universal male suffrage and the removal of obstructions to working men becoming members of parliament. The socialist movement sought to deepen, expand and intensify the development of such class consciousness (the economic dimension of class will be discussed in Chapter Three). Indeed, contemporary movements, with the deployment of

² World-systems analysts use the term ‘anti-systemic movements’ to refer to both social movements and national movements. The focus of this thesis falls upon social movements within developed nations, so, for the sake of clarity, I do not use the term ‘anti-systemic movements’ myself unless directly engaging with world-system analysts.
slogans such as ‘we are the 99%’, appear to be rediscovering this insight, as will be explored in Chapter Six.

Of import for such a project was the development of socialist thought. The dominant strand of socialist thought in the early nineteenth century was of a utopian bent, inspired by the French thinkers Saint-Simon, Fourier and Babeuf (Harvey, 2010a, pp. 5-6). Marx and Engels directly challenged such utopianism, seeking to develop instead a concrete systematised vision of what was possible. Communism was not seen as some ‘speculative conception, implying an ideal or experimental community’, but rather as an animating principle for an immense social movement whose demands were to be guided by the ‘coherent application of the principle of Revolution’ (Balibar, 2007, p. 20). The Communist Manifesto, which they had been commissioned to write by The League of Communists in 1847, emphasises the importance of class consciousness for furthering the socialist project.

History, they argue, is ‘the history of class struggles’, and the contemporary epoch is defined by struggles between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marx and Engels, 2012, pp. 34-35). The development of modern industry swells the ranks of the proletariat, it equalises the conditions of their life, and it concentrates their numbers within urban centres. Struggle may take the form of ‘collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois’; it may take a class form in ‘occasional revolts’, even ‘riots’, but any victories won this way will be short lived. ‘The real fruit of their battles lies, [however,] not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers’. It is interesting to note, in passing, how the very technological developments Marx and Engels saw as immiserating the working class were also seen to possess emancipatory features: ‘This union [of workers] is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another’ (ibid, pp. 44-46), an argument not unlike that made as to the emancipatory potential of the Internet today (as will be explored in Chapter Seven). Of import here, for Marx and Engels’ analysis, is the way in which struggles can scale upwards and outwards.

An essential characteristic of the workers’ movement, they argued, is that it is directed not toward the achievement of particular aims, but rather tends toward the universal.
All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air. (ibid, p. 49)

The key to achieving these wider aims was the ‘self-conscious’ nature of the movement. Class consciousness animates the mass revolutionary subject. A theme emphasised throughout Marx’s work, and throughout Marxism, is the importance of the transition from being a ‘class in itself’ (as exists objectively) to a ‘class for itself’ (the subjective dimension, a recognition of a shared subject position). As Paul Thomas (1980, p. 260) writes,

This transformation entails a comprehension of the conditions of existence for the class, together with an appraisal of how they are to be changed; it entails an inner transformation, a drawing together, the creation of bonds among members of the class in such a way that communicability of interest and concern... can emerge, and can be put to work.

Such an approach necessarily assumes an international form. Just as capital respects no boundaries, neither should class consciousness be confined by state borders. As Marx was all too aware, any revolution bound by national boundaries was doomed (ibid, p. 257).

It was in this spirit that the International Working Mans’ Association (IWMA), more commonly known as the First International, was formed. As stated in their inaugural address in 1864:

[The] experience of the period from 1848 to 1864 has proved beyond doubt that, however excellent in principle and however useful in practice, co-operative labour, if kept within the narrow circle of the casual efforts of private workmen, will never be able to arrest the growth in geometrical progression of monopoly, to free the masses, nor even to perceptibly lighten the burden of their miseries. (International-Working-Mans’-Association, 1864, np.)

An effective movement had to endure and have a wide reach. The IWMA, as stated in the preamble to their General Rules, saw ‘the emancipation of labour as neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries’ (as cited in Schulkind, 1972b, p. 255). The aim of the International was to facilitate mutual aid among different national groups (Schulkind, 1972a, p. 34), it was a movement
building organisation. It was not composed from political parties or unions, but rather from individual workers who joined a branch or section, which were, in turn, linked to a General Council (Thomas, 1980, p. 265).

Over time, however, the International became the site of intense and bitter arguments as to what constitutes effective political action, arguments which resonate through to the present day. Marx, while not a founding member of the International, was an active member behind the scenes, using his influence to ensure the group’s statutes could accommodate the entry of all socialist groups (ibid, pp. 266). Within this space Marx created, argues Thomas (ibid, pp. 249-50), the political approach since labelled ‘Marxism’. This approach found a strong opponent in Mikhail Bakunin, who developed anarchism into a revolutionary social movement in its own right.

To achieve this Bakunin first set about unseating Proudhonist anarchists from within the International, whom he considered too pacifistic and too wed to social individualism (ibid, pp. 268-69). Bakunin was an advocate of revolutionary violence, calling for the ‘root and branch extermination of the prevailing society with its good and bad.’ ‘Positive anarchy,’ he argued, ‘could result only from nihilism du combat, [in which] destruction takes on the capacity to invert itself and to become an imminent life-force’ (ibid, p. 289). Such a position entailed the rejection of any engagement with, or recognition from, the state. Any political activity undertaken within this sphere, he argued, undermines the integrity and authenticity of revolutionary actors (ibid, p. 295); an argument still common today, as will be shown in later discussions of Occupy. Bakunin argued, instead, for the organisation of society from ‘the bottom up, by way of free association, and not from the top down by means of authority’ (as cited in ibid, p. 304).

Here lies one of the central enduring tensions between anarchism and Marxism. Anarchists have continued to see the state as the principal source of social injustice. To replace a capitalist state with a socialist one, some hold, is to replace one form of tyranny with another (ibid, 1980, p. 2). Governance is seen as the root cause of human disharmony (Bakunin, 1972, pp. 220-221). Rather than seeking to conduct the actions of others within a revolutionary situation faith should be placed, instead, in the spontaneous capacity of the masses (see Kropotkin, 1885).
The pursuance of such an approach by Bakunin within the International put him on a collision course with the Marxists. Engels (1873, np.), for example, was scathing of Bakunin’s influence:

At quiet times, when the proletariat knows beforehand that at best it can get only a few representatives to parliament and have no chance whatever of winning a parliamentary majority, the workers may sometimes be made to believe that it is a great revolutionary action to sit out the elections at home, and in general, not to attack the State in which they live and which oppresses them, but to attack the State as such which exists nowhere and which accordingly cannot defend itself.

The same critique could be made of the organisational logic that has prevailed within Occupy and other contemporary movements and, indeed, of many intellectuals on the left: the state is routinely denounced and condemned, yet seldom is found a discussion as to what it actually is. In denouncing the abstract ‘state’, actual concrete states continue to act as conduits through which dominant classes are able to secure their interests (as will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three). Strange, 150 years later, that the left should still be struggling with the same problems faced by the International.

While Bakunin’s arguments as to the illegitimacy of the state form find traction today when held up against the sorry attempts to realise communism in the twentieth century, it must also be asked what positive enduring vision he offered? It is easy to critique and call upon romantic notions of revolution, but how does one advance an actual concrete political programme over time? Bakunin’s answer to this question was paradoxical and problematic: while outwardly rejecting authority and advocating ‘bottom up’ organisational forms he also, simultaneously, practiced subterfuge and dissimulation within the socialist movement. He set up different covert revolutionary cells that he would play off against one another (Thomas, 1980, p. 300). Further, Bakunin believed a ‘heroic elite’ could initiate revolution through ‘the very intransigence of their credo and by a spontaneous mass intuition of its validity’ (ibid, p. 302). Such an elitist opaque approach, relying upon ‘spontaneous mass intuition’ as its justificatory means—carried out, in the meantime, by submerged networks of anarchists accountable only to themselves—indicates a problematic strain within nineteenth century anarchism. Such an historical example does not, of course, discount the validity of anarchist arguments. It should, however, prompt a critical appraisal of how anarchism—and activism more generally—is practiced. Indeed, as will be shown in later chapters, the spectre of such
opaque networks haunts contemporary movements. There is always the risk that a stratum of activists arises that—either through design, or due to its spontaneous interpersonal formation—excludes others from full participation (Taylor, 2008, p. 86).

In contrast to Bakunin, Marx argued the workers’ movement had to be organised openly rather than covertly. This position entailed an acknowledgement of the positive capacities afforded the movement by the liberal-bourgeois state (Thomas, 1980, p. 345). When possible, it was argued, why not enjoy the legal protection of the state and use its electoral machinery to press for concessions and reforms? Parliamentary activity was not seen as a replacement for class conflict, but rather as a means of articulating common grievances and concerns, and thus as means of lending the movement a clearer form and direction (ibid, p. 345). Marx’s argument for positive engagement with the state defeated the anarchist faction within the International, as they were unable to demonstrate any effective path to revolutionary change that could be followed when facing a repressive state apparatus. Only when state control had been wrested from the hands of the elite, Marxists asserted, could the movement pursue transformative strategies (Wallerstein, 1991b, p. 112). While Marx may have won the battle against Bakunin, the spoils of victory were few: internal conflicts had undermined the International (Kinna and Prichard, 2012, p. 1) and it was only a weak force within the wider workers’ movement (Wallerstein, 1990, p. 18).

The Paris Commune provides an important staging ground for the debates waged within the International. Both Bakunin and Marx referred to it to justify their own ideas (see Schulkind, 1972b). The Commune may have been important for the International, but the International does not seem to have been so important for the Commune. Despite seventeen of the Commune’s 92 positions being filled by members of the International (Mason, 2008, p. 69) the International only played a minor role within the Commune (Thomas, 1980, p. 250). The French chapter of the International was unable to offer any coherent programme for the Commune, which tended, instead, to develop through improvisation and spontaneity. Political action tended to be rooted in neighbourhoods and, ‘in general, the only sections of the International to maintain their level of activity were precisely those based upon neighbourhood membership’ (Schulkind, 1972a, p. 35). Recognition of the need for enduring forms of left organisation revealed in the aftermath of 1848 had yet failed to take root, despite the best intentions of the International.
The issues of the left as played out within the First International—of how to build an enduring movement, what organisational forms should be assumed, of how to engage (or to not engage) with the state, of the role to be accorded spontaneity—are also contemporary issues. As will be shown in later chapters, the legacy of Occupy presents these questions to the left again. How is the left to learn from its history? The Paris Commune, as an attempt to realise direct democracy through the occupation of a city, presents an especially important historical example from which to learn.

The Paris Commune—testing the possible
While short lived, the Paris Commune provides a vivid picture of direct democracy in action. It stands as a beacon of possibility for the left. A beacon that functions, simultaneously, to warn of the perils of reaction. It is useful to linger a while with the legacy of the Commune, as it presages, in many ways, issues at the forefront of contemporary social movements like Occupy. Consider the following poster from the Commune:

Citizens,

It is with the aid of public meetings that we have been able to recognise and defend our rights.

It is only at public meetings that we are able to enlighten ourselves regarding the stormy times through which we are passing.

We thus request your presence and participation, in order that each citizen know fully what is occurring, how it is occurring and how it ought to occur.

Once having assembled, and everyone having been able to say what he thinks, it will be much simpler for us to reach decisions concerning events which may arise.

Long live the Republic! Long live the Commune!

(Poster advertising a public meeting in the Paris Commune, cited in Schulkind, 1972b, p. 130)

Such sentiments, as to the transformative power of public assembly and participatory decision making, echoed throughout protest encampments in 2011. Occupation was also an important tactic for the Commune. This could be seen in the taking of specific buildings:
A great revolutionary act has just occurred: the population of the III Arrondissement has at last taken possession—to serve the political education of the People—of a building that has until now served only the cast that is inherently hostile to any kind of progress. (wall poster from the Paris Commune, cited in Schulkind, 1972b, p. 126)

The occupation of buildings belonging to the ruling class for political education was a tactic also pursued by Occupy London’s Bank of Ideas, of which more will be spoken in later chapters. Indeed, the Commune was itself, an occupation: the occupation of a whole city by the popular classes. How did such a situation come to pass?

In a recurring historical motif (think here of the self-immolation of Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi the Tunisian fruit seller in 2010 that sparked for the Arab Spring, or the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri which inspired the widespread ‘Hands-Up’ protests of 2014) the death of a single individual can operate metonymically for the violence and corruption of the state as a whole. In the case of the Paris Commune the shooting of a radical journalist by the philandering cousin of Louis Napoleon III, in January 1870, brought 100,000 people to the streets for the funeral, vowing they would only return home when France once again became a republic (Mason, 2008, pp. 63-64). Strikes followed the protests and a powerful labour federation soon formed (ibid, p. 64).

Despite such unrest weakening France internally, Louis Napoleon III went to war against Prussia and was quickly defeated. Workers who had flocked to join the National Guard, and consequently held Paris against a Prussian siege were not willing to relinquish their weapons once an armistice was signed in 1871. Instead the National Guard formed a central committee to ensure that they, and the French working class as a whole, were not forgotten. When the French Army entered Paris to recover artillery that had been paid for by the people of Paris they were repulsed by the city’s inhabitants (ibid, pp. 66-8). The French Government had clearly lost control of Paris. The Central Committee called for the election of a ‘Commune’ (a city council), a motion supported a week later, on the 26th of March, when 230,000 people went to the polls (ibid, pp. 68-69). The new Paris Commune promptly found itself under attack and besieged by the French Army, eventually falling on the 28th of May 1871.

While short lived the Paris Commune highlighted what was possible. It represents ‘the first general rejection of the belief that ordinary workers were not equipped to govern’ (Schulkind,
1972a, p. 31). As argued by Engels (1962a, p. 483) it was clear from the outset that, once in
power, workers ‘could not go on managing with the old state machine,’ that they must ‘do
away with all the old repressive machinery used against it.’ In dismantling this ‘repressive
machinery’, Marx (1962a, p. 522) wryly noted, the Commune was able to make ‘that
catchword of bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality, by destroying the two
greatest sources of expenditure—the standing army and State functionarism.’ The
administrative, educational and judicial posts that remained within the Commune were filled
by election through universal suffrage (albeit of a limited form, as it did not include women).
The elected delegates were subject to binding mandates and the right of recall by their
electors. All officials were paid wages commensurate with that of other workers. These
measures erected ‘an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism’ (Engels, 1962a, p.
484). Through enacting full suffrage within the Commune and with elected delegates subject
to recall, Marx (1962a, pp. 520-21) celebrated the ways in which the Commune turned its
back on ‘hierarchical investiture’ in favour of direct democracy. It was seen to have rejected
the limited form of democracy that only allows people to decide ‘once in three or six years
which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament.’

With direct democracy in place, the Commune set about enacting a raft of revolutionary social
changes. Education was stripped of ecclesiastical and government interference and opened
to all for free; judicial functionaries were stripped of their ‘sham independence which had
served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments’, with all magistrates
and judges being elected to their positions and subject to recall (Marx, 1962a, pp. 520-21).
Progressive economic and workplace projects were introduced. Back-rents accrued during
the Prussian siege were written off, and a two year moratorium on all debts declared.
Conditions within workplaces improved through the introduction of such measures as the
eight hour day (Mason, 2008, p. 70-71) and abandoned factories were occupied by workers
and run on a cooperative basis (Schulkind, 1972a, p. 47). The organisation of large-scale
industry and manufacture undertaken by the Commune, based not only on the association of
workers of each factory, but also through the organisation of these associations within one
523) enthusiastically exclaimed in his appraisal of the Commune:
...the Commune intended to abolish that class-property which makes the labour of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labour, into mere instruments of free and associated labour.—But this is Communism, “impossible” Communism!

The model being developed within the Commune—the fledgling communism of Paris—was to serve as a model for all of France. Rural communes would manage themselves, but send delegates to town centres; town communes would, in turn, manage themselves and send delegates to the National Delegation in Paris—with delegates, at each step of this process, being recallable by those who elected them; the ‘repressive organs of old government were to be amputated’, the ‘parasitic excrescence’ of state power was to be rejected, and power restored to ‘the responsible agents of society’, to societies productive elements, the working class (ibid, p. 520).3 The Commune was a ‘thoroughly expansive political form, while all previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive’ (ibid, p. 522).

There were, however, limits to the communards’ ability to overcome old modes of thinking that had fatal consequences. The clearest example of this is their ‘standing respectfully outside the gates of the Bank of France’. Had they taken the bank with its reserves of gold, argues Engels (1962a, p. 481), it ‘would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages. It would have meant the pressure of the whole of the French bourgeoisie on the Versailles government in favour of peace with the commune.’

The Commune also failed to extend suffrage to women, although this did not stop women from playing a major role. A women’s movement had been steadily building in the years preceding the Commune, and radicalised women quickly assumed prominent positions within it; with women being amongst ‘the most ardent advocates of revolutionary violence’ (Mason, 2008, p. 75). Radical theoretical assertions underpinned such engagement. One group, for instance, argued sexual discrimination had, historically, been ‘enforced as a means of maintaining the privileges of the ruling classes’ (as cited in Schulkind, 1972b, p. 173).

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3 It is interesting to note that, despite their vehement opposition to one another, Bakunin’s (1972) assessment of the Commune is very close to Marx’s in celebrating the ‘bottom up’ free association of workers.
As it was, however, the Commune soon met its Thermidor. The capture of the city by the French Army led to a bloodbath. Estimates for the dead following the Commune have varied widely; Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray estimated 17,000 to 20,000 communards had been killed while others set the number as high as 50,000 (Tombs, 2012, pp. 680-81). More sober estimates hold the number of communards executed in cold blood, or after a summary military trial, to be around 1,400 (ibid, p. 697); with 5,700 to 7,400 communards killed overall (ibid, p. 695). Whatever the final figure, the picture painted by Lissagaray (2012, p. 312), in his history of the commune, evokes the scale of repression meted out upon the commune.

So many were killed, he writes, that the...

...burying of such a large number of corpses soon became too difficult, and they were burnt in the casements of the fortifications; but for want of draught the combustion was incomplete, and the bodies reduced to a pulp. At the Buttes Chaumont the corpses, piled up in enormous heaps, inundated with petroleum, were burnt in the open air. The wholesale massacres lasted up to the first days of June, and the summary executions up to the middle of that month.... Many battlefields have numbered more dead, but these at least had fallen in the fury of the combat. This century has not witnessed such a slaughtering after the battle; there is nothing to equal it in the history of our civil struggles.

And so it was, with the massacre of the communards, that ‘order’ was returned to the streets of Paris and the first modern attempt to realise direct democracy within an occupied city was quashed. The towers of smoke rising from the piles of slaughtered communards’ corpses was an ominous warning to future revolutionaries.

As Badiou (2008, p. 100) has argued, the years stretching from the French Revolution through to the Paris Commune can be seen as the ‘first sequence’ of communism: ‘that of its setting up, its installation, and that of the first attempt at its realisation’. This sequence saw the introduction of a new political phenomenon into a wide range of countries. There were, under the sign of communism, mass popular movements and seizures of power, the object of which was to organise struggle on multiple fronts in order to enact a revolution. This sequence was closed with the bloody massacre that defeated the Paris Commune (ibid, pp. 105-06). The second sequence of the communist hypothesis, he argues, opened with the Russian Revolution in 1917 and closed in 1976 with the Cultural Revolution in China and with the decline of other militant movements around the world at the same time (the epicentre of the
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latter, for Badiou, being May 1968 in France). The second sequence was dominated by the question of time: how to achieve victory, and how to organise the new power, the new state, to protect it from destruction by its enemies? It was the problem of victory and duration, of not formulating the communist hypothesis but of realising it. Such is the legacy of the Paris Commune.

From the Second International to the Exhaustion of the ‘Old Left’—paths through revolution and reform

The Second International, in its first iteration from 1889 to 1916, hosted the initial debate as to how communism might achieve an enduring form, and whether parliamentarianism or revolutionary insurrection offered the best means of achieving the movement’s goals. The ‘reform vs. revolution’ debate has become a perennial dilemma for the left, as will be seen in later discussions of contemporary social movements.

Representatives from core states in the Second International favoured the reformist approach. Engels (1962b, p. 128), for example, saw great hope in the German Social Democratic Party’s progress in the years 1871-1890. Arguments in favour of ‘evolutionary parliamentarianism’ were put forward, holding that the working class would eventually vote capitalists out of power and achieve socialism, and, in the mean-time, could incrementally improve their lot (Wallerstein, 1990, pp. 19-20). An approach which, through its gradual process of reform, would avoid provoking the type of reaction met by the Paris Commune. Eduard Bernstein, a major figure within the SDP, became the leading proponent of this approach. He met with fierce resistance, notably from Rosa Luxemburg (1970, p. 59) who was scathing of his conciliatory position toward capital. Better, she argued, to let capitalism collapse under the weight of its own contradictions than to ameliorate the effects of these contradictions. Luxemburg (ibid, pp. 57-58) supported trade-union and parliamentary activities as ‘the means of guiding and educating the proletariat in preparation for the task of taking over power’ and for creating ‘the subjective factor of the socialist transformation’, and opposed Bernstein’s notion that the aim should be to reduce exploitation and reform capitalism in order to ‘objectively [achieve] the desired social change.’ Capitalism, she argued, would never ‘evolve’ into socialism. Despite such criticism Bernstein’s approach became dominant. Whenever Second International parties achieved power within the core they instituted a welfare state, but never sought an end to capitalism (Wallerstein, 1991b, p. 85).
The Second International—in its second inter-war iteration and in its re-emergence as the Socialist International after WWII—proved compatible with Keynesianism and the stabilisation of capitalism within core countries.

Marxists within the Second International agreed as to the necessity of engaging with state power as the means of achieving their goals, and followed what Wallerstein (2004, p. 69) has called the ‘two step program’ of first attaining state power and then transforming society. Such emphasis upon the state had led to the formal exclusion of anarchists from the Second International in 1896 (Arrighi, 1990). There was a further split concerning how to engage with the state. While members from core states advocated the reformist parliamentary path, Lenin rejected this position and broke with the Second International. He argued for an insurrectionary path, on which a committed avant garde party—well versed in Marxism—was to serve as guide (Lenin, 1992, p. 25).

The conditions arising from WWI created the ideal situation for Lenin, as leader of the Bolshevik party, to pursue the insurrectionary path to power in Russia. The Russian Revolution was a ‘world shaking event,’ spawning a wave of revolutions (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 66) that, by 1949, had led to a third of the world’s population living within states that were, nominally at least, ‘communist.’

If the Paris Commune stands in the history of the left as a beacon of hope and possibility, then the Russian Revolution represents hopes betrayed and a foreclosing of possibility. The early days of the revolution looked as if they could realise, on a massive scale, the promise of the Paris Commune, but the fight for an enduring revolution in the face of external aggressors ultimately led to a moribund despotic state form antithetical to the idea of communism.

While the path taken by the Soviet Union is a cause for despair, the opening days of the revolution still have much to offer those interested in questions of radical social change. Strikes, protests for bread, the mutiny of the Tsar’s troops—‘Four spontaneous and leaderless days on the street put an end to an Empire’ (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 60). Following the Tsars’ abdication, basic demands were issued: for bread from the city’s poor, for higher wages and better conditions from workers’, for land from the peasantry, and a universal demand for peace from all. The only real asset Lenin’s Bolshevik party possessed at this point, argues Hobsbawm (ibid, p. 61), was their ability to recognise what the people wanted and to
encapsulate this in the revolutionary slogan of ‘Peace, Land, Bread’. Like all successful revolutions, the energy unleashed by popular demands was channelled into a larger project (Sader, 2011, p. 86, see also Laclau, 2005), a lesson, it will be argued later, Occupy would have benefited from learning.

While the early days of the Revolution were characterised by spontaneous actions, Lenin (1975, p. 30) had long considered the spontaneity of the masses only an ‘embryonic’ component of resistance, one that tended in the direction of the interests of each particular group and thus failed to account for the wider socio-political situation. He held that a disciplined revolutionary party was needed to provide an overview of the masses’ disparate struggles. Struggles informed the party, and, in turn, the party became the vehicle by which the masses could ‘understand their actions and express their collective will’ (Dean, 2012a, p. 243). As Lukács (2009, p. 35) notes, apropos Lenin, the party had to ‘unite the spontaneous discoveries of the masses, which originate in their correct class instincts, with the totality of the revolutionary struggle, and bring them into consciousness.’ The party’s role was to overcome the division of the masses—fractured as they were by capitalist social relations—and bind them together so they might find common goals (Blackledge, 2010, p. 4).

The capture of state power was essential for the achievement of any such goals. The lessons from history were clear, the French Revolution had failed because the revolutionaries had lost control of the state. Lenin was determined to not repeat this mistake (Ali, 2009, pp. 45-46). Following Marx, Lenin (1992, p. 8) argued:

> The state is the product and manifestation of the irreconcilability of class contradictions. The state arises where, when and to the extent that class contradictions cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state demonstrates that the class contradictions are irreconcilable.

The state is, then, by its nature, an exploitative organ; one which seeks to maintain the interests of the minority against those of the majority. The state, as seen from this position, stands above society. Marx (1962c, pp. 32-33) had argued that ‘freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it’ (ibid, p. 32), and that ‘between capitalist and communist society lies the... political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat’
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( Ibid, pp. 32-33). Lenin (1992, p. 55, emphases in original), in the years preceding the revolution, held true to Marx’s vision of the state:

The proletariat needs the state only temporarily... the abolition of the state is the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must make temporary use of instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters just as a temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class is necessary for the abolition of classes.

The state, historically, has shown itself as an exploitive apparatus—securing the interests of the few at the expense of the many. The aim is to be rid of the state, but this can only happen once the exploiting class has been removed. They can only be removed through the use of the state itself:

...in the transition from capitalism to communism, suppression is still necessary; but it is now the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the ‘state’ is still necessary; but this is now a transitional state, it is not a state in the proper sense.... (Ibid, p. 81, emphasis in original)

The Paris Commune had failed to adequately suppress the bourgeoisie (Ibid, p. 39) and thus set the stage for their bloody return. Lenin sought to ensure the Bolsheviks would not allow such a thing to happen if they were to achieve power.

With their eyes upon the capture of state power the Bolsheviks were able to tap into anarchic popular struggle and turn it toward a concerted political program. Following the Tsars’ abdication a liberal provisional government had been put in place, but it exercised little power—real power lay with the soviets that had arisen spontaneously within Moscow and across Russia, ‘but they had no idea what to do with it or what ought to be done’ (Hobsbawm, 2006, pp. 60-61). The soviets—directly democratic workers’ councils—provided, Lenin saw, the basic building blocks for an alternative democratic system that could bypass the Russian Parliament (to which the Bolsheviks stood no chance of being elected) (Chubarov, 2001, p. 52), hence the other popular revolutionary slogan deployed by the Bolshevik’s: ‘All Power to the Soviets.’

The promise of the soviets provided an echo of the Paris Commune, only this time power had been assumed on the level of the state and would thus, it was hoped, endure. Worker’s councils provided, for Marxists, a prefigurative approach to social change (Blackledge, 2010,
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p. 4)—one which could be scaled outwards in a federative schema, as seen above in Marx’s discussion of the Paris Commune. This promise was, however, quickly abandoned by the Bolshevik’s, a move seen by many as a betrayal of the revolutionary potential of the moment (Rubel and Crump, 1987, p. 4, Castoriadis, 1988, p. 95, Pannekoek, 2003, p. 82). The soviets were hollowed out; their power transferred to a centralised party apparatus which, following the armed Petrograd uprising in October 1917, led to the assumption of Bolshevik power and the end of the provisional government.

The Civil War that arose immediately after the October Revolution prompted the need for centralised power. The cruel irony being that safeguarding the revolution meant betraying the promise of the soviets. The Bolsheviks were faced with a reactionary old guard who had been bolstered, in resources and troops, by surrounding capitalist powers who were eager to contain and reverse the revolution. The civil war proved disastrous for the Bolsheviks. They had been able to hold out against hostile forces, with the war coming to an end in 1922, but the revolution was contained and unable to spread into the West. The ruling classes in the West had deflected mass uprisings by offering democratic reforms (such as universal suffrage) and improved working conditions (with such measures as the eight hour day) (Ali, 2009, pp. 38-39). Back in Russia, the Bolsheviks ‘could have no strategy or perspective beyond choosing, day by day, between the decisions needed for immediate survival and the ones that risked immediate disaster’—the new socialist republic that emerged was vastly different to that which Lenin had initially envisioned (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 64).

In the unsettled conditions following the October Revolution Lenin first advocated for ‘state capitalism’. This involved greater control of the economy through labour discipline, wage incentives and managerial authority, and a compromise with financial interests. But the pressures of the civil war made this untenable and required the extreme state control of ‘war communism’, which involved increased rates of nationalisation and bureaucratisation; inflation could not be settled through the printing of money and thus required the requisitioning of supplies from peasants; and, once the civil war ended, a demobilised red army was assigned urgent tasks, creating a partially militarised labour force (McLellan, 1980, pp. 115-16). With the conclusion of the civil war the New Economic Policy was introduced. This saw the introduction of a mixed economy, with room freed up for smaller enterprises while the state controlled large industry, banks and foreign trade. The introduction of the NEP came
from a defensive position, trying to ensure the supply of basic necessities throughout an exhausted Russia (Sader, 2011, p. 87).

Developments had led Lenin to conclude that a strong state was needed for some time yet—how else was the Revolution to hold out against internal reactionaries and external aggressors? As noted above, Lenin had envisioned the *withering away* of the state in the post-revolutionary period during the transition from a capitalist to a communist society. As it panned out, however, the party continued to consolidate its power, and the state became increasingly bureaucratised at the expense of direct democracy; these all being things Lenin (1992, pp. 44-45) had previously railed against. Some critics have argued Lenin’s works and political activities had always included a germinal authoritarian impulse, one that ineluctably led to the despotic soviet state (see, for instance, Service, 2000, p. 489). Maybe, but such an impulse was stimulated by the need to defend a revolution. What if this had not been the case? What if Lenin had not died so early in the process? Lenin’s work also contained a libertarian impulse. If circumstances had been different then perhaps this is the figure history would have bequeathed us? What if Trotsky had succeeded Lenin rather Stalin? ‘What if’, ‘maybe’, ‘perhaps’, an endless chain of hypothetical questions can be posed of the Russian Revolution.

As things stand, however, the measures taken in the face of the Civil War and its aftermath laid the foundations for Stalinism. The civil war had prompted Lenin to clamp down on liberties in 1921. All groups who possessed particular political platforms were dissolved and any workers’ opposition to the Bolsheviks was condemned. Only the Communist Party, it was held, was able to overcome vacillations within the populace and provide the unity needed for organising the people in times of adversity. Expulsions from the party began at this time (McLellan, 1980, pp. 90-91). The Revolution was scarred by civil war, economically debilitated, suffering from mass famines, an economic blockade from capital, and it had lost nearly a whole strata of politically conscious workers. The Revolution had been contained, the outcome was Stalin (Ali, 2009, pp. 39-40).

After Lenin’s death, and having manipulated Trotsky out of the picture, Stalin assumed the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1922. The first victims of Stalin’s rule were communist revolutionaries who protested against the bureaucratic travesties taking
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place under the guise of securing the revolution. Stalin consolidated his rule in the period stretching from the late 1920s through to the 1940s. He physically eliminated any perceived threats to his power and swamped the party with pliant new recruits drawn in from the provinces (Ali, 2009, pp. 46-47). Under Stalin’s watch the Soviet Union became conservative and restrictive—dissent was crushed, either through public show-trials and executions, or through sending people to the gulags. Stalin cast a long shadow:

Stalinism transformed Marxist theory into a set of pragmatic rules. History was systematically falsified and rewritten; natural sciences were obstructed and research suppressed; women’s rights were severely curtailed: divorce law was designed to encourage ‘family life’ and the right to abortion was halted; homosexuality was regarded a perversion, although it was not made illegal. A thinly disguised moral code, reminiscent of Victorian England, was instigated at every level of culture and education. (ibid, p. 51)

Tariq Ali (ibid, pp. 60-61) considers Stalinism to be, ultimately, a ‘result of the defeat and isolation of the world revolution’. The socialist revolution was supposed to have been international. The containment of the first wave of revolution caused a dangerous inversion: Stalin’s deformed notion of ‘socialism in one country,’ a proposition which turned Lenin and Marx upon their heads and that explains, in no small part, why the state failed to wither away (McLellan, 1980, p. 136, see also Barker, 2013, p. 60). The Soviet Union was ‘communist’ in name only, in practice it came to exercise a crude form of ‘state-capitalism’—one directed by the party and its functionaries rather than by private capitalists (Pannekoek, 2003, pp. 31-32, el-Ojelili, 2003, p. 147). In common with industrial capitalism, there was a drive for ever-increasing productive, scientific management of the workplace, and a division between intellectual and manual labour.

The Third International was another sphere that suffered under Stalin’s influence. Lenin founded the Third International in 1919 to promote communist revolution in opposition to the reformist drift of the Second International (Arrighi et al., 1989, p. 32). The capitalist strata were too strong to allow their own liquidation through the peaceful means of the ballot box and gradual social change. Rather, he argued, they would use the state apparatus to stymy any substantial change and would forcefully suppress it if need be (Wallerstein, 1991b, pp. 85-86). A successful revolutionary path would involve, then, a strong centralised military
apparatus capable of matching that deployed by capitalist states—a lesson learnt in the early years of the Russian Revolution.

The dictates of realpolitik were, then, introduced to the Third International by Lenin. This can be seen—ironically, considering Lenin’s 1919 (np.) inaugural address to the Third International called for soviets to play a direct role in the administration of the state—in the expulsion of all council communist groups (that is, advocates of the soviet model) from the Third International by 1921 (Rubel and Crump, 1987, p. 5). Those parties which did remain ‘...became completely detached from the working class and soon lost entirely their revolutionary character’ (Castoriadis, 1988, p. 99). With Stalin at the helm, the Third International became an instrument for securing the interests of the Soviet Union rather than furthering the world revolution, any mention of which was, by this point, mere rhetoric (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 71).

Since 1917 Bolshevism had been able to either absorb all social revolutionary trends or push them to the margins—this was especially the case with anarchism (ibid, p. 74). Anarchism did, of course, show itself to be a strong force in the Spanish Revolution, but the inability to safeguard this revolution has been considered, for some, indicative of this tradition’s shortcomings (see, for instance, Debord, 1995, p. 65). Some have gone so far as to argue that the defeat of the Spanish Republic was, simultaneously, the defeat of anarchism as a revolutionary tradition (Kinna and Prichard, 2012, p. 5).

It is illustrative, then, to quickly review the Spanish Civil War in order to assess the uneasy path of revolution outside of the Soviet bloc, and to question the veracity of claims that have sought to discredit anarchism following the fall of the Spanish Republic. The Spanish Civil War, argues Hobsbawm (2006, p. 157), was the stage on which the political issues of the 1930s were played out: on one side democracy and social revolution, the other counter-revolution and reaction. Before the war there were no strong ties to Moscow, with the Spanish left leaning, for the most part, toward ultra-left anarchism. A repressive conservative government had, throughout the 1930s, created a revolutionary counter-pressure. Calls from the Third International for a ‘Popular Front’—a single electoral body formed from the diverse parties and organisations of the Left—struck a chord, argues Hobsbawm, with a ‘Left that did not know quite what to do,’ with anarchists also coming out in support of this measure despite
Spain being ‘their last mass stronghold in the world.’ The Popular Front won the election in 1936, and this victory ‘produced not so much an effective government of the Left as a fissure through which the accumulated lava of social discontent began to spurt’ (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 157). Notably this was the first government in Western Europe to include communists (Beevor, 2006, p. 162), a state of affairs unacceptable to the right, with General Franco staging a coup on the 17th of July 1936.

The strong anarchist presence in Spain fuelled the mass resistance against Franco's forces. As anarchist historian Michael Schmidt (2013, p. 83) notes, networks of free communes were closely tied to the two-million-strong anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT), which in turn was linked to other Spanish anarchist federations—a wider anarchist federation was constructed from these pre-existing contacts to form a confederated militia to defend the communes. With such a strong presence on the ground Schmidt charges the Spanish anarchists with ‘betraying the class line’ through participating in the Republican government. It is hard to know, however, how much more successful anarchists would have been in safeguarding their communes had they not participated at the national level, owing to the strong, well resourced, military power they faced under Franco, backed as he was by German and Italian fascist powers.

Even once the social power of the anarchists was matched with the resources of the Republican government they were unable to match Franco's forces. To do so they would have to turn to foreign help. Calls for support were thwarted, however, by the British government who—fearing the spread of Bolshevism—championed a non-interventionist policy in the international community (despite Germany and Italy’s support for Franco). As a result the democratically elected Spanish government was unable to buy arms with which to defend itself (Beevor, 2006, p. 476). The only government from whom they could hope to receive any help from was Russia, but Stalin’s policy of ‘socialism in one country’ meant help was slow to come, and was minimal when it did (ibid, p. 156). The Russians seemed more concerned with accessing the Republic’s bullion reserves. After convincing them to transfer these to Moscow for safe-keeping, bills for ‘fraternal military support’ and ‘creative accounting’ saw a rapid transfer of Spain’s bullion into Moscow’s own reserves (ibid, p. 173), and even then Stalin ignored most requests for military assistance (ibid, p. 368).
Following Stalin’s decision to support the Republican government, the Third International sent out a call for volunteers to form an International Brigade (ibid, p. 176), a call answered mostly by workers (ibid, p. 178). Over forty thousand volunteers from over fifty countries flooded the ranks of the Brigades, while only one thousand foreign volunteers joined Franco’s forces (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 160).

The International Brigades, once formed, contributed to the chaotic mix of forces arrayed in defence of the Republic. While the Right had a strong cohesive force, the Republic was, in Antony Beevor’s (2006, pp. xxix-xxx) words, ‘a cauldron of incompatibilities and mutual suspicions, with centralists and authoritarians opposed by regionalists and libertarians.’ The Republican government, under the leadership of Juan Negrín of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party, who had come increasingly under the influence of Stalin, sought to form a centralised force capable of matching Franco’s—a goal he achieved, but too late in the conflict for it to turn events to the Republican’s favour (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 161). In building a ‘disciplined machine’ of government Negrín lost the popular support such a machine needed to run—anarchists, for example, argued the victory of Negrín and the communists would, for them, be little different than that of Franco (Beevor, 2006, p. 306).

There was good reason to be sceptical. Knowledge of Stalin’s corrosion of the ideals of the Russian Revolution seeped into Spain. If the Republicans secured a victory the guns would, likely, be quickly turned against competing left-wing factions. As it was, the Stalinist paranoia of Trostkyist infiltration led to the arrest and execution of a number of innocent Republicans (ibid, p. 475). By the time the Spanish Republic fell to Franco’s forces in early 1939, the Republican forces had turned in upon themselves. In doing so they revealed the deep antagonisms riven through the left. The history of the twentieth century shows that the left was just as likely to suffer defeat through sectarianism as by external aggressors.

What lessons can be taken from the Spanish Civil War? Schmidt (2013, p. 84) disagrees with those who see it as the swansong of anarchism, arguing, instead, that it offers the ‘best-studied methods for the successful operation of an egalitarian society on a large scale’, with the ‘worker- and peasant-run fields and factories of Spain providing examples of what is possible’. Secondly, ‘the example of Spain clearly shows’, he argues, ‘that internationalist anarchism and the interests of the working class are totally at odds with nationalist
government, however “revolutionary”.’ Although it is hard to see how the anarchists would have fared any better against the centralised military forces of Franco had they not collaborated with others through their engagement with the Republican government.

Is the problem not, rather, the perennial one of there being massive popular support for the cause—both within Spain and internationally—but that external aggression shorts the revolutionary process. As with the Russian Revolution, the journey toward a new innovative form of social life was subverted by the urgent need for defensive ad hoc responses to reactionary forces. Such conditions necessitate tight coordination, a commanding position, and the bolstering of a strong state—but such an institution becomes a hard shell, restricting movement and thwarting the liberatory impulse. The left splits. Some accept the necessity for the state, and generally are co-opted in the process, while others hold on to romantic ideals at stark odds with the forces assembled against them. The failure of the Spanish Republic may have indicated to some the futility of seeking liberation through the state, but how is liberation to be achieved within the territorial confines of a state so long as it rests in the hands of conservative or reactionary governments? Such questions are as urgent today as they have ever been.

Following the defeat of the Spanish Republic the fortunes of communism in the twentieth century became firmly tied, in most eyes, to the fate of the Soviet Union (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 56). More generally, socialism was divided between the revolutionaries who supported the Leninist approach as supposedly exemplified by the Soviet Union, or the path of social democracy pursued within most core states. Both of these approaches, however, soon came to be seen as bankrupt in the eyes of wage earners (Crump, 1987, pp. 35-38). Social democratic governments within the core had, through their compromises with capital, greatly improved the material conditions of workers’ lives. It is important to not view this, however, as simply being the outcome of workers’ interests dictating the terms on which capital was to act. Indeed, as will be argued in Chapter Three, the post-war period can be seen as one in which conditions were stabilised for capital. Concessions to workers contained unrest—which was important so long as the Soviet Union presented an alternative economic model—and steadily rising wages were directed into mass-consumerism, creating a virtual, although ultimately unsteady, cycle of production and consumption within the core.
So, yes, workers’ interests had been advanced within the core—parties of Second International pedigree had successes they could point to—but were always limited by what was acceptable for capital. In this sense the workers’ movement within core countries had achieved ‘step one’ of the plan—assuming positions of power within the state. They had, however, failed in regards to ‘step two’—they had not radically transformed society (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 69).

The same could be said of the Soviet Union. That vast geopolitical bloc was, nominally, communist in the post-war period, but society had not been transformed anywhere close to the visions that had animated the radical left in the nineteenth century. Rather, despotic state-capitalist regimes had formed—mired in bureaucracy and overseen by a *nomenklatura* (the elite of the communist parties) who had assumed an exploitative position as the new ruling class (Chubarov, 2001, p. 59). While the spirit in which Moscow contributed to republican forces in the Spanish Civil War was questionable, that they were the *only* government to support the fight against fascist forces sent a powerful message to the world. While the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of non-aggression between Russia and the Nazi Germany, signed in 1941, betrayed the shadowy *face* of Moscow’s *realpolitik*, the role eventually played by the Soviet Union in fighting fascism in WWII appeared to place them on the right side of history. But the violent repression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956—the crushing of its citizen’s militias and worker’s councils, brushing aside popular calls for social democracy—shattered illusions of the Soviet Union being a progressive force; prompting many prominent Western Marxists to turn their back on it and the parties affiliated with it (Anderson, 1979, pp. 38-39, Blackburn, 2014, p. 77)—a decision further justified by the violent suppression of the ‘Prague Spring’ in 1968. Such repressive actions meant that Moscow ceased to be the centre of the international communist movement (Hobsbawm, 2006, p. 399). As a geopolitical bloc the Soviet Union did not disappear until 1991, but it had long shown itself incapable of ‘transforming the world’ for the better. The ‘old left’ had failed.

**New Social Movements and the New Left—identity politics dethrones class**

The ‘world revolution of 1968’ witnessed a dramatic backlash against ‘old’ state-focussed antisystemic movements, which were no longer seen as ‘part of the solution but part of the problem’ (Wallerstein, 2002b, p. 33). The antisystemic movements born of the nineteenth century, despite their successes, had failed to ‘deliver the goods’ (Gunder-Frank and Fuentes,
1990, p. 139). While they had been able to ensure a certain degree of material stability, they were unable to meet the demands that erupted in the late 1960s.

A ‘new left’ arose, ‘claiming to supersede the compromised and outdated politics of all branches of the Old Left, whether communist or social-democratic’ (Blackburn, 2014, p. 81). While the new left defies easy categorisation, a few general trends can be discerned: it aimed to free subjectivities from racial, political and patriarchal domination; its struggle was not simply against material or economic hardship, but for a revolution of everyday life; it glorified spontaneity and individual autonomy; plurality was celebrated and the ‘monism’ associated with the ‘old left’ rejected; direct action was elevated above the party and programme; the foundation of revolutionary activity was expanded to embrace students, young people, national minorities and the lumpenproleteriat (Kastfiacas, 1987, p. 27); and the industrial proletariat was no longer positioned as the leading figure of revolt (Wallerstein, 1991b, p. 72). As these trends reveal, the emergence of the new left can also be seen as a re-emergence of anarchist tendencies (see Hobsbawm, 1973).

A proliferation of new social movements in the 1970s accompanied the rise of the new left. These movements were, by and large, cause-focused, encompassing such issues as peace, women’s rights, racism, the environment, homosexual and transgender rights. Instead of focussing principally on redistributive goals, these movements often sought ‘recognition’: the social acceptance and inclusion of different identities and lifestyles—although, despite the shift of emphasis, a redistributive agenda was often implicit in these movements’ claims (Fraser, 2003, p. 12). This so-called ‘cultural turn’ caused concern for some of the old left who bemoaned the rise of ‘identitarian sects’ pursing ‘trivial’ political goals, staging only ‘transient events,’ and failing to address the ‘systematic interrelatedness of social and economic conditions’ (Butler, 1998, p. 34). The rejoinder to such an argument being, for Judith Butler (ibid, p. 37), that the distinction between material and cultural life is far from clear, and future unity for the left, in the wake of new social movements, will

...not be the synthesis of a set of conflicts, but will be a mode of sustaining conflict in politically productive ways, [a] practice of contestation that demands that these movements articulate their goals under the pressure of each other without therefore exactly becoming each other.
It is in the ‘resistance to unity,’ she argues, that the left’s democratic promise is to be found. As true as these statements may be, the tensions between the class-based antisystemic movements that emerged from the nineteenth century and those of the 1970s has been hard to resolve, not least because of capital’s ability to co-opt the energy unleashed by these struggles. An element of the unrest in this period, advocated largely by youth, was a rejection of the *culture* associated with the Fordist-Keynesian economy. This culture was seen as overly bureaucratic, grounded in stolid and highly regulated work, and mired in bland acts of mass consumption that intensified alienation (see Debord, 1995, Baudrillard, 2005). This was the ‘revolution of everyday life’ (Vaneigem, 2006, p. 270) that capital was able to subvert, partly through the proliferation of niche consumerism (Harvey, 2005, p. 42) and also through developing increasingly flexible, personalised, modes of employment intimately bound with the self (at least for those above the lower rungs of the workforce) (Cremin, 2011, pp. 32-33). As argued within the autonomist school of Marxist theory, capital is adept at appropriating the energies unleashed by anti-capitalist struggles to fuel its own development—workers’ struggles, argued Mario Tronti, *provide the dynamic of capitalist development* (cited in Dyer-Witheford, 1999, p. 66, emphasis in original). For example, the Italian autonomist movement of the 1970s, as a continuation of the spirit of ‘68, opposed the Keynesian state and the rigid factory based systems of worker control—faced with this revolt, it was as if capital ‘turned the rebels’ weapons against them saying, in effect, ‘You want freedom? We’ll show you freedom! You want flexibility? We’ll show you flexibility!’ (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007, p. 26).

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007, p. 97) argue that ‘the new spirit’ of capitalism that emerged in the 1970s echoed the sentiments of ‘68ers, many of whom were easily integrated into the neo-management movement of the 1980s:

The qualities that are guarantees of success in this new spirit [of capitalism]—autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity, multitasking (in contrast to the narrow specialisation of the old division of labour), conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability, creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts—these are taken directly from the repertoire of May 1968.

The barriers constructed by labour and the rejection of the Fordist-Keynesianism economic culture at the close of the 1960s can be seen to have fuelled capital’s dramatic restructuring.
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in this period. As Badiou (2010a, p. 44) puts it, ‘the real hero of ‘68 is unfettered neo-liberal capitalism’. Movements which pursued a radical, even anti-capitalist, agenda in the 1960s-70s became increasingly amenable to a restructured capital—a case Nancy Fraser (2013, np.) makes, for instance, regarding second wave feminism, which she terms as having become the ‘handmaiden of neoliberalism’: ‘In effect,’ she writes, ‘we absolutised the critique of cultural sexism at precisely the moment when circumstances required redoubled attention to the critique of political economy.’ As will be argued in Chapter Three, capital’s surface manifestations may change as it pursues new paths to profit, but its underlying dynamics remain the same. An unfortunate outcome of the success of the ‘cultural turn’ was that the imperative to critique the dynamics of capital faded into insignificance for most resistance movements.

As a result, the left was more fractured than ever at the onset of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, in step with Butler’s prognosis, ‘networked’ forms of resistance were emerging at this time to challenge neoliberalism. As Wallerstein (2002a, p. 19) has argued, a ‘world family of antisystemic movements’ was coalescing, animated by the spirit of the World Social Forum. This was a non-hierarchical coming together of diverse groups. A common theme was the promotion of militant actions grounded in popular mobilisations relating to everyday life, a search for ideological clarity, and the attempt to instigate significant long-term changes. Resistance to neoliberalism was strengthening.

Challenging Neoliberalism—the global justice movement, world social forum and anarchism

The challenge to neoliberalism first emerged in the South. One of the earliest uprisings was a popular revolt in Venezuela in 1989, the most famous the Zapatista uprising of 1994 (Ballvé, 2006, pp. 27-28). Due to the expanding reach of the Internet at the time, Subcomandante Marcos (2002, p. 117), the Zapatistas’ spokesperson, was able to take the then novel step of broadcasting from the Lacandon Jungle to activists and sympathisers worldwide. In the ‘Second Declaration of la Realidad for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism,’ broadcast in 1996, he declared:

That we will make a collective network of all our particular struggles and resistances, an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism.... This intercontinental network
of resistance will be the medium in which distinct resistances may support one another. ...

It is not an organising structure; it has no central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist.

Marcos’ words resonated with activists around the world. By 2001 Naomi Klein was able to speak of there being a ‘movement of movements’ actively contesting neoliberalism (Klein, 2001, p. 82). Its diverse components included: environmentalists; those concerned about the effects of global trade; NGOs in solidarity with the world poor, and humanitarian NGOs; workers and trade unions; farmers and peasants; indigenous people and their solidarity networks; women’s movements; revolutionary artists; anarchists and autonomous groups from different ideologies and traditions; young people in violent revolt against society; and political parties of the old left (Castells, 2005, p. 150). Indigenous people played an important role within the movement, calling upon lessons learnt from 500 years of resistance to global capitalism (Smith, 2012, p. 372). This movement, more commonly known as the Global Justice Movement (GJM), was a deliberate attempt to establish social control over the dominant economic and political institutions that were seen to be operating in the interests of an elite whose actions had undermined democracy.

An important ongoing aspect of the GJM has been the World Social Forum (WSF), a platform from which activists and social movements from around the world could discuss and further the idea that ‘another world is possible.’ It is a direct challenge to the reigning hegemonic order (Santos, 2006, p. 36). Indicative of the new politics pursued by the WSF was the exclusion of political parties and insurrectionary movements, with the vertical organisational structures of the old left rejected in favour of horizontal organisation (Wallerstein, 2014, p. 170; horizontalism will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five). The WSF, with its aversion to hierarchy and exclusion, fostered ‘a culture of networked politics’ (Smith, 2008, p. 225).

The notion of ‘networked politics’ led some to argue that the form of the GJM was inextricably bound to the Internet. Marcos had broadcast the need for a ‘network of resistance’ and the Internet was seen to provide the means of its realisation. Its structure—many nodes, no centre—was celebrated as directly analogous to the GJM’s own structure (Castells, 2005, p. 154, Fenton, 2008, p. 40). Scholars positioned the movement as a paradigmatic example of a networked social movement (van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004, p. 121, Zivkovic and Hogan, 2008,.
p. 187, Castells, 2009, p. 342). As opposed to the centralised, hierarchical forms of organisation associated with political parties or unions, the Internet was seen to offer the movement ‘a broader model for creating alternative forms of social, political, and economic organisation’ (Juris, 2005a, p. 206). The emergence of new networked social movements challenging neoliberalism appeared to confirm the hopes early proponents of the Internet had held for the medium as a means of rejuvenating democracy and bringing ‘power to the people’ (see for instance Rheingold, 1993, Negroponte, 1995).

The GJM’s organisational structure was also seen to reflect anarchist sensibilities (Graeber, 2002, p. 62). In a continuation of the spirit of 1960s there was a push for decentralised organisational structures, strong egalitarianism, a suspicion of authority (especially that of the state), a rejection of leaders, an emphasis on consensus based decision making, a push for direct action and a call for individuals to be committed to their own sensibilities (see Ward, 2005, Munck, 2007).

The anarchist model of organisation practiced by the GJM did, however, attract criticism. Stephanie Ross (2002, p. 289) argued the fragmented nature of the movement was not a deliberate tactic, but rather a reflection of a consciousness deliberately fostered by capital ‘so as to break down forms of collective action which posit a universal interest.’ Ross offers an exhaustive list of the shortcomings of the GJM’s anarchist-inspired approach: the sacrosanct autonomy of the local is seen to come at the expense of mutual understanding and the management of the contemporary left’s diversity of opinion; avoidance of conflict within affinity groups was seen to lead to the continuous formation of smaller and smaller groups; autonomous groups are undemocratic as there is no mutual accountability; the commitment to a leaderless movement is seen as rhetoric only as leaders always emerge for practical reasons, and because this happens informally there is a lack of accountability or democratic restraints on such leaders; the diversity of tactics pursued by the movement was problematic, as the decisions of a minority group during an action can impact negatively on all other groups (an example being when the Black Block becomes involved in violent engagement with the police, who are able to then use this as an excuse to violently repress all groups involved in an action); finally, consensus decision making is critiqued by Ross for its ‘tyranny of endurance,’ with those able to hold out long enough getting to make decisions (see also Epstein, 2001).
The strategic approach of the GJM has also been critiqued. Emir Sader (2011, pp. 15-16), for instance, is critical of the manner in which the WSF—through excluding political parties—reduced the domain of struggle exclusively to that of social movements and NGOs, and thus privileged civil society over politics, the problem being, he argues, that this approach became mired in a resistance mentality and was, therefore, unable to build alternatives. While right to be critical of traditional parties and political practices, Sader (ibid, p. 125) argues that evacuating the established political sphere was a bad strategy: ‘The mistake is to give up on politics altogether, believing that an alternative, even one built from the bottom up, could simply avoid disputing the political sphere.’ The WSF is seen to have confined itself to the social sphere, holding a defensive position, ‘unable to create the instruments needed to fight for political hegemony.’ Ultimately, he contends, the logics embedded within the WSF were all too compatible with the neoliberal discourse they sought to oppose. Hostility to the state, political parties and government has dovetailed with neoliberal rhetoric. As a result it was unclear what was being fought for. If the wider economic situation is the target of their struggles, then what is to be made of the fact that any regulation of the movement of capital and financial markets can only be achieved through state actions?

While the anarchist influences in the GJM did not go unchallenged, they appeared in step with the times—with the loosely affiliated networks of groups who coalesced into various actions around the world reflecting the communications technologies they used for organisation. They embodied the notion (as expressed above by Butler) that the left should not seek synthesis but rather work with productive tensions. The tensions have persisted, as will be seen in later chapters, but have yet to prove productive.

**Summary—from class struggle to the movement of movements**

Political change has been seen as a constant feature of social life since the French Revolution, but the question of how to best steer this process of change towards substantive democracy has proved problematic. In tracing the long arc of contention this chapter has uncovered a series of persistent dilemmas for the left. Every attempt to instigate deep revolutionary change has been met by fierce resistance. How is it possible to safeguard the fragile beginnings of new egalitarian social forms when met with aggression? The Soviet Union provides an example of how using a strong state to defend the revolution becomes itself
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problematic: state institutions become sclerotic, new forms of inequality and privilege arise, the new society becomes a parody of the old.

Core states sought to avoid the problems of defending revolutionary change through pursuing steady programmes of reform instead. It becomes difficult, however, to assess the extent to which these reforms genuinely stemmed from the working class and its representatives, as these changes also had the effect of stabilising conditions for capital following the Great Depression and two world wars. Whether through reform or revolution, the state was widely rejected as a means of transforming society by many on the new left or those involved in new social movements.

As will be argued in detail in Chapter Three, capital was adept at incorporating the working class in the post-war period. The movements emerging from 1968 tended to reject the notion that the working class constituted the revolutionary subject. Identities and cultures that had either been ignored, or at best side-lined, blossomed and came to the forefront of radical challenges to the status quo. Capital proved just as adept at co-opting the energies unleashed in this period of struggle as it had those of the former period, while at the same time critiques of capital disappeared from the vocabulary of social movements.

Resistance to neoliberalism, when it emerged in the late twentieth century, saw critiques of capital come to the fore again; although this time without recourse to the state or the party. There was, rather, an emergence of networked, often spontaneous, horizontal, and pluralistic approaches to political contestation—reflecting the diverse currents of protest to have grown from the 1960s—that offer the means of creating flexible links across an increasingly fractured left. Critiques of this approach, however, argue it expresses the same logics that animate capital in the contemporary age. Such debates signal a return to the dilemmas faced by nineteenth century movements, although this time anarchism appears ascendant within social movements in the core. The ways in which this debate plays out within the contemporary context (with particular reference to Occupy) is the subject Part Two of this thesis. The next chapter will consider the ways in which social movement theory has responded to changes within social movements.
Social movements can challenge established power. If the current crisis of democracy is to be overcome it is important to consider the crucial role social movements can play (Della Porta, 2011, p. 803). Chapter One traced the arc of contention, from the French Revolution through to the rise of new social movements and on to the alternative globalisation movement, as traversed by social movements from the left. In the following pages attention is turned to the barren terrain of social movement studies. If this field is to become fruitful it is necessary to reintroduce Marxian modes of analysis.

Social movement studies, historically, had a strong Marxian underpinning. The term ‘social movement’ was first deployed in a scholarly context in 1850, by the German sociologist Lorenz von Stein, to convey the idea of an on-going process by which the working class achieved self-consciousness and power (Tilly, 2004, p. 5-6). Although, as seen in the preceding chapter, Marx and Engels had deployed the term earlier than this and can rightfully be considered the ‘earliest theorists of social movements’ (Tarrow, 2011, p. 17). By the 1920s the notion of ‘social movements’ was salient throughout the social sciences, almost always in relation to working class movements (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006, p. 13-14).
The Marxist influence on social movement studies, while still strong in the 1970s, has since waned. Charles Tilly, one of the most influential North American social movement scholars argued Marxism was important for the study of movements, as it stressed ‘the ubiquity of conflict, the importance of interests rooted in the organisation of production, the influence of specific forms of organisation and intensity of collective action’ (as cited in Jasper, 2012, pp. 4-5). Yet key Marxist categories, most notably that of political economy, disappeared from Tilly’s later work—as well as that of his collaborators Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow (Barker et al., 2013, p. 4).

Indeed, as Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin (2013, pp. 83-86) have argued, while leading movement studies in the 1960s and 70s might have paid close attention to the dynamics of capital there has since been a ‘strange disappearance of capitalism from social movement studies.’ ‘Instead,’ they write, ‘recent scholarship tends to focus on short-term shifts in “cultural framings,” social networks, and especially “political opportunities,” rarely examining the deeper causes of such shifts.’ The rise of ‘new social movement’ studies is largely responsible for this turn (Blackledge, 2013, p. 259). In this sense, it can be seen that the changing emphasis of social movement studies has mirrored that of new movements themselves (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 1).

Having explored the arc of social movement contestation in Chapter One, this chapter charts how social movement theorisation has reflected the changing manifestations of contention. North American and European approaches to social movement studies are both found wanting for having dropped political economy from their analyses. New social movements may have put questions of political economy to one side, but there was no reason for those studying movements to do the same. The need for a theory of social movements able to account for the dynamics of capital was apparent with the rise of the global justice movement at the turn of the millennium. But rather than seriously appraising how political economy contributed to the appearance of these movements, theorists like Manuel Castells (2006) took a techno-fetishist turn to explain change while others pursued (as will be shown below) a more micro-focussed activist-centred approach. The strength of Marxian studies of social movements, as advocated for in what follows, is that it allows for a multi-tiered holistic account of movements—the agency of people within movements is viewed as dialectically entwined with the social structures they seek to challenge and change.
North American Social Movement Studies—the restricted scope of conventional social movement studies

Marxism and the study of working class movements dominated the development of social movement theorisation within Europe. Pioneering North American studies, however, tended to take place under the rubric of ‘collective behaviour theory’ (from the 1920s through to the 1960s). Questioning how actors create meaning through social interaction drove such analyses (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 12). Collective behaviour, it was held, arose when established systems of meaning broke down and people were forced to construct new ones. Such behaviour, Neil J. Smelser (2008, pp. 79-80 [1962]) argued, unfurled along two axes: that of ‘collective outbursts’ as seen in panics and crazes; and that of ‘collective movements’ seeking to ‘modify norms and values’. This theoretical approach tended toward conservatism—disruptive movements were dismissively branded ‘irrational’ and those stabilising the status quo celebrated (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006, p. 19).

Mancur Olson (2008 [1965]) offered a significant development to collective behaviour theory through emphasising the rational aspect of social movement participants’ actions. Individuals, in his reckoning, tended toward rational, self-interested behaviour. Therefore their aggregation into a common group will not automatically lead to cooperative behaviour: ‘they will not act to advance their common or group objectives unless there is coercion to force them to do so’ (ibid, p. 94). If given the opportunity, groups and individuals will ‘free-ride,’ enjoying the benefits of collective action without expending their own energy.

Resource mobilisation theory (RMT) was constructed on the foundations of Olson’s work. As pioneered by John D. Mcarthy and Mayer N. Zald (1977, pp. 1212-13) in the late 1970s, RMT sought to move from a social psychology inflected analysis toward a more ‘structural’ method, one focused on the resources a movement could draw upon. While Olson held participation required a degree of coercion, RMT argued it was a result of ‘normal behaviour, emerging out of biographical circumstances, social supports, and immediate life situations’ (McCarthy and Zald, 2001, p. 535). A sense of deprivation or shared grievances is not enough for collective action to take place. Resources are needed. These include a movement’s ability to gain purchase within the wider community (which involves their capacity to positively influence
news media), human time and effort, and money (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 128). The ability of the movement to strategically coordinate these resources is vital—it must be able to convert the ‘available pools of individually held resources into collective resources and to utilise those resources into collective action’ (ibid, p. 116).

RMTs economistic approach has left it open to the charge of reducing everything to ‘calculation, bargaining and exchange’ (Melucci et al., 1989, p. 186) and of not paying sufficient attention to the wider social/cultural environment (Mayer and Bartholomew, 1992, p. 142). Nevertheless, RMT signalled a shift in the North American field of social movements toward a positive conceptualisation of movements—in no small part because many of the scholars involved were either participants in, or at least sympathetic to, the movements they studied (Flacks, 2004, p. 136).

Political process theory (PPT) is closely associated with RMT (McCarthy and Zald, 2001, p. 534). Its primary focus, however, is on the state—‘political opportunities,’ it is held, determine the likelihood of movement achieving its goals (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 17). Peter Eisinger (1973, pp. 11-12), a pioneering figure of this approach, argues ‘the manner in which individuals and groups in the political system behave... is not simply a function of the resources they command but of the openings, weak spots, barriers and resources of the political system itself.’ The more open the political opportunity structure is at a particular point, then the more likely groups will press their demands. As with RMT, the notion of ‘rational actors’ is used to evaluate collective behaviour, with protest considered ‘a product... of a cost-benefit calculation’ (p. 13).

Both RMT and PPT emphasise the importance of resources for mobilisation—but while RMT argues a group’s own resources are not enough without wider community buy-in, PPT argues groups will often have ‘enough resources and disruptive potential to induce social change, when confronted with a favourable political opportunity structure’ (Giugni, 1999, p. xix, see also Tarrow, 2008, p. 146). Taken together, RMT and PPT offer useful lines when considering the wider constraints and opportunities movements face, although both are guilty of downplaying the subjective elements of protest (Jasper, 2004b, p. 3) and neither satisfactorily account for the wider dynamics of social change, especially in relation to political economy.
The ‘framing’ approach to social movement study, developed in the 1990s, sought to directly address the neglected subjective dimension of mobilisation as part of the attempt to synthesise and extend RMT and PPT (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 18). Erving Goffman’s notion of ‘frames’ as ‘schemata of interpretation’ that allow actors to ‘locate, perceive, identify, and label’ experience orientates this approach. The construction of frames—a ‘meaning making’ process—enables actors to organise experience in ways that help guide action. ‘Frame alignment’ is necessary for movement participation. Alignment creates links between individuals and the cognitive orientation developed within a movement (Snow et al., 1986, p. 465) and increases the probability of mass-participation (Opp, 2009, p. 234). There is a practical bent to the framing approach, with activist scholars undertaking framing work ‘to shape a particular group into a coherent movement’ (Ryan and Gamson, 2006, p. 13)—Occupy’s slogan ‘we are the 99%’ is an example of such an attempt.

Framing theorists argue that they overcome a number of shortcomings found in other approaches. The list of failings identified in these other approaches is substantial. They are seen to overlook the ‘interpretation of grievances and other ideational elements, such as values and supportive beliefs’ within movements; having too static a view of movements; over generalising the participation-related process by not specifying the ‘extent to which various participation-related processes, such as bloc recruitment... network recruitment... mobilisation of pre-existing preference structures... and conversion... vary across social movements;’ and ‘pursuing a microstructural approach that ignores variation between groups’ objectives, organisational structures and opponents (Snow et al., 1986, pp. 465-67). The framing perspective has been critiqued, in turn, for not going far enough, as it favours cognitive over emotional elements in describing collective action (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 88). The chief problem with the framing approach, however, as opposed to the approach pursued within this thesis, is its tendency toward narrowly focussed studies with a strong descriptive value but little explanatory value vis-à-vis wider dynamics of social change. It tends toward the narrow and particularistic.

The dynamics of contention approach (DCA), developed by the leading scholars of the PPT tradition, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), is a more recent contribution to the North American field of movement studies. In developing DCA, they reject the notion that a choice
should be made between culturalist, rationalist or structuralist approaches to contentious politics (ibid, p. 35). Movement studies, they argue, should encompass a range of ‘contentious politics,’ including ethnic conflicts, strikes and pushes for democratisation (an approach already long pursued by those in the world-systems school, see Arrighi et al., 1989).

Cultural, historical and political contexts are important for DCA. People engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change such that a repertoire of collective action can be strategically deployed. This repertoire can then be picked up by others and the cycle of contention widened (Tarrow, 2008, p. 145). It is important to consider repertoires of contention, as people do not simply ‘act collectively.’ Rather the decision to ‘petition, assemble, strike, march, occupy premises, obstruct traffic, set fires, [or] attack others with intent to do bodily harm’ depends on cultural context. The ‘learned conventions of contention are part of a society’s public culture’ (ibid, p. 146, see also Tilly, 2006, p. 35).

The state must also be considered, since ‘although movements usually conceive of themselves as outside of and opposed to institutions, acting collectively inserts them into complex policy networks, and thus within the reach of the state’ (Tarrow, 2008, p. 150). DCA’s more structurally orientated approach has led James M. Jasper (2012, p. 33) to critique the manner in which considerations of context come at the expense of attention to individual players (their biographies, ideas, goals, decision making processes). The value of DCA lies in recognising that cultural and historical context is important for movements, as are concrete considerations of the state. Although, as with the other approaches considered above, insufficient attention is paid to the effect of political economy upon mobilisation.

Each of the various approaches developed in the field of North America movement studies since the 1970s offers useful insights—although each approach has limitations. A synthesis of these approaches, as seen with DCA, is a valuable step forward, but one that does not go far enough. There is still a tendency to ground analysis in notions of the ‘rational actor’—of calculation and entrepreneurship—without sufficient consideration paid to how wider social forces shape individuals. Of use, however, are practical considerations as to how resources, political opportunities, cultural repertoires, histories of struggle, and framing influence movements. The glaring absence of analyses of political economy limits the usefulness of these approaches and, by extension, there is an inability to fully account for how movements are dialectically intertwined with social change.
European Social Movement Studies—new social movements and the absence of political economy

As explored in preceding chapters, the emergence of new social movements in the late 1960s had a profound impact upon developed societies—politically, culturally and economically. The emergence of these movements was, for European social movement theorists, considered indicative of profound social change. If worker’s movements (‘old movements’) were an expression of the conflictive dynamics of industrial society, then new movements expressed forms of grievance novel to a ‘post-industrial society’ (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 20). Conflicts arose over control of the means of symbolic production rather than material production (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 63). Alain Touraine pioneered the study of new social movements, followed, most notably, by his students Alberto Melucci and Manuel Castells. All three will be loosely drawn together in what follows to develop an overview of European studies of new social movements. Unlike North American approaches, this approach is situated within a theorisation of the wider social context.

May 1968 prompted Touraine (1971a, p. 346) to reconceptualise social movement studies. What made this period’s uprisings unique, for him, was that they were less about those ‘excluded from the social system’ and more about those ‘at its very heart’—as the ‘revolutionary thrust’ of collective action came from ‘the most modern sectors of economic activity, where the role of knowledge is most important: the advanced industries, centres of research or advanced technology, the universities, information media, etc’ (Touraine, 1971b, p. 98).

Touraine situates new movements in the context of a technocratic ‘post-industrial’ society (a term used interchangeably with ‘programmed society’) (Touraine, 1981, p. 6). In such a society technology is able to ‘penetrate’ the social, to override custom and tradition, and affords large organisations the ability to attain and hold power through ‘programming society’ (Touraine, 1971a, p. 32). The social movements of 1968 were seen as a reaction to the programmed society, with its mass consumption and the ‘commercialisation of human relations, feelings and sexuality.’ These movements were ‘social, political, and cultural rather than exclusively economic’ (ibid, p. 32-3). Touraine’s approach to social movements is driven by the assertion that a newly emerging social form begets new social movements.
Melucci (1989, p. 45), like Touraine, situates the study of movements against a theorisation of the wider social context. Although for him it is in terms of ‘complex societies’ (or ‘information societies’) where ‘material production is increasingly replaced by the production of signs and social relations.’ Since information is the key resource of complex societies, it is important that individuals can ‘act as competent and reliable terminals in a complex network of communications’, which ‘is only possible if they have access to resources that enable them to solve problems and to learn’ (Melucci, 1989, p. 175). The wider populace is therefore seen to have benefited from the rise of complex societies. People now have access to resources and knowledge from which they were previously excluded, and thus have presumably increased decision-making capabilities and independence (ibid, p. 113, see also Himanen, 2001, p. 112, Castells, 2009, p. 30). The ability of individuals to participate in the social, to extend their knowledge and decision making capacities, to respond to the pressure of socialisation, depends upon their position vis-à-vis the ‘codes’ (norms, values, dominant ideas) structuring complex societies (Melucci, 1989, pp. 170-71).

The circulation of codes—their implementation, development and contestation—animates complex societies. Social control, argues Melucci (1996, p. 8), has shifted ‘from the manifest forms of behaviour to motives and the meaning of action, to those hidden codes that make individuals and groups predictable and dependable social actors.’ We have, therefore, a ‘media system’ that imposes, on a global scale, ‘patterns of cognition and communication which work far beyond the specific contexts diffused by the TV or the movies’ extending into our consumption habits, sexuality, education and interpersonal relations (ibid, p. 180). The problem here being that the assimilation of codes is generally passive. Individuals are only there to receive codes ‘and have no access to the power that shapes reality through the controlled ebb and flow of information’ (ibid, p. 180). In such a system, argues Melucci (ibid, pp. 178-179), inequality is not to be conceived solely in terms of the distribution and control of resources, but also in terms of who has control over ‘master codes.’

Melucci’s focus on the importance of ‘challenging codes’ has become increasingly pertinent in light of the role played by social media in movements and the possibilities this offers for bypassing mainstream media, as indicated in the preceding chapter’s discussion of the global justice movement. New media offers the potential for a more active engagement with media, an issue receiving a lot of attention in Castells’ work.
Castells develops similar lines of argumentation to Melucci, although he situates his arguments—due to his focus on information and communication technologies—within the context of a ‘network society.’ Castells (2001, p. 155) considers the material structure of a society to be bound to the technology it develops and disseminates. The lineaments of the ‘network society’ have formed ‘around networks activated by microelectronics-based digitally processed information and communication technologies’ (Castells, 2009, p. 24). It is a global society, as communication technologies from the 1940s onwards have provided the material conditions for the emergence of large scale global networks (Castells, 2004, pp. 5-6). These networks have radically changed social organisation within developed societies. They have eclipsed the vertically structured hierarchical command institutions that characterised industrial societies (Castells, 2001, p. 155). Castells (2009, pp. 19-20), in a reprise of Melucci’s arguments (not that this debt is ever acknowledged), asserts that every network has a programme, made of codes, that assigns the network its goals, values, and rules of performance. The dominant codes of the network society are imbued with the logic of capitalism. But it is a new form of capitalism, one that

...depends on innovation as the source of productivity growth; on computer-networked global financial markets, whose criteria for valuation are influenced by information turbulences; on the networking of production and management, both internally and externally, locally and globally; and on labour that is flexible and adaptable. (Castells, 2009, p. 33)

Consistent with the work of Touraine and Melucci, Castells offers a picture of recent history as characterised by fundamental shifts in the means and relations of production, propelled, in part, by radical technological change (with the economic dynamics driving this downplayed). As with Touraine and Melucci, Castells envisions a dialectical entwinement of social movement contestation and social change.

Social movement contestation involves, for these theorists, the disruption of ‘cultural codes’ (Melucci, 1996, p. 9). Drawing on themes developed in Marshall McLuhan’s work (see McLuhan, 2006, Keane and Mier, 1989, p. 5) Melucci argues that movements operate as ‘messages’ and ‘signs’, in the sense that they ‘express something more and other than the particular substantive issues for which they are usually known’. A movement may be targeting a particular issue, yet it also sends ‘signals which illuminate hidden controversies about the
appropriate form of fundamental social relations within complex societies’ (emphasis in original, Melucci et al., 1989, p. 206). Castells (2009, pp. 42-5) is more explicit on this point. Networks (which, for him, constitute the structure of contemporary society) are programmed, and the question of who ‘programmes’ the dominant networks (and the logics at play within such programming) involves the play of power. Power is grounded in the ability to control the communication of information, to code the network. Therefore, as also argued by Melucci, resistance involves ‘challenging codes.’

Effective resistance for Castells (2009, p. 20), seeks to challenge the codes programmed into the most powerful networks. If power within network society is chiefly determined by the ability to programme the lines of communication that flow between the nodes of a network, then ‘to alter the outcomes of the network, a new program (a set of goal-orientated, compatible codes) needs to be installed from outside the network’. Of great import here is how political issues are communicated and perceived.

Alternative projects and values put forward by the social actors aiming to reprogram society must also go through the communication networks to transform consciousness and views in people’s minds in order to challenge the powers that be. And it is only by acting on global discourses through the global communication networks that they can affect power relationships in the global networks that structure all societies (ibid, p. 53).

The challenge here being, that while social movements are able to enter public spaces from multiple sources ‘by using both horizontal communication networks and mainstream media to convey their images and messages,’ in doing so ‘they must adapt to the language of the media and to the formats of interaction in the communication networks’ (p. 302). It is hard to evade the dominant logics embedded within a network. Therefore, the ability to enact change is effected by the degree of autonomy movements are able to gain ‘vis-à-vis the controllers of societal communication nodes’ (p. 413). This is difficult as, despite arguments to the contrary, the ability to reach the wider public via the media is still dominated by ‘gatekeepers’

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4 In relation to movements as signs Melucci (1996, p. 183) raises the possibility of ‘silence and retreat’ as forms of resistance in a society where communication is the ‘dominant means and content of domination’. Retreat offers the opportunity to experiment with alternative models of social life. While this notion of evacuating the places of power has overlaps with more radical critiques, such as that of Negri and Hardt (as will be explored in the following chapter), Melucci postulates a more conservative outcome: a social movements ‘message’ of withdrawal is ‘incorporated into the social arena and the debates may commence.’
who seek to protect their own interests. Government control and corporate attempts to enclose telecommunication networks ‘shows the persistence of networking power in the hands of the gatekeepers’ (p. 419). New media affords social movements opportunities to affect how the wider public perceives political issues, but the ability to do so is a lot more constrained than some web pundits would have us believe (as will be explored in Chapter Seven).

The focus of these theorists upon the disruption of cultural codes points to the different nature of new social movements from ‘old’ ones. Melucci (1996, pp. 102-03), for example, attributes the following key features to contemporary social movements: heterogeneity and low negotiability; disinterest in the political system and the seizing of power; a challenge to modern separation of the public and private; the search for communal identity; and the rejection of ‘representation’ in favour of direct action, the ‘appeal to spontaneity, anti-authoritarianism, and anti-hierarchism.’ Movements are both ‘pre- and post-political’ (Melucci, 1989, p. 71-2), as their actions are directed toward symbolic or affective relationships that function ‘according to a differential logic,’ and thus cannot be considered political (ibid, 1989, p. 167). An immediate impact made by movements is forcing ‘power out into the open and [giving] it a shape and face’ (Melucci, 1996, p. 1, a definition which owes much to Touraine, see 1971a, p. 60). Although, the question must be asked: just how new is any of this? The term ‘new movements’ could be replaced with ‘anarchists’ and not a word would appear out of place.

Movements, we are told, modify complex society through challenging codes and consequently they have the functional outcome of stabilising society (Melucci, 1989, p. 11). ‘Only a society that is able to accommodate the thrust of the movements by providing an unconstrained arena for the fundamental issues raised by collective action... can ensure that complexity is not ironed out... and [that there is] a manageable coexistence of its own tensions’ (1996, p. 10). From this position, Melucci’s view of social movements casts them as vital antagonistic forces which can, paradoxically, stabilise the status quo in the sense that the dominant ‘codes’ are updated without being overthrown. ‘Difference’ as pursued by movements and underwritten by complex society is a given, but only within a particular paradigm (a neoliberal one). The function of movements is to stabilise this paradigm.
The leading protagonists of Melucci’s (1989, p. 56) work are social movements, but the important outcomes of their actions, to his mind, are to be found in the creation of new elites and the modernisation of institutions. Therefore the only demands that are seen to gain purchase are those compatible with the dominant market logic. Although movements may, from time to time, make ‘power visible’ they keep the hand of the market invisible.

Against this continual co-option of social movement activity by capital (although Melucci would never term it this way) the rather hollow sounding assertion is made that, in movements, there is a ‘deeper commitment to the recognition that personal needs are the path to changing the world and to seeking alternatives’ (Melucci et al., 1989, p. 49). This focus on ‘personal needs’ inside social movements, as also noted by Touraine, reflects a ‘cultural turn’ whereby the focus of collective action has moved from class, race and other ‘traditional political issues’ toward the ‘cultural ground’ since the late 1960s. Political targets are dropped and cultural challenges arise against ‘the dominant language [of] the codes that organise information and shape social life (Melucci, 1996, p. 8), and fights for ‘difference’ replace those for equality (Melucci, 1989, p. 185). Touraine (2003, p. 128) argues ‘grand historical narratives [have been replaced] with grand personal narratives, i.e. narratives which deal with the strengths and weaknesses of social actors who have become the ultimate aim of their own action.’ While Touraine (2008, p. 215) has become pessimistic about the turn taken by movements—especially their explicit separation from the state—Melucci (1989, p. 165) is relatively sanguine: ‘While movements may withdraw from what can be considered explicitly political,’ he argues, ‘there has been a multiplication and diffusion of political instances within complex societies... [because] complexity and change produce the need for decisions’ and political relationships. Movements prompt elites to mediate between opposed interests and to address areas of uncertainty within the social, the result being, he argues, the modification of complexity (Melucci, 1996, p. 112).

Echoing the types of arguments made by neoliberal economists (as will be explored in Chapter Three) Melucci ignores the hierarchical structures implicit in culture, especially in relation to economic issues (Mayer and Bartholomew, 1992, pp. 148-50). Noting that the withdrawal of movements from the explicitly political, at the same time as there is a multiplication of political instances, leads Melucci (1996, p. 216) to assert that movements are ineffective if
they do not work through political actors (a technocratic elite) who can mediate their demands—this being, ultimately, a very conservative argument.

The perception of democracy within Melucci’s (1996, p. 219-20) work is a very limited one: if individuals are able to express themselves, it would seem, elites can take care of the rest. He offers, ultimately, little more than a hollow celebration of representative democracy. His only caveat is that certain conditions need to be met if democracy is to persist. Chief among these being the ‘expansion and official recognition of public spaces,’ as the existence of such spaces allows movements to contribute to the ‘invisible networks of civil society.’ The nature of such contributions lies in movements articulating and publicising to the rest of society the issues they consider important, which, in turn, influences political actors (Melucci et al., 1989, p. 227-28). Such public spaces already exist, to some extent, argues Melucci, in the form of knowledge-producing institutions, ‘such as universities, cultural foundations and research institutes’ and they could also be strengthened ‘within the field of collective consumption—in the areas of transportation, housing, health and other public services.’ Finally, and importantly, public spaces could also be strengthened in the field of communication media (Melucci et al., 1989, p. 228). Public spaces are points of connection between collective demands and political institutions, between government and the representation of conflicts; they are spaces in which movements are able to act without losing their specificity.

The functionalist undertones of Melucci’s argument, his deployment of ultimately conservative, normative statements regarding ideal movement outcomes, coupled with a near blindness to political economy and the hierarchies it produces, limits the usefulness of his work when viewed from a Marxist perspective. Despite such shortcomings, what is of value in Melucci’s approach—as with Touraine and Castells—is the situating of social movements in a wider context (something which mainstream North American social movement scholars have largely failed to do). They tend to focus on movements’ effects in terms of ‘reprogramming society’—with their conceptions of the social emphasising a break between industrial and post-industrial societies, with communication and knowledge becoming the chief terrain of production and contestation.

As will be argued in the following chapter, the dynamics of capital persist even as their outward manifestations change. To focus on the ‘newness’ of contemporary society can be
misleading. While the above approach correctly identifies the changing nature of social movements—directed toward identity and cultural issues (as explored in Chapter One)—this comes (with the exception of Touraine’s later work) with rather facile celebrations as to the changing nature of contestation. Descriptive accounts of movements slide into normative assumptions as to their democratic efficacy. In arguing that they are ‘post-political’, insufficient attention is paid to the fact that, in making such claims, that there is a corresponding reliance upon a technocratic elite to interpret and respond to movements’ claims-making—the irony being that such an elite was supposedly the target of new movements when they first emerged in the 1960s. Ultimately this approach fits all too comfortably with neoliberal beliefs about the ideal forms of political organisation for contemporary society.

The Activist Perspective—actors first, structure (a distant) second

Melucci’s work, with its cultural emphasis, helped to establish an approach to social movements that takes activists’ viewpoints seriously (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006, p. 38). James M. Jasper has sought to extend such considerations, developing an approach to the study of movements that explores how ‘structured arenas shape players’ decisions’, and also how actors’ cultural understandings, meanings, and feelings effect collective action (2004b, p. 4). Abstract ‘rational choice theories’ of collective action are abandoned by Jasper, as he holds there is no “‘rationality” independent of institutional contexts’ (2004b, p. 6). In step with Melucci, Jasper argues activists are ‘like artists, they are at the cutting edge of society’s understandings of itself as it changes’ (1997, p. 13). Regarding activists in such a way, gives rise to the idea of movements as rupturing the status quo—the moment in which ‘strategic players manage to break with expectations and make another choice, taking their opponents by surprise. This is how structures change, after all’ (Jasper, 2004b, p. 7). Such an approach opens the door to considering how activists develop strategies and make choices in particular contexts, and also takes account of the role of emotions (as culturally produced and mediated) in influencing (and sustaining) action (Jasper, 2004a, p. 242, see also Goodwin et al., 2004, pp. 424-5).

A more explicitly activist-orientated approach to the study of social movements can be seen in the work of Sarah Maddison and Sean Scalmer (2006, pp. 6-7), who argue for the importance of taking the ‘knowledge produced by activists very seriously’. A key component
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of this approach is valuing the ‘practical knowledge’ activists develop. This approach ‘takes knowledge from the streets back to the academy.’ Activists have developed a particular type of knowledge that does not possess the formal or abstract qualities of academic theory, and which cannot be ‘reduced to a set of fixed propositions’. Rather, it is ‘best understood as a mode of acting and reasoning, a particular kind of relationship between thought and practices’. This practical knowledge is: local and partisan; social; intuitive; experimental; adaptive; narrative; and reflective’ (ibid, p. 250).

Following in the footsteps of James C. Scott (1985, pp. 296-99), this activist-centred approach recognises that there are multiple and varied forms of resistance carried out by actors in their life-world that can easily be missed by theoretical approaches focused on larger structural features. Bearing in mind the ‘activist perspective’ when considering social movements is valuable as it maintains the theory-action circuit that is all too often broken. Although it must be acknowledged that while this circuit is not always explicitly obvious, it is almost always present on an implicit level, as activism within contemporary developed countries is frequently initiated by those with a university education (which does not necessarily imply ‘leaders’ are middle class). Consequently there will always be some theoretical underpinning to movements’ actions. While this thesis will take account of what Jasper terms ‘structural’ considerations, it is also recognised that the perspectives of activists themselves must be considered.

A further extension of this approach, one acknowledging the ‘wisdom of activists’, can be found in the work of ‘activist scholars’ of which there has been a recent proliferation in social movement studies (Gillan and Pickerill, 2012, p. 138). As defined by Jeffrey Juris (2007, p. 164), this approach, which he calls ‘militant ethnography’, ‘involves a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements.’ This emphasis upon collaboration is important, Kevin Gillan and Jenny Pickerill (2012, p. 136) note, because there is often an ‘ethics of immediate reciprocation’ guiding those who pursue this approach. There is, for these scholars, a desire to be ‘useful’ for the struggles they study (Urla and Helepololei, 2014, p. 438).

Distrust of ‘grand narratives’, and of those who feign ‘objective knowledge’, tends to be a feature of this perspective. Positivist approaches are discredited, and the knowledge
produced by activist scholars is unashamedly subjectively mediated, with scholars’ openly declaring their own point of view. As David Graeber (2009, p. 33-34) asserts in explaining this method: ‘I am making no pretence of objectivity here. I did not become involved in this in order to write an ethnography.... Even when I’m critical of the movement, I’m critical as an insider, someone whose ultimate purpose is to further its goals.’ The aim is to overcome the research and practice divide (Juris, 2007, p. 138, Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007, p. 11), to put ‘ones’ body on the line’ (Juris, 2007, p. 165).

The work of activist scholars, at its best, provides detailed ‘thick description’ and offers an insider’s view of movements and their internal cultures. While this is of interest for the study of movements, it is hard to assess its value for the movements themselves, despite activist scholars’ intentions. Indeed, there is a risk, as noted by Gillan and Pickerall (2012, p. 138), that ‘if social movement research projects rely mostly on listening to activist analyses and then simply parroting these lessons to an academic community, then it would be difficult to see it as having any benefits to the social movements themselves beyond, perhaps, amplifying the voices of activists.’ While ultimately sympathetic to the value of the activist scholar approach, they express concerns. They question the extent to which activist scholars are able to overcome the ‘problems of objectification’ arising from their movement participation, and argue the ‘ethic of immediate reciprocity’—as a means of gaining access to groups—needs to be approached cautiously (ibid, p. 136). Ethical problems arise, especially regarding scholars using activism as a means to further their careers (ibid, p. 136). Further, there is a danger that active immersion in movements blunts the ability of activist scholars to critically evaluate movements (ibid, p. 137). With their emphasis upon the value of the situated vantage point of the militant ethnographer as a conduit for an ‘authentic knowledge’ the external observer is unable to access, there is a danger of ‘losing sight of the different values of different kinds of knowledge’ (ibid, p. 138).

At issue here is how the political perspective of activist scholars (which is often of an anarchistic bent) can colour their description of movements. Political viewpoints conflicting with those of activist scholars can become, potentially, marginalised or discredited in ways that do not necessarily correlate with a realistic view of the movement itself (an issue I would argue is salient in some studies of the Occupy movement). Further, through being engaged activists within movements, such scholars can impact the form the actual movement takes
(as I would argue may have happened in some instances with Occupy). There is a fine line between learning from a movement and influencing it. This is not necessarily an argument against scholars being engaged in movements; rather, it is a call for scholars from diverse political backgrounds to become engaged in the movements they care about, so as to promote a diversity of political viewpoints (provided they are completely transparent as to their point of view). It is in such a spirit of diversity that the rejuvenation of a Marxist approach to the study of social movements is seen as an important recent development, a rejuvenation this thesis hopes to contribute to in a constructive manner.

It is important to underline, at this point, that the celebration of the activist perspective and the rise of activist scholars has coincided, in large part, with the rise of the global justice movement—a movement that brought questions of political economy back to the forefront of contestation. Yet activist-centred approaches have tended to downplay discussions of political economy. Structural analysis is often given a secondary position relative to the insights of those within movements. This perspective reflects the anarchist sensibilities of prominent scholars within this area. Such work is valuable, but the approach advocated by this thesis—a Marxist approach—seeks to balance structural factors and activist knowledge.

**Marxism and the Study of Social Movements—balancing activist knowledge with structural analysis**

Before making a case for bringing Marxism back into the study of social movements, it is useful to question the extent to which Touraine (and by extension, his students) abandoned Marxism when studying collective action, as some have argued has been the case (see Della Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 8-9). Despite being sharply critiqued, Marxism continued to be influential in the study of new social movements. This reflects, in no small part, the essential role Marxism had played for some of these thinkers in their early intellectual development.\(^5\)

As Paul Blackledge (2013, p. 259) has argued, new social movement theorists did not simply dismiss Marx, rather they rejected what they saw as his economic determinism. On this basis,

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\(^5\) As Andy Merrifield (2002, p. 130) quips in regards Castells’ trajectory: ’Castells appeared to think that, once, during the 1960s and for a little of the 1970s, Marxism was trendy, in vogue, intellectually hip.... Now, alas, its time has passed: now, society raises such new and befuddling problems that Marxism founders, no longer providing all the answers—as if any Marxists... really thought it could’. 
the category of class was jettisoned. Melucci, for instance, was scornful of the ‘naive premise evident in the whole Marxist tradition that [class] “interests” are the motivating force of collective action... that suffering and social inequality leads necessarily to collective action’ (1989, p. 192). Although, as argued in the preceding chapters, Marxists—for the most part—emphasised the distinction between the objective and subjective dimensions of class, the former does not necessarily lead to the latter, hence the importance of the party for Lenin. The Marxism associated with reformist or institutionalised currents—the type practised by the French Communist Party under the shadow of the USSR (see Barker et al., 2013, p. 1, on this point)—was conflated with ‘Marxism’ as a whole and summarily rejected. Yet Touraine (1981, p. 149) still argued (with echoes of Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach) for the need to not simply describe the world but to actively ‘intervene’ in it, with sociologists’ ‘real objective’ being to ‘enable a society to live at the highest possible level of historical action instead of blindly passing through crises and conflicts’. Like Marx, Touraine (2003, p. 123) situates his work ‘in a context of an overall view of society’. Marxism persisted as a spectral presence within the work of new social movement theorists as they attempted to address the concerns they saw as novel to ‘post-industrial’ or ‘programmed’ societies.

While there is much of value in their work, they would have been much more successful had they not attempted to consign Marxism to the dustbin of history. In arguing that ours is a ‘post-industrial’ (or ‘complex’ or ‘network’ or whatever) society the consistent, enduring dynamics of capital fell from the picture. In focussing on the ‘new’, that which persists is obscured. The argument unpacked in the following chapter as to the persistent dynamics of capital—as developed by such contemporary Marxist theorists as Harvey, Panitch and Gindin—gives the lie to notions of a substantive rupture within the development of capitalism. Capital has sought a spatial fix through offshoring production to the periphery (Harvey, 2010b, pp. 155-159). This does not, however, spell the rise of a post-industrial era as such, but rather speaks to a deepening and increasingly complex global division of labour. The problem with new social movement scholars, when critiqued from a Marxist perspective, is their inability to successfully identify how the recurrent crises of capitalism (crises that are inevitable outcomes of capital’s inherent dynamics), high levels of inequality and wider international structural constraints play out in relation to social struggle (Webber, 2011, p. 7). The jettisoning of political-economy from their analyses has led to a narrowing of new social
movement scholars’ understanding of movements, limiting their ability to successfully situate movements within the context of large-scale change (Barker et al., 2013, p. 1). Further, in welcoming the shift from ‘old’ to new social movements ‘as a move from instrumental, statist to ethical, anti-statist politics’, new social movement theorists ‘have tended to reify this shift as a profound historical break’ (Blackledge, 2013, pp. 274-275). Such a reification has caused a blindness toward the similarities between the old and the new: ignoring, for instance, the rich cultural dimension of working-class movements as has been explored by figures such as Thompson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1998). This blindness has led to a generally insubstantial treatment of the continuing dialectic between social contestation and the dynamics of capital.

While Marxism has a rich heritage vis-à-vis the field of social movement studies and activism, the challenge mounted by new social movement theorists, along with the work of North American social movement scholars, highlights the need for the development of a ‘Marxist branch of social movement studies’ that is in dialogue with these other traditions (Barker et al., 2013, p. 28). A number of recent studies have shown this project is now well underway, at the forefront of which is the edited collection *Marxism and Social Movements*. As the editors of this collection argue, Marxism has much to offer social movements. First a proposition: ‘the core problem facing popular movements in the present epoch is the capitalist system’; and, second, a wager: ‘the working class is capable of transforming itself through collective action and organisation to the point where it can break capitalism apart and lay the foundation of a new cooperative world community’ (ibid, p. 12). Marxism, they argue, needs to be ‘resolutely committed to popular emancipation “from below”’—recognising the agency people have in creating the world, whilst also being aware of the limited capacity we have as individuals-qua-individuals to do so. *Strength lies within collective organisation.*

Marxism is seen to offer a ‘theory of transformation with strategic consequences.’ It operates, the editors argue, as ‘an argument about movements, and an argument within movements’ (ibid, p. 13). Like the activist scholars noted above who are generally of an anarchist persuasion, some Marxist scholars (see, for instance, Cox and Nilsen, 2014, p. ix) also see their

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6 Castells’ *Information Age Trilogy* represents an exception to this trend within the work of new social movement theorists. In downplaying political-economy he draws attention, instead, to technological change as the principal driver of social change; a position which sees him veering dangerously close to techno-determinism (see, Castells, 2006).
work as located within movements. From this position, they argue, Marxism can be seen as an engaged practice, one that ‘develops and learns alongside those with whom it participates in the effort to change the world’ (Barker et al., 2013, p. 15). While Touraine has continued to argue for an engaged approach to the study of social movements, the problems of Melucci’s normative appraisal of social movements—that they influence institutions, and need to be interpreted by professional politicians—become apparent. Such a view sits at a remove, happy to merely commentate, whereas the Marxist approach to social movements seeks to learn from, and in turn to inform, movements; it seeks to offer a structural overview, strategic considerations, and to empower movement participants.

Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2014)—both of whom were editors of, and contributors to, the collection *Marxism and Social Movements* that was noted above—have, perhaps, gone the furthest in elaborating what a Marxist approach to the study of social movements should look like in *We Make Our Own History*. The tendency of conventional social movement studies to downplay or ignore the state is considered to be ‘worse than useless’, as action and its consequences need to be thought on a larger scale (ibid, xi, see Charnock et al., 2012, for a treatment of the Spanish protests of 2011 that uses such an approach successfully). As, Cox and Nilsen point out, the majority of states have been made—and often remade—by social movements. Marxism offers a theory of social movements that rejects the political reductionism found within conventional social movement theory (ibid, p. 6). It views movements as ‘materially situated in the everyday reality of people’s lives’ and, thus, as extensions of everyday life, rather ‘than as a subset of the political system’ (ibid, p. 56). To view movements on this scale requires taking account of their historical context (something Webber, 2011, does successfully in his study of indigenous struggles in Bolivia). History, when read from a Marxist perspective (as argued in Chapter One), is conflictual. It is shaped through ‘encounters between dominant and subaltern social groups’ (Cox and Nilsen, 2014, p. 57). There is, then, a need to recognise the actions of ‘social movements from above’ as well as from below.

The term ‘social movement from above’, for Cox and Nilsen (ibid, p. 59), refers to

...the collective agency of dominant groups, which is centred on the organisation of multiple forms of skilled activity around a rationality that aims to maintain or modify a dominant
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structure of entrenched needs and capacities in ways that either reproduce or extend the power of these groups, and their hegemonic position within a given social formation.

While social movement studies tend to focus on subaltern groups, Cox and Nilsen point out that it is usually the wealthy and privileged who ‘are most capable of producing collective agency in a sustained and effective manner’—with their actions constructing and reproducing the institutions that best serve their needs; with privileged access to political power in state apparatuses aiding their projects (pp. 64-65, a point that will be explored in some detail in Chapter Eight when discussing the work of Nicos Poulantzas). Further (and here they draw upon Gramsci) social movements from above are able to shape the ‘common sense’ (/hegemonic) assumptions with which the majority of people orientate their experience of everyday life (ibid, p. 66). Social movements from above sometimes pursue defensive strategies when faced with challenges from below (accommodating demands in some instances, repressing groups in others) (ibid, p. 68). They also pursue offensive strategies, attacking truce lines set by previous struggles (ibid, p. 70). The neoliberal project is an example of a successful offensive strategy deployed by a social movement from above (ibid, pp. 136-137).

Social movements from below, argue Cox and Nilsen (ibid, p. 72), generally ‘grow out people’s experiences of a concrete life world that is somehow problematic relative to their needs and capacities, and from their attempts to combine, organise and mobilise in order to do something about this.’ ‘Militant particularisms’ are important in this process, these being ‘practices, skills, idioms and imaginaries’ that can be generalised and thus transcend the particular locale in which they were generated (ibid, p. 79). Through connecting with groups outside of a specific locale, what started as a particular problem can become a generalised challenge to the established order. It takes on a systemic dimension. At which point a ‘social movement project’ can be said to be underway; which they define as ‘(a) challenges to the social totality which (b) aim to control the self-production of society and (c) have or are developing the potential for the kind of hegemony—leading the skilled activity of different social groups—that would make (b) and hence (a) possible’ (ibid, p. 83). A movement capable of ‘remaking the world needs to develop a substantial degree of (counter-) hegemony’—the capacity to form strategic alliances ‘around a different way of organising the social world, grounded in the life-activity of subaltern social groups’ (p. 195). Such a movement project
would need to be capable of forming and sustaining ongoing relations across ‘different class interests, gender positions and ethnic or racial identities.’

It should be noted, however, that much of what is called for in a ‘rejuvenation of Marxist social movement studies’ is already present in the often overlooked study of ‘antisystemic movements’ undertaken within the field of world-systems analysis (the foundational texts here being Arrighi et al., 1989, Amin et al., 1990).

While Marxism remains a strong current in world-systems analysis, it is not adhered to by all operating within this tradition, and those who do tend to cultivate a heterodox position, our era being, after all, as Wallerstein (1991c, pp. 177-178) argues, that of a ‘thousand Marxisms.’ To the extent that Wallerstein himself remains situated within the socialist tradition, suggests Chamsy el-Ojeili (2015, p. 146), his attachment is more to the ‘Left communist political tradition, to non-Leninist, anti-statist (councilist, syndicalist, anarcho-communist and so on) positions.’ Indeed, one finds in his analysis of nineteenth social movements (as drawn upon here in the preceding chapter) a balanced appraisal of both Marxism and anarchism—the former critiqued for seeking to capture the state rather than smash it, and the latter for its celebration of spontaneous actions over permanent organisations. There is a sensitivity within world-systems analysis to the ways in which Marxist social movements have historically overshadowed others (such as the women’s movement) (Gunder-Frank and Fuentes, 1990, p. 139). The crisis of Marxism is not, then, seen as an overly negative occurrence for those operating within this tradition.

In a similar vein to new social movement theorists, 1968 is seen to represent a rupture in the trajectory of social movements. Wallerstein (1991b, p. 65) considers it one of the great formative events of the modern world-system, an event of profound cultural-ideological import. The important point being, when analysing this ‘world revolution,’ that the new movements were led largely by young people ‘who had grown up in a world where the traditional antisystemic movements... had already achieved their intermediate goal of state

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7 The line of argument being similar to that laid out by Laclau (2005) in On Populist Reason, and Laclau and Mouffe (2001) in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, which will be considered in some depth in the following chapter. Cox and Nilsen make some reference to these authors in their work, but do not undertake any in-depth engagement. The heavy debt to Gramsci held by Laclau and Mouffe and Cox and Nilsen may explain their conceptual overlaps, although it could also be a case of the latter seeking to distance themselves from ‘post-Marxism’ and to cut a path of their own (even if previous travellers have done much to break the ground).
power,’ the results of which had been found wanting (ibid, p. 69). Unlike new social movement theorists, however, Wallerstein has continued to position class, and class struggle, as important considerations in the study of social movements (see, for instance, Wallerstein, 1991a, and Wallerstein, 2004). The value of the ‘world revolution’ of ’68, for Wallerstein (1991b, p. 83) is, then, not that working class social movements have been eclipsed by new social movements, but rather the strategic questions this rupture has raised. Questions which, writing in 1991, he conjectured could take ‘ten to twenty more years’ to find coherent answers for.

While these answers have yet to manifest, it appears, for world-systems analysts, that the world social forum is the most likely space in which they would be formulated. Wallerstein (2014, pp. 170-171) thinks that the ‘spirit of Porto Alegre’ (so named after the site of the first world social forum) animates positive transformative projects today, whilst, simultaneously, he concedes that the forum struggles with many of the same dilemmas faced by nineteenth century social movements (such as questions as to whether or not to engage with the state).

Jackie Smith—a second generation world-system analyst who has, arguably, done the most to develop an updated approach to the study of social movements within this tradition—addresses these questions head on in her work. In Social Movements for Global Democracy, Smith (2008, p. 206) argues that the world social forum provides a model for expanded citizen participation. For the forum to be effective, however, she argues it must interact with the United Nations and other global institutions, whilst simultaneously fighting to retain its autonomy. In terms of the debate over whether or not social movements should engage directly with the state, Smith sides with the pro-state camp. The state must, she argues, be reclaimed from neoliberalism (ibid, p. 232, see also, Smith, 2012).

While Smith’s work is stripped of any overt Marxian reference points, she advocates a position that is compatible with calls for a rejuvenated Marxist approach to social movements. Social movement contestation is seen as inimically bound to capitalist developments (Smith and Wiest, 2012, p. 10), with social movements responding to the structures underpinning the world economy. A relational approach to the study of social movements is advocated (a position which dovetails neatly with Poulantzas’ work, as will be explored later), in which movements ‘both shape and are shaped by their interactions with states and other global
actors’ (ibid, p. 12). The world-systems analysis approach to social movements is seen to be largely in step with the dominant strands of social movement studies insofar as: political opportunities determine the capacity of movements to form and expand; that strong civil society and material resources are vital for a movement to grow, with networks between groups and activists considered a valuable asset; and the success of social movements depends on the ability of activists to frame and effectively communicate claims to particular audiences (ibid, pp. 21-22). But world-systems analysis goes further than these conventional approaches by taking account of political economy and the *longue durée*; with scholars in this tradition actively engaging in dialogue with, or participating in, the movements they study.

There is, then, much in common between the approach called for by those seeking to rejuvenate the Marxist study of social movements and those active within the world-systems tradition. The principal difference is, perhaps, the appraisal of contemporary movements. World-systems analysts, generally, tend to see the horizontalist ‘spirit of Davos’ in a favourable light. Marxists are more likely to view this, at best, as a transitory stage in movement formation, or, more unfavourably, as a dead-end that poses no threat to the logics fostered by contemporary capital. The means of contextualising movements, and a positive valuation of the importance of knowledge produced within movements, is shared by both approaches. It is in relation to strategic considerations that they tend to diverge. Although, it should be noted, there are, no doubt, considerable overlaps between figures espousing both approaches on questions of strategy also. The rejuvenation of the Marxist study of social movements is, then, one that can benefit from ongoing engagement with scholars in the world-systems tradition.

**Summary—bringing Marxism back to social movement studies**

In light of the shortcomings found in dominant strands of social movement theory it is argued that a rejuvenated Marxist approach is needed for the study of movements. An approach able to take account of the longue durée, of action on the scale of the state, and of the dynamics of capital. This is not to abandon perspectives that account for the micro-level aspects of movements (which is the typical scope of North American social movement studies), but to rather ensure that study takes place on multiple levels. Further, such an approach is not just a study of movements, it is also study for movements from within movements. There is a value here, then, to constructively engaging with the work of activist scholars working within
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de anarchist tradition and of arguing for the importance of Marxist forms of analysis and organisation for social movements. The study of movements should be accompanied with strategic reflections as to how best to promote positive social change (this being the point on which a useful dialogue can take place between Marxist and anarchist social movement studies).

To recall, again, Marx’s famous aphorism: the point is not to explain the world, but to change it. The study of social movements should not restrict itself to armchair analyses. Through historically contextualising movements, and assessing the ways in which they are bound to ongoing dynamics of change (something new social movement scholars have aimed to do, with varying results), and through learning from movements themselves, possible pathways toward more egalitarian and democratic societies can be traced. The study of social movements has much to offer for the rejuvenation of democracy.

Historically (as shown in Chapter One) social movement contestation was self-consciously orientated through critiques of capital, and those advocating communism sought to destroy capitalism entirely. The loss of capital-critical contestation has led to a situation where levels of inequality have deepened and democracy entered a period of crisis. Movements need to challenge capital if the crisis of democracy is to be overcome, and those studying movements need to be able to account for the ways in which the dynamics of capital impact upon movements. The study of movements needs to be a holistic exercise. It is now time to tease out the dynamics of capital so as to come a step closer to understanding the context of contemporary contestation.
Chapter Three: The Dynamics of Capital:

The economic underpinning of conflict

Social life is economic life. Any understanding of a society necessarily entails consideration of its systems of production, exchange and consumption. While national and cultural differences persist in the current global era, the capitalist economic form dominates. An appreciation of capitalism’s key dynamics and its historic dimension is therefore crucial for contextualising issues of social contestation and change. The dynamics of capital, many of which harbour contradictory tendencies, underpin class relations and influence how individuals and groups interact. The tensions arising from such relations stimulate social struggle and, in turn, these struggles influence the unfolding character of capitalism.

These dynamics are those of dispossession, alienation, the power of ‘dead labour’ over ‘living labour’, and capital’s quest for endless accumulation. Capital’s ability to persist through time relates to the formation of a ‘capitalist class’ whose interests are embedded within and
exercised through the state. The financialisation of the economy, and the expansion of debtor/creditor relations are the means by which capital was able to exit the crisis it faced in the 1970s. The means of exiting one crisis led to another: the financial meltdown of 2008. This latest crisis has stimulated a cycle of global unrest, as witnessed most prominently in 2011 and which continues today. The deepening of inequalities throughout core states indicates that these struggles may increase in the years to come.

In Chapter One it was seen that social movements have been dialectically entwined with the development of capital. Yet, as shown in the preceding chapter, considerations of political economy have fallen by the wayside in social movement studies. That contestation may, for a time, have generally moved away from sustained critiques and challenges to capital is no excuse for social movement theory having done the same. The purpose here, then, is to bring the dynamics of capital to light so as to contextualise the conditions in which contemporary social movements like Occupy emerge. The study of social movements needs to be, simultaneously, a study for social movements. An understanding of capital—of its dynamics, its historical manifestations, of the previous cycles of resistance to which it has given rise—provides important intellectual resources for the development of effective social movement strategy.

**Capital’s Key Dynamics—drivers of discontent, class struggle and state capture**

To begin at the beginning: the ‘primitive accumulation’ of capital entails dispossession and ensures the presence of a wage-dependent workforce for capital. As argued by Marx (1990, p. 874),

> The process... which creates the capital-relations can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers.

Through separating individuals, and the communities to which they belong, from the materials needed to provide a suitable standard of living, capital compels people to participate in the labour market. Having commoditised their labour power, individuals are, with the receipt of wages, led to find their means of subsistence within a market economy.
In the West dispossession entailed, historically, the enclosure of the commons, a process which denied peasant families their traditional livelihood (Knotter, 2001, p. 151). This, when combined with radical changes to agricultural production and the dissolution of feudal social bonds, created a surplus rural population that flooded into expanding urban industrial centres (Hobsbawm, 1964, p. 66-9). Having been dispossessed of the means to sustain traditional forms of life, the immediate producer emerged ‘as the “free” and “naked” worker, cut off from the network of personal, statutory and territorial bonds that actually constituted him in medieval society’ (Poulantzas, 1980, p. 64). Separating the public from the commons, and turning public wealth into private profit, compelled individuals to engage with the market economy as both producers and consumers of goods—forcing them to commoditise their productive and creative capacities, inducing them to enter a process of proletarianisation (Tilly, 1984, pp. 13-14).

While dispossession can be seen as a historical stage in the development of Western capitalism, it is important to acknowledge that it has continued through to the present day as a means of incorporating people into capital-mediated social relations. This can be witnessed, for instance, in the contemporary struggles of indigenous communities in Mexico against the dispossession of their land through the transfer of communal ownership into private titles (Hesketh, 2013, p. 222). Indeed, much of what we take for granted in advanced capitalist societies comes to us via processes of dispossession, a prominent example being consumer electronics. The extraction of minerals for such technology within various African states involves slavery (Fuchs, 2013, p. 11). The government appropriation of land in China (where the state seeks to foster a capital friendly environment) has forced 40 million landless peasants to migrate to cities. This cheap pliable workforce is then exploited by companies like Foxconn, who fabricate products for such brands as Apple, Sony and Dell (ibid, p. 12, see also Clelland, 2014, Friedman, 2014, pp. 117-118).

Dispossession should not be seen as only belonging to a transitive stage between traditional non-capitalist forms of social organisation and capitalist society. It is an inherent ongoing dynamic within capitalism—it ‘lies at the heart of what capital is all about’ (Harvey, 2014, p. 54)—and spans a wide range of capitalist relations. Hardt and Negri (2009), for instance, argue that dispossession of the commons continues to be an important source of private profit for capital in core states. Common wealth can be found where we would normally think to find
it, namely in the material world, in such things as water, air and the fruits of the soil. It also exists, they argue, on an immaterial plane, encompassing the ‘results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and for other production, such as knowledge, language, codes, affects, and so forth’ (ibid, p. viii). The common includes ‘culture’ in the full anthropological sense of the term, that which humanity collectively produces and is simultaneously dependent upon—and which capital finds ways of transforming into private profit. As will be shown in later chapters, calls for reclamation of the commons are an essential component of contemporary political struggle.

Dispossession, as one of capital’s key dynamics, entails proletarianisation and is, by extension, tied to the formation and perpetuation of class divisions. Proletarianisation denotes the process by which individuals and communities—lacking the material means to fully subsist and reproduce themselves outside of the market economy—are compelled to work for wages within the capitalist labour market. It is here that the basic class division in capitalist society is to be found: between those who possess only their labour power, which they are compelled to sell in the market, and those who possess sufficient capital to purchase this labour power and set it to work. These two class positions, the working class and the bourgeoisie, form the basic analytic units of Marxist class analysis (the political implications of which were explored in Chapter One).

There are, of course, further variations to be made in relation to this division. Marx (1991, pp. 1025-26), in volume three of Capital, before the manuscript abruptly breaks off, positions landowners—those who profit from ground-rent—alongside the owners of ‘mere labour power’ and the owners of capital. He goes on, however, to indicate that such class groupings can undergo an ‘infinite fragmentation of interests and positions into which the division of social labour splits not only workers but also capitalists and land-owners.’ In The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850, Marx (1962b, p. 140, emphases in original) undertakes a political analysis that entails complex relations between a number of class groups. He discusses, for example, the manner in which the industrial bourgeoisie were subordinated to a ‘finance aristocracy’ but included within government, while the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry were completely excluded, as were the ‘ideological representatives and spokesmen of the above classes, their savants, lawyers, doctors, etc., in a word: their so-called men of talent.’ Marx’s political analyses illustrate the ways in which different class blocs and
alliances can form within and against the state in order to secure and advance shared interests. Nevertheless, as argued in the Communist Manifesto, while there is a plethora of possible class positions, an outcome of the industrial epoch was the simplification of class antagonisms: ‘Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat’ (Marx and Engels, 2012, p. 35).

Subsequent theorists in the Marxist tradition have sought to tease out the complexities of class in contemporary capitalist society (a full discussion of which falls outside the bounds of this thesis). Erik Olin Wright (2009, p. 108), for example, sees class denoting an individual’s position in relation to the ownership of the means of production, but extends this to encompass their ability to occupy a privileged position within relations of exploitation, as is the case for those with highly sought-after skills or who hold managerial positions. As argued by Poulantzas (1978, pp. 198-99), however, it remains important to not be led outside of the fundamental Marxist class framework by such additional distinctions.

Marxism indeed admits the existence of fractions, strata, and even social categories. … But this in no way involves groupings alongside, marginal to or above classes, in other words external to them. Fractions are class fractions; the industrial bourgeoisie, for example is a fraction of the bourgeoisie.

Indeed, the distinction between the sellers of labour power and those who profit from it can be complicated, for example, through consideration of the entwinement of workers’ pension funds with financial markets. Even then the fundamental cleavage persists: is an individual’s principal source of income gleaned from their own labour, or that of others?

The focus on labour is important here. Marx (1990, p. 283) considered labour to lie at the heart of our species-being. Through labour, he wrote, the worker ‘acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way simultaneously changes his own nature.’ Through being compelled, under capitalism, to sell their labour-power within the market, however, the individual undergoes a process of alienation—a separation from a profound aspect of their species-being. During the industrial process of manufacture, where the division of labour...

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8 Arguments have been made, however, that with the rise of a ‘post-industrial’ society the Marxist analysis of class has become redundant. This notion was be explored (and rejected) in Chapter Three.
leads individuals to undertake de-skilled, repetitive tasks, the worker becomes, held Marx (ibid, p. 481), a ‘crippled monstrosity... through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations’; a process analogous to the butchering of a ‘whole beast for the sake of his hide or tallow.’ Through capitalist social relations an individual’s labour power becomes a commodity to be sold in the market, something separable from the human who possesses it. ‘Labour’ designates not just our ability to undertake physical jobs (stacking shelves in a supermarket, lifting lumber in a timber yard, soldering electrical circuits in a factory), but also our creative potential. Labour, for the vast majority of people, is shorn of any creative dimension. Even those whose labour does entail a creative dimension (such as musicians, designers, film-makers) struggle to maintain autonomy and must, like everyone else, debase their labour capacity to the requirements of capital. Through losing autonomy over our labour power we lose control over our own becoming, all is subject to the logic of capital accumulation.

Capital demands our vital energies, which it unleashes through dispossession, in order to animate the cycle of accumulation. Marx (1990, p. 289), when surveying nineteenth century English factories, saw capital as ‘dead labour’ congealed inside the means of production and lying dormant in raw materials, all of which required workers’ active labour for animation. As such, capital is ‘vampire-like’ living only by ‘sucking living labour’ (ibid, p. 342). Without animation from living labour, that which is dead decays, ‘iron rusts, wood rots’ (ibid, p. 289). The rows of Apple desktops quietly humming in the downtown design office awaiting the touch of ‘young creatives’ early on a Monday morning are no different in this respect. Living labour always bears capital aloft.

The vitality capital sucks from living labour is ‘surplus-value.’

Our capitalist has two objectives: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value which has exchange value ... a commodity; and secondly he wants to produce a commodity greater in value than the sum of values of the commodities used to produce it, namely the means of production and the labour-power he purchased with his good money on the open market. His aim is to produce not only use-value, but a commodity; not only use-value but value; and not just value but surplus-value.’ (ibid, p. 293)
By transmuting living labour into the ‘lifeless objectivity’ of the material commodities the capitalist has purchased with money, the ‘capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorisation process, an animated monster which begins to “work”, “as if its body were by love possessed”’ (ibid, p. 302). Surplus-value ‘results only from a quantitative excess of labour, from a lengthening of one and the same labour-process’ (ibid, p. 305). The ‘quantitative excess’ is the period of labour engaged in by the worker that extends beyond the cost of the reproduction of their labour power. Surplus-value ‘originates from the difference between what labour gets for its labour-power as a commodity and what the labourer produces in a labour process under the command of capital’ (Harvey, 2010a, p. 125). Surplus-value arises from the actions undertaken by commodified labour as dictated by capital—it is the very thing that turns money into capital. Capital, argues Marx (1990, p. 342), ‘has one sole driving force, the drive to valorise itself, to create surplus-value.’

Such dynamics feed into capital’s endless quest for accumulation. Capitalists must constantly accumulate capital in order to re-enter it into circulation so as to amass still more capital (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 24). As an endless cycle of accumulation, capitalism is not a thing, but a process, ‘a continuous flow of value through... different physical states’ (Harvey, 2014, p. 73). It is a process requiring capital to commit to a compounding rate of growth, with three percent posited as the minimal growth rate for a healthy economy. ‘Any slowdown or blockage in capital flow will produce a crisis. If our blood flow stops, then we die. If capital flow stops, then the body politic of capitalist society dies’ (Harvey, 2011, p. 90). The history of capitalism is littered with crises in which growth has faltered, but capital’s dynamism lies in its ability to turn the limits to growth into obstacles that can be overcome (Harvey, 2010b, p. 47).

Frighteningly, the limits of the environment to sustain life in its current form are not recognised as an absolute limit to capital’s drive for endless accumulation. As Fredric Jameson (2003, p. 76) famously quipped, it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than it is the end of capitalism. There is no evidence capital will collapse because of environmental dangers (Harvey, 2014, p. 260). Rather, ‘disaster capitalism’ will provide new opportunities ‘for capital to continue to circulate and accumulate in the midst of environmental catastrophes’ (ibid, p. 249). Indeed, the melting of permafrost and ice-sheets due to climate change is providing
opportunities for big business and states to exploit previously unreachable natural resources (Žižek, 2010, p. 328). That large corporations like Google covertly fund climate-change denial groups whilst simultaneously pursuing interests in the development of renewable energy sources and other environmental causes (Olson et al., 2014, p. 7) illustrates the cynical opportunism of capitalist enterprises. Even companies who profess to take climate change seriously do not let this stand as an obstacle to the achievement of short-term profits. The logics of capital do not falter when faced with the destruction of the planet. The possibility of large-scale luxury space stations circling the earth as homes for an elite escaping environmental catastrophe no longer appears a far-fetched science fiction scenario—especially with entrepreneurs like Richard Branson busily pursuing commercial space flight technologies after reneging on pledges to fund low-carbon fuel research (see Klein, 2014, p. 240, for a discussion of Branson).

To sum up the points covered so far: to understand our world we need to understand the dynamics of capital; capital involves, in its ‘primitive stage of accumulation’ (a logical as much as historical aspect of capitalism), dispossession; dispossession undergirds class relations, the principal division being between those who must sell their labour power and those in a position to purchase it; once purchased, capital sets about exploiting the labour power in its employ so as to realise surplus-value; all these dynamics fuel the endless accumulation of capital, a process that seemingly knows no bounds. Capital’s dependence upon surplus-value, however, positions workers as a potential obstacle in the accumulation process.

For workers to withhold their full productive capacity during their hours of work is to deny their employer the ability to fully realise surplus-value. To give an anecdotal example: after failing high school I was employed as a trade assistant for one of New Zealand’s largest construction companies; once I was trusted by the old-hands, the various hiding places on site were revealed to me, places where groups of workers would sit for up to twenty minutes at a time chatting and smoking marijuana outside of the officially sanctioned break times. Further to such passive means, sabotage provides a more violent disruption of the valorisation process. As Marx (1990, p. 352) notes, ‘moments are the elements of profit’ and any moment snatched by workers comes at the expense of their employer’s capacity to realise surplus value. Beyond these spontaneous forms of resistance are the organised disruptions of the ‘stop work meeting,’ the ‘go-slow’ and the strike as organised (usually) by
unions, all of which disrupt the valorisation process and operate as blockage points in the accumulation process. Hence capital’s need to control workers (Harvey, 2010a, p. 130).

Antagonism between the worker and the employer rests at the heart of capitalist production. Capital produces the ‘free and naked worker,’ who in turn produces value for capital. Individual capitalists seek to keep their production costs low so as to realise maximum profit. Controlling workers and driving down their wages is a common means of realising this goal. Such strategies, however, lead to resistance by workers over time, or create under-consumption: goods are being produced efficiently, but value is not realised through acts of exchange due to low wages.

The consumption of goods, then, is just as important as their production for capital. It is the means by which capital realises value. It is only profitable for a capitalist to produce goods if there is a demand for these products, or if demand can be stimulated through marketing and advertising. Capitalist production, spurred on by competition between producers, each seeking to realise surplus value through the market, forces capital to create ‘new social wants and needs’ (Harvey, 2006, p. 88). An abundance of commodities in the market, as Guy Debord (1995, p. 30) scathingly puts it, requires a ‘collaboration’ between workers and capital:

All of a sudden the workers in question discover that they are no longer invariably subject to the total contempt so clearly built into every aspect of the organisation and management of production; instead they find that every day, once work is over, they are treated like grown-ups, with a great show of solicitude and politeness, in their new role as consumers.

As alienated workers our humanity is transferred to the commodities we produce (and in service work, we ourselves are the commodity that bears the service). Consumption—when extended beyond the most basic reproduction of our physical state—offers to give back what was lost in the act of production. Our creative potential is taken from us in the workplace, with the promise that we can realise it again within the marketplace through our choice of commodities: yes, I am a service food worker, but the sixty hours a week given over to my job is not me, I am present within my collection of Nike Air Jordan’s, my iPhone, and in my Final Fantasy avatar; yes, I am an accountant, but you will not find me during the 50 hours a week given over to this job, I am present within my 2010 Audi Quattro, my renovated villa, and my collection of rare 1950s Jazz LPs.
The need to stimulate consumption is, Harvey argues, one of capital’s most important, and contradictory, historical forces. On the one hand it seeks to develop and refine workers’ tastes as a means of expanding consumer demand. On the other, through the crushingly mundane nature of most people’s working conditions, it barbarises them. ‘The competition for accumulation’, he writes (2006, p. 32), ‘requires that the capitalists inflict a daily violence upon the working class in the workplace. The intensity of that violence is not under individual capitalist’s control, particularly if competition is unregulated.’ Here lies one of the principal dilemmas faced by capital: to increase their share of surplus-value capitalists must pay workers the bare minimum, yet to realise this surplus-value in an unregulated market capitalists need consumers, the very same workers whose wages they wish to cut.

What makes sense for the individual capitalist—lowering the wage bill—creates a collective problem for capitalists in the long-term through an over accumulation of goods in a market suffering from slack consumer demand. As Marx (1992, p. 391) noted, workers are important as buyers of commodities,

...but as sellers of their commodity—labour-power—capitalist society has the tendency to restrict them to their minimum price. Further contradiction: the periods in which capitalist production exerts all its forces regularly show themselves to be periods of over-production; because the limit to the application of the productive powers is not simply the production of value, but also its realisation. However the sale of the commodities, the realisation of commodity capital, and thus of surplus-value as well, is restricted not by the consumer needs of a society in general, but by the consumer needs of a society in which the great majority are always poor and must always remain poor.

Capitalism is constantly caught by this contradiction (Harvey, 2014, p. 81), trying either to keep effective demand strong through allowing the empowerment of workers and thus undermining the ability to extract surplus-value, or maximising the conditions for creating surplus-value and hampering its ability to realise this value. Capitalists, collectively, must produce enough wage goods and lay out enough wages in order to ‘ensure that the working class possesses the effective demand required for its own reproduction. Yet individual capitalists are under continuous pressure to cut back wages and reduce the value of labour power, while those producing wage goods look to labourers as a source of effective demand’ (Harvey, 2006, p. 90). Caught between these two conflicting demands, driven by the need for
constant accumulation and competition from other capitalists, individual capitalists are in a constant state of anxiety (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007, p. 5). The actions of individual capitalists, argues Harvey (2006, p. 34), can, given these pressures, endanger the basis for accumulation and cut against the interests of the capitalist class as a whole: ‘They are then forced to constitute themselves as a class—usually through the agency of the state—and to put limits on their own competition’ and intervene in the exchange process. The free market, ultimately, is a myth. The state always needs to step in to secure the interests of capital.

The State is necessary for capitalism because, ‘collective means have to be found to do what individual capitalists cannot reasonably do and in part because class struggle requires the mediations of the state apparatus’ (ibid, p. 404). The state, argues Harvey (ibid, p. 449), ‘puts a floor under inter-capitalist competition and regulates conditions of employment. ... The state, in short, plays a vital role in almost every aspect of the reproduction of capital.’ States have been crucial to the development and continuation of capitalism, especially through ‘the establishment and administration of the juridical, regulatory, and infrastructural framework in which private property, competition, and contracts came to operate’. They have played a crucial role in containing capitalist crises, especially in their role as ‘lenders of last resort’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 3), as will be explored in more detail below.

The state has also played an important role in opening the spaces in which capital is able to operate—for example the extension of private property relations, as witnessed in the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Harvey, 2014, pp. 40-41), or, more recently, the dispossession of peasants’ land by the Chinese government. The capitalist state’s monopoly over the use of violence has been used to ‘protect and preserve the individual private property rights regime as articulated through freely functioning markets. The centralised power of the state is used to protect a decentralised private property system’ (ibid, p. 42). The centrality of the state to the perpetuation and stabilisation of capitalism is as important today as it has ever been, despite arguments about the ways in which ‘globalisation’ has, supposedly, led to ‘capitalist markets escaping, by-passing, or diminishing the state’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 1). State power has not diminished, vis-à-vis the dynamics of capital, rather ‘state powers and practices have been more and more directed to satisfying the demands of corporations and bondholders, often at the expense of citizens’ (Harvey, 2014, p. 158).
While globalisation has been seen by some as the age of large corporate power, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which today’s multinational corporations (MNCs) depend on states. This is particularly the case in relation to the US, which, Panitch and Gindin (2013, p. 1) argue, practices an informal form of empire through the management of global capitalism. As opposed to previous forms of empire which were concerned primarily with territorial expansion, the US pursues economic expansion, and its military interventions abroad have been ‘aimed at preventing the closure of particular places or whole regions of the globe to capital accumulation’ (ibid, p. 11). In the transition from the British to the US empire, something distinctive has emerged: ‘The American state, in the very process of supporting the export of capital and the expansion of multinational corporations, increasingly took responsibility for creating the political and juridical conditions for the general extension and reproduction of capitalism internationally’ (ibid, p. 6). The international institutions formed after the Second World War, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, did not presage the formation of a proto-global state, but rather the embedding of national states within the American empire. National states are still responsible for themselves, but have become ‘internationalised’ in the sense of having ‘to accept some responsibility for protecting the accumulation of capital in a manner that contributed to the US led management of the international capitalist order’ (ibid, p. 8). In the US itself, the state has been instrumental in the development of US capitalism, with a close relationship having formed over time between the business and political elite. An outcome of this has been the containment of organised labour and the construction of a regulatory state apparatus that has been insulated from democratic pressures in sensitive areas, such as the Federal Reserve (ibid, pp. 32-34).

As noted above, the dynamics of capital give rise to antagonistic class relations. On the one hand individual capitalists seek to pay workers as little as possible, yet collectively capitalists depend upon the same workers for consumption if value is to be realised. Further, capital frequently finds itself faced with resistance from workers, which always threatens to derail the valorisation process. Such conflictual tendencies rely upon the state for stabilisation. Having explored these dynamics in a general manner, it is now time to turn to the concrete developments of the last forty years so as to comprehend the ways in which the political economy of this period has led to the current crisis and cycles of contestation. The dynamics
of capital are essential for understanding social movement activity. In what follows, it will be shown that the means by which capital exited the crisis of the 1970s led to the financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing social unrest.

From Keynesianism to the Financial Crisis of 2008—the working class bound to debt

The Fordist-Keynesian economic model, which was developed in the aftermath of the economic crisis of the 1920s, became predominant in core states in the post-WWII period. While there were variations in this model, the basic features were quite wide-spread: the mass production of goods was met, on the demand side, through relatively high wages and, in times of rising unemployment, the state would stimulate the economy through spending on public works. The US-led post war order has, Panitch and Gindin (2013, p. 9) argue, usually been seen as a victory for the interventionist welfare state model over that of the market economy, with states able to cushion their citizens from external economic shocks. This period should be seen, however, as one in which ‘social welfare reforms were structured so as to be embedded in capitalist social relations. They facilitated not the “decommodification” of society, but rather its increasing commodification through full employment in the labour market and through the consumer demand that the welfare state made possible’—this process was linked, they argue, to the ‘relaunching of global capitalism.’ This model succeeded in extending and embedding capitalism, but by the late 1960s and early 1970s it was in crisis and the economy entered a period of restructuring.

Labour scarcity in Europe and the US had contributed to this crisis by creating a barrier to capital accumulation. Scarcity meant wages were relatively high and labour possessed considerable political clout, allowing it to curb the power of capital (Harvey, 2010b, p. 15, Robinson, 2010, p. 294). Workers who were now used to ‘full employment’ were becoming increasingly militant, making it difficult for capital to deploy austerity measures when faced with economic imbalances (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 112). The tension between strong labour and capital’s quest for value contributed to increased political unrest in the later part of the 1960s through to the early 1970s. Strike rates increased and, in many cases, worker and student alliances were formed. This unrest posed a problem of some magnitude for capital and precipitated change (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 85-86, Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007, pp. 167-74). To overcome obstacles to the accumulation of capital posed by workers, capital mobilised state machinery to crush organised labour.
Further, with capital increasingly geographically mobile from the 1970s onwards (Arrighi, 2010, p. 2), production began to move offshore in pursuit of cheaper labour sources. The mobility of capital served to discipline labour within the core. As industrial production shifted from the core to the periphery a number of theorists (as explored in Chapter Two) argued that a ‘post-Industrial’ economy was forming, a notion which fails to fully account for the globally integrated nature of contemporary capitalism. Such changes meant, however, that developed countries experienced growing levels of unemployment and wage stagnation (Harvey, 2011, p. 94, Marazzi, 2011, p. 30) which, in turn, led to problems of under-consumption.

Fordist capitalist growth at this point was suffering from complete technological and economic exhaustion—having experienced a fifty percent drop in profits between the 1960s and 1970s (Marazzi, 2011, pp. 28-30). The situation was further exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 1973—which began with a crash in the global housing market and then deepened with the spike in oil prices following the Arab Oil embargoes (Harvey, 2010b, p. 8). With Fordism-Keynesianism crumbling, and the economic downturn of the 1970s deepening, the ‘financialisation’ of the economy opened a viable path for renewing processes of capital accumulation.

To recall: capital has industrial, commercial and financial spheres. In the post-war period industrial capital had been predominant, but from the 1970s onwards financial capital comes to the fore. The provision and circulation of credit/debt, and complex financial vehicles, afforded capital increased fluidity on a global scale. This aided industrial capital in its pursuit of offshore production sites and, domestically, helped commercial capital through increasing consumers’ access to credit.

‘Financialisation’ also signifies the subordination (not the disappearance) of the ‘real’ economy—as tied to production and consumption of material things, such as toasters, cars and screw-drivers—to a speculative, abstract, economy. It is not that industrial capital and the production of ‘stuff’ ceases to be important, but rather that it loses its dominant position. Changes within the US domestic economy, which presaged global developments, reflected the extent to which the industrial sectors of capital ‘had come to accept the need to give priority to fighting inflation and defeating labour, and agreed that the strengthening of
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financial capital this would involve was in their own interest’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 163). The problem being, however, that the periods in which the ‘finance capital’ bloc achieves dominance within capitalism tends to usher in a phase of instability, due to it being such a ‘contradiction-laden’ flow of capital (Harvey, 2006, p. 317).

Before the 1970s, Harvey (2014, p. 239-41) asserts, the main avenues for the accumulation of capital lay through investment in the production of value and surplus value in the fields of manufacturing agriculture, mining and urbanisation. In the last forty years, however, capital has sought more speculative avenues, and has been ‘invested in search of rents, interest and royalties rather than in productive activity’. We are witnessing a ‘trend towards a rentier form of capital’, one that is ‘reinforced by the immense extractive power that increasingly attaches to rents on intellectual property rights to genetic materials, seeds, licensed practices and the like’ (ibid, p. 241). The ‘parasitic forms of capital are now in the ascendant’ (2014, pp. 244-45, see also, Cassidy, 2012, p. 64, Žižek, 2012b, p. 8). Rent seeking, argues Harvey (2014, p. 133) is ‘nothing more than the polite and rather neutral-sounding way of referring to…“accumulation by dispossession”.’

Similar lines of analysis have been opened by Hardt and Negri. Hardt (2010, p. 137) contends that capital’s principal means of appropriation from the common takes the form of rent through such means as patents and copyrights. The immaterial has, in their reckoning, usurped the material within production. The immaterial does not suffer from scarcity. It is easily reproduced and shared without reducing utility (as can be seen in the pirating of software). Rent generates income from immaterial production, but also retards it. The circulation of information increases productivity, yet treating information as property in order to extract rent obstructs circulation. It is here that the ‘emerging contradiction internal to capital’ is apparent, as ‘the more the common is corralled as property, the more its productivity is reduced; and yet expansion of the common undermines the relations of property in a fundamental and general way’ (ibid, p. 136).

Economic orthodoxy, however, holds that a healthy economy relies on the provision of finance—and sees the current era of financialisation, despite the abstractions involved, as ‘business as usual’. Finance is said to be needed to start new businesses, which in turn create new jobs, new products, and so on. In practice, however, such traditional investment banking
accounts for only 13-15 percent of activity, to take the example of Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs in 2010 (Cassidy, 2012, p. 59). Maurizio Lazzarato (2012, p. 23) notes that ‘financialisation represents less a form of investment financing, than an enormous mechanism for managing private and public debt, and therefore, the creditor-debtor relation, through methods of securitisation.’ ‘Securities’ are forms of credit or potential future cash-flows that have been turned into saleable assets. For example, if a bank held a number of mortgage loans these could be securitised and sold to investors who then receive the revenue of future repayments on these loans with interest. The sale of securities allows banks to displace risk onto the investors who buy them (ibid, p. 134). The displacement of risk allows banks to increase their speculative financial activities.

The lion’s share of financial activity actually resides in ‘buying and selling securities ... tied to existing firms and capital projects, or to something less concrete, such as the price of a stock or the level of an exchange rate’, as a consequence big banks have turned themselves into ‘immense trading houses whose fortunes depend on their ability to exploit day-to-day movements in the markets’ (Cassidy, 2012, p. 59). There has been a dramatic increase in the number of financial transactions: in 1983 they totalled $2.3 billion and by 2001 $130 billion (Harvey, 2005, p. 161). Twenty-five years ago finance comprised one-seventh of US business profits, in 2006 it was one-third and in 2009, despite the financial crisis, it was still one-quarter (Cassidy, 2012, p. 61). Financialisation was, in large part, responsible for capitalism’s recovery in the 1970s (Calhoun, 2011, p. 17). In playing this role financialisation can be seen as a key element of the neoliberal project (Lazzarato, 2012, p. 23), tied as this has been to the deregulation of the economy and the increased role of markets in public life. A number of institutional changes were undertaken in the 1970s by developed states as a response to the economic strain they were under at this time, such as the overturning of the Bretton Woods’ agreement on fixed exchange rates in 1971, which allowed for the rapid growth of credit/debt that came to circulate throughout the US economy (Duncan, 2012, p. 14). Although the deregulation undertaken since this period ‘was less determined by an ideological commitment to getting the state out of markets than by state actors pragmatically trying to catch up with the globalising markets they had earlier nurtured’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 267).
Important here has been the ability of capital to react to problems on the demand side caused by the depression of wages. A strange situation is arising, where ‘most of the world’s population is becoming disposable and irrelevant from the standpoint of capital’, which is increasingly reliant upon ‘the circulation of fictitious forms of capital and fetishistic constructs of value centred on the money and form and within the credit system (Harvey, 2014, pp. 110-11).

One solution to this problem has been an increase in credit for both the employed and unemployed, with risky debt supposedly stabilised through securitisation (Harvey, 2010b, p. 17). In the long-run, however, that credit tends to make things worse, as ‘it can deal only with problems that arise in exchange and never with those in production’, it can also generate erroneous price signals to producers and thus stimulate a trend of over-accumulation (Harvey, 2006, p. 287)

Another solution has been the export of capital to create new markets through lending to developing countries. Although debt payment proved problematic, as witnessed in the 1980s when Latin-American and African countries threatened to not repay loans, the IMF responded with ‘structural adjustment programmes’ (ibid, p. 19). As key positions in the IMF were filled at the time by graduates of Chicago University’s economic department, well versed in neoliberal economic orthodoxy (Klein, 2007, p. 163), it should come as no surprise that these programmes involved the imposition of such measures as the deregulation of the market, the privatisation of state assets and cuts to state spending. As seen in Chapter One, such measures have been met with staunch resistance—especially in Latin America—elements of which have fed directly into contemporary protest movements within the core.

The ‘solution’ for capital in the core (increasing access to easy credit) created the conditions for the 2008 financial crisis, due to the way this played out in the US mortgage market. Panitch and Gindin (2013, pp. 20-21) highlight the central role the US state played in this through its encouragement of mortgage-backed securities. The expansion of the mortgage market had been important for the US economy, they argue, as it was a means of counteracting the wage stagnation that began building in the 1980s. Home ownership meant workers’ economic security became tied to the rising value of their properties, but when this market eventually collapsed it created a global financial crisis by undermining their main source of wealth which,
in turn, saw a drop in US consumer spending. Subprime mortgages are an example of how, in the period of neoliberal entrenchment, market deregulation created opportunities for the proliferation of wealth for those able to manipulate and exploit it. In the early 1980s a series of laws were passed that deregulated the mortgage market. This opened the way for creative financial approaches to the offering and structuring of mortgages (McLean, 2012, pp. 85-86).

One result was the rise of ‘subprime’ mortgages for borrowers with a high risk of insolvency (Lazzarato, 2012, p. 134). Through extending the number of people eligible to buy houses, subprime mortgages increased demand for housing and, consequently, caused real estate values to rise. Subprime lending thus contributed to a housing boom in the US during the 1990s that inevitably burst when subprime lenders defaulted on payments. This boom, then bust, was relatively contained because the lenders were minor players in the banking scene (McLean, 2012, p. 94). The scale of subprime lending changed dramatically once major players, such as Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, entered the market in the early 2000s.

A key factor behind the entry of such players into the US subprime market was another act of deregulation, the repeal of the Glass-Steagal Act in 1999. This act, passed in 1933, had prohibited banks from being both investors and lenders; universal banks (who both lent and invested) were considered to generate excessive risk and to have been a leading cause of the Great Depression (Black, 1997, p. 198). Panitch and Gindin (2013, p. 308) emphasise the role played by the state in all of this—not just in terms of the regulatory environment (or lack thereof) that it oversaw, but also because of the actions of the government-sponsored enterprises Freddie Mac (Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation) and Fannie Mae (Federal National Mortgage Association) who held and guaranteed mortgage assets: in the 1980s they held $85 billion in mortgage assets, seven percent of the overall market; in 2002 this had grown to $3.7 trillion, 45 percent of the market; and was standing at $5.3 trillion in 2007. The financial markets had treated the assets of these companies as safe investments due to the implicit assumption that they were guaranteed by the US state. With regulations curbing the speculative activities of universal banks in the mortgage market brushed aside, and with a substantial part of this unsteady market guaranteed by the US state, the number of subprime markets expanded rapidly. By 2006 one in every five new mortgages was subprime (Konings, 2010). A real estate bubble expanded accordingly.
Tailored as they are for people with a high risk of insolvency, subprime mortgages explicitly targeted those with low-incomes. As mentioned, expanding access to credit was an important means of dealing with stagnant demand caused by depressed wages. Low income groups had long been the target of easy-to-obtain credit for consumer items (hire-purchase, for example), but the financing of high-risk mortgages was new to the age of financialisation. Subprime lenders targeted, often through predatory means (Konings, 2010, p. 26, see also Ferguson, 2010), those previously marginalised by the credit market: people with low-incomes, young adults, senior citizens (Montgomerie, 2010, p. 104) and those perniciously excluded on racial grounds (Dymski, 2010, p. 96). A relatively new financial innovation was deployed to lure lower-income people into mortgages: the variable-interest loan, which begins with low interest rates that later spiral rapidly upwards. Poorer purchasers entered the market after being advised they could afford expensive houses on low monthly payments. This was based on the assumption that house prices would continue to rise. Many borrowers believed they would be able to refinance loans once payments became difficult; or, alternately, if they were unable to meet repayments, the house could be sold for a profit, allowing them to pocket the difference (Chirot, 2011, pp. 118-19).

As it panned out, however, once large numbers of subprime mortgage holders began to default—beginning in 2006—the housing market collapsed with them. Defaulters on subprime mortgages lost their homes, which were now worth (in most cases) considerably less than had initially been paid for them, miring defaulters in significant levels of debt for which they had nothing to show. The repercussions of this spilled outwards and caused the global financial crisis in 2008. This, in turn, punished other holders of debt, subprime or otherwise, through rapid upturns in unemployment or through the continued depression of wages (all of which makes it difficult to meet loan demands). Further, many investors lost substantial amounts of money due to their exposure to failed subprime loans (which, in many cases, implicated pension saving-funds).

Panitch and Gindin (2013, p. 192) underline the impacts this process has had upon working-class organisation in the US. The low levels of working-class resistance in the final two decades of the twentieth century stemmed, in no small part, from workers’ access to new forms of credit. This credit, in the face of stagnant wages, fed consumerism and ‘materially integrated’ workers into global capitalism and the circuits of financial capital.
Workers reduced their savings, increased their debt, and looked for tax cuts to make up for stagnant wages; they cheered rises in the stock markets on which their pensions depended, and counted on the inflation of house prices to serve as collateral for new loans, provide some added retirement security, and leave a legacy for their children.

Such high levels of integration for workers has led to inequalities between workers, they assert, and has seen an increasingly individualised, fragmentated working class with no collective capacity.

Consideration of the mechanisms that facilitated the subprime mortgage market casts light on the cynical, if not corrupt, aspects of contemporary finance. A number of ‘financial innovations’ were deployed in the subprime mortgage market. Investment banks bought these mortgages from lending banks, packaged them into securities along with other forms of debt (such as student loans, car loans, credit card debt, and commercial mortgages) that were then sold on to investors (see Ferguson, 2010). Securities of this type were called Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDOs) or ‘mortgage-backed securities’, and they were attractive to investors because of the high ratings accorded them by ratings agencies like Standard and Poor’s, and Moody’s, who had been commissioned to do this work by the investment banks selling the securities.

Another important financial mechanism tied to the proliferation of such securities were Credit Default Swaps (CDS’). CDS’ functioned as insurance policies to mitigate the risk associated with financial products like CDOs (Lazzarato, 2012, p. 127). In relation to subprime mortgages this was, effectively, a guarantee of revenue from loans that borrowers defaulted on. The chief purveyor of CDS’ was American International Group (AIG), who, due to deregulation, did not have to possess reserves of money commensurate to what they were exposed to. Further, multiple CDS’ could be purchased against a single CDO, which led to speculators buying CDOs against CDS’ they did not own. Amongst the buyers of such speculative CDS’ were the very banks selling the CDOs, a cynical action revealing their actual internal valuation of the securities they were selling as junk. This true valuation was at odds with the high ratings accorded to these securities by ratings companies (see Ferguson, 2010).

While all these operations were legal, due to the deregulated market in which they took place, they functioned like a giant Ponzi scheme, ‘as they relied increasingly on passing risk to others
as quickly as possible while creating loans that could never be paid off’ (Chirot, 2011, p. 119). The market deregulations which allowed such developments, and consequently helped the US economy recover after the upsets of the 1970s, also created the conditions that led to the Financial Crisis of 2008 (Schwartz, 2010, p. 173). The processes at play here illustrate the ways in which money that is supposed to represent the social value of creative labour takes the form of ‘fictitious capital’, which ‘circulates to eventually line the pockets of the financiers and bondholders through the extraction of wealth from all sorts of non-productive (non-value-producing) activities’ (Harvey, 2014, p. 32).

Defaults on subprime mortgages turned the securities into which they had been packaged toxic, which threatened the entire financial system and had global repercussions. ‘It was because US finance had become so integral to the functioning of twenty-first century global capitalism that the ultimate impact of this crisis through the international economy was so profound’ (Panitch and Gindin, 2013, p. 311). The US government took steps to contain this crisis through massive bail-outs for the financial sector. In March 2008, with the onset of the crisis, the US Federal Reserve—in agreement with the Treasury—assumed $30 billion of Bear Stearns’ (an investment banks) bad assets, allowing JPMorgan Chase to take over what remained of Bear Stearns (Ferguson and Johnson, 2010). Next to be bailed-out were Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, on September the 7th, owing to their having been amongst the largest buyers of what were now toxic securities. These were both private companies, which had operated with implicit US government backing and were deemed ‘too big to fail.’ The US government assumed responsibility for their ‘trillions in debt to prevent a complete collapse of financial markets around the world’ (Chirot, 2011, p. 119), a bail-out equivalent to forty percent of the US’ GDP. A week after these bail-outs the US government, in a step actually consistent with free-market ideology, let Lehman Brothers crash. This precipitated runs on money market funds, banks and commercial paper and the panic sent the stock market into free fall, with investors flocking to government securities (Ferguson and Johnson, 2010, p. 120).

With financial markets in chaos, the US government stepped back into the fray. AIG—overextended as it was due to the CDS’ it had sold with no reserves backing them—was nationalised. Treasury then pushed through a $700 billion asset buying programme, which they administered with no review or accountability, and which failed to achieve any tangible
results as world markets continued melting down (Ferguson and Johnson, 2010, p. 121). The British response to the crisis was more circumscribed—their banks were recapitalised, but bad assets remained on their books. This response, along with the ‘Irish governments decision to guarantee all deposits… set off a competitive scramble among the G7 countries to ring-fence their financial systems from total collapse via partial nationalisations, state loan guarantees and extended insurance on bank deposits’ (Ferguson and Johnson, 2010, p. 121).

All these rounds of bail-outs did little to stave off collapse. Global unemployment levels remain high, and ‘mortgage defaults and bankruptcies are still running at high levels’ (ibid, p. 122). The bail-outs of the finance sector have done little to stimulate the wider economy, and the problem of effective demand has arisen again, placing us in the midst of a global under-consumption crisis (Keyder, 2011, p. 160). As Panitch and Gindin (2013, p. 302) note, however, ‘in the aftermath of this crisis the growing significance of the internationalistation of the state in global capitalism [has] become clearer than ever’. If the US state had not stepped in to the extent that it did, and if other states had not followed suit, capitalism would have suffered a lot more than it did in the wake of the crisis. The contemporary crisis was not as bad as that of the Great Depression because governments and central banks from wealthy countries created liquidity and staved off the collapse of the financial system (Piketty, 2014, p. 472).

The big-players of the financial system made massive amounts of money from exploiting a deregulated market. Once the system that had produced this wealth failed—due to its own irrational and cynical machinations—governments around the world stepped in to bail-out the architects of this disaster, which gives credibility to critiques of the class-based nature of neoliberalism. Neoliberal theory, which preached the importance of deregulated markets, was at odds with actual practices. While the individuals who benefited most from the financial system were, by-and-large, able to maintain their personal wealth, the other ‘99 percent’ are facing—for the greater part—economic hardship. Those at the top of the financial system were bailed out, and it is people on ‘Main Street’ who are left holding the debt, on a personal level in the case of loans, and also collectively as taxpayers picking up the tab for the bail-outs. Such a situation highlights, as Harvey (2014, p. 224) argues, the manner in which ‘the accumulation of wealth since the 1970s has been… tightly associated with the accumulation of public, corporate and private debt. The suspicion lurks that an accumulation of debts is now the precondition for the further accumulation of capital.’ Or, as Piketty (2014, p. 131)
notes, public debt is a tool for private capital. The ‘question of public debt is a question of the distribution of wealth, between public and private actors in particular, and not a question of absolute wealth’ (ibid, p. 540).

It was argued above that ‘dispossession’ is a primary ongoing dynamic of capital. The deepening levels of debt to which the public and individuals are subjected can be seen as a means of dispossessing the future. As Lazzarato (2012, pp. 46-7 ) argues,

...all financial innovations have but one sole purpose: possessing the future in advance by objectivising it. This objectivisation is of a completely different order from that of labour time; objectivising time, possessing it in advance, means subordinating all possibility of choice and decision which the future holds to the reproduction of capitalist power relations. In this way, debt appropriates not only the present labour time of wage-earners and of the population in general, it also preempts non-chronological time, each person’s future as well as the future of society as a whole.

Through increased indebtedness, our future becomes that of the debt-holder—indebtedness, he argues, has a profound subjective impact (a theme that will be teased out in more depth in Chapter Six). As Lazzarato notes (ibid, p. 21) contemporary capitalist accumulation takes place principally through rents. Without changing the fundamental class division in society, it indicates the character this division will increasingly manifest in the twenty-first century. There are the indebted, those who future is given over to the payment of debt, and the rentiers, who need not work as they can derive an income from the interest paid on the debts of others. Indeed, Piketty’s (2014) Capital in the Twenty-First Century posits this as the paramount vector of inequality.

Inequality has increased within core countries over the last thirty years, and looks set to worsen if the dynamics of contemporary capitalism are not disrupted. Piketty’s (2014, p. 438) work shows, on a global scale, that the inequality of wealth in the 2010s is comparable to that of Europe at the start of the twentieth century. ‘The top thousandth seems to own nearly 20 percent of total global wealth today, the top centile about 50 percent, and the top decile somewhere between 80 and 90 percent. The bottom half of the global wealth distribution owns less than 5 percent of total global wealth.’ This trend of deepening inequality is observable within core states too. The lowest level of inequality in the US was for the period
1950-1980—with the top decile claiming something in the range of 30-35 percent of national income. In the period stretching from the early 1980s through to the 2000s, however, the share of the upper decile grew to 45-50 percent. If this trend were to continue at the current rate, argues Piketty (ibid, p. 294), this level would be at 60 percent by 2030. Piketty (ibid, p. 118) attributes the destruction of capital in the First and Second World Wars with having created ‘the illusion that capitalism had been structurally transformed’ in the twentieth century.

Piketty (ibid, p. 25) offers the equation $r > g$ to illustrate the ‘fundamental inequality’ found within capitalism—where ‘$r$’ is the average rate of return on capital (including such factors as profits, dividends, interest and rents), and ‘$g$’ is the growth of the economy (the annual increase in income or output). When the rate of return on capital is greater than the growth of the economy ‘it logically follows that inherited wealth grows faster than output and income. People with inherited wealth need save only a portion of their income from capital to see that capital grow more quickly than the economy as a whole’. Such a trend undermines ‘the meritocratic principles of social justice fundamental to modern democratic societies’ (ibid, p. 26). Alongside the growing power of inherited wealth is the widening gap between the incomes of top managers—who set their own remuneration—from the rest of the population (ibid, p. 24). Piketty (ibid, p. 335) draws attention to the political reasons behind growing wealth and income disparities, which for him are essentially tied to tax rates:

...the decrease in the top marginal income tax rate led to an explosion of very high incomes, which then increased the political influence of the beneficiaries of the change in the tax laws, who had an interest in keeping top tax rates low or even decreasing them further and who could use their windfall to finance political parties, pressure groups and think tanks.

Such trends are tied to the decline of democracy in core states (as noted above in the introduction) and signal the terrain on which contemporary redistributive social movements must sally forth.

The rise of the rentier is a deepening trend within the contemporary economy, one that will ineluctably lead to increased levels of inequality.

The inequality $r > g$ implies that wealth accumulated in the present grows more rapidly than output and wages. This inequality expresses a fundamental logical contradiction. The
entrepreneur inevitably tends to become a rentier, more and more dominant over those who own nothing but their labour. Once constituted, capital reproduces itself faster than output increases. The past devours the future. (Piketty, 2014, p. 571)

While Piketty recoils from Marxism, much can be found within his analysis that corresponds to this tradition. While capitalists exalt the figure of the entrepreneur as a means of justifying this system—with the argument that free individuals in pursuit of private gains ultimately produce public gains through their creative activities—Piketty illustrates how this becomes a contradictory trend, with this productive figure retreating to the circuits of non-productive, fictitious capital. Further, he illustrates the underlying class antagonism developing between such figures and the bulk of the public who have only their labour power to sell. He also draws attention to one of the fundamental issues of our time, the intensifying generational rifts opening up in developed societies due to inherited wealth becoming disproportionately important (ibid, p. 378). Cumulative growth means that returns on capital will intensify the \( r > g \) trend (ibid, p. 77).

Panitch and Gindin (2013) also draw attention to growing income disparities, focusing on the US. The annual rate of growth within the US for the period 1983-2007 was 3.5 percent, a higher rate than any period from 1830-1950, and only marginally less than the post war ‘golden age’ (ibid, p. 291); and real non-financial corporate profits doubled between 1983 and 1999. Yet, despite all these signs of economic growth, real private-sector wages were higher in 1968 than they were in 1999, real hourly compensation rose at the low rate of .6 percent annually between 1983 and 1999, while CEOs salaries increased by 650 percent over this time despite there having only been, on average, a two percent annual increase in productivity—all of which highlights a significant lag in workers’ compensation (ibid, p. 184). Despite arguments to the contrary, there is no sign that reductions to top marginal tax rates and an increase to top incomes has stimulated productivity (Piketty, 2014, p. 510). Economic developments over the last forty years have, it would seem, benefitted the (very) few at the expense of the many. As will become clear in later chapters, this deepening inequality has begun to stimulate large-scale campaigns of resistance. Social movements are, once again, bringing political economy back into their claims-making.

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Summary—capital, the state and the rise of the rentier

This chapter has explored the key dynamics of capital—dispossession, limitless accumulation, the power of dead labour over living labour, the problem of under-consumption and the conflictive class antagonisms which these dynamics give rise to. Capitalism engenders resistance. An understanding of resistance movements—especially, but not exclusively, redistributive social movements—relies, then, upon consideration of capital’s key dynamics. The arc of resistance stimulated by capital, as explored in Chapter One, has stretched across the last two centuries. There is a dialectical interplay between struggle and capital’s historical development, an insight that has been lacking (as shown in the preceding chapter) from most contemporary social movement theory. An understanding of the dynamics of capital contextualises contemporary social movement resistance in the core states.

Notable here has been capital’s development over the last forty years. Emphasis must be placed upon the continuing role of the state in the development and stabilisation of capitalism, a point frequently lost in contemporary accounts of globalisation and neoliberalism. The role of the state, and considerations of what exactly the state is, will receive continued attention throughout the pages that follow. It is conjectured, despite the dismissal it receives from many contemporary left-theorists and activists, that effective struggle must grapple with the state form. The current role played by the state in the stabilisation of capitalism, and the consequent deepening levels of inequality, requires us to consider the ways in which the state acts in the interests of the dominant class. Overcoming the crisis of democracy requires facing these issues head on.

In tracing the path capital took to escape the crisis of the 1970s—that of financialisation—we arrive at the financial crisis of 2008. The predatory nature of the financial system was exposed by considering some of the ‘financial innovations’ developed over the last forty years. The increasing indebtedness of the many for the enrichment of the few—for the rentiers—fuels much of today’s social unrest, the topic to which this thesis turns in later pages.

Most social movement studies fail to pay adequate attention to questions of political economy. By unravelling the dynamics of capital and charting their recent historical manifestations, this chapter has sought to rectify this oversight in social movement studies. The arc of contention, as traced in Chapter One, is passing once again through a point in which
political contestation is explicitly expressed in relation to economic processes (as was seen with the rise of the global justice movement, and as will be illustrated in Chapter Five in relation to Occupy). Economic critique needs, however, to be complemented by effective political strategy. With this in mind, the next chapter explores what is considered to constitute effective political action today in the realm of left theory.
Chapter Four: Theory Responds: Reconceptualising political strategy after the ‘crisis of Marxism’

Changes to political economy and social movement contestation have been matched by significant shifts within the academy. The ‘arc of contention’ traced in Chapter One witnessed the rise of Marxism as a hegemonic theoretical body on the radical left (see Arrighi, 1990) that underwent subsequent marginalisation post-1968, with anarchism having recently become a more influential modality for radical political contestation. Chapter Two explored Marxism’s decline in the field of social movement studies. Prominent theorists in this field argued that post-industrial society signalled the increasing irrelevancy of Marxism. As argued in the preceding chapter, however, a critical understanding of capital’s dynamics—as offered by Marxism—is as important today as it has ever been, especially for those studying social movements. Marxism is concerned with much more than offering critiques of capital: it is also seeks to conceptualise what constitutes effective political action. It is this political aspect of Marxist thought that has been most profoundly challenged over the past forty years.

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9 See Keucheyan (2013) for an excellent overview of the broad shifts being discussed here.
Changing political sensibilities found their theoretical counterpart in the rise of post-modernism and post-structuralism, with the latter having a strong overlap with ‘post-Marxism’ (most notably with Laclau and Mouffe, 2005). These new intellectual approaches to left theory displaced and/or problematized key components of Marxist political thought, these being: the importance of economic explanations for social problems; the centrality of the state in political theorisation; the role of the intellectual on the left; the category of universalisable ‘truths’; and the notion of conflictive class relations being fundamental drivers of social change. Problems in theory are tied to those of practice: what constitutes effective political action today? How are left theorists to respond to the question of ‘what is to be done?’ This chapter interrogates contemporary left theory in order to find answers to such questions.

In what follows a synthesis of the work of Badiou, Žižek, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe will be undertaken. Some of these theorists still consider themselves Marxist (Žižek and Badiou), others post-Marxist (Laclau and Mouffe), and one has distanced himself from the tradition (Rancière). All these thinkers grapple with issues raised by post-structuralism and the changing nature of political contestation. The results, it will be argued, are valuable for contemporary left theory—but need to be pushed further. The themes of democracy, the politically possible, and the importance of bringing the ‘inexistent’ (those excluded from full participation in the social) to the forefront of emancipatory politics, run throughout the work of these diverse theorists.

While their works diverge, there are also many similarities. By focussing on their convergences, it is hoped that a strong theoretical position can be constructed from which to analyse contemporary social movements, and also from which to extend strategic considerations as to what comprises effective action. Three divergent political strategies are presented by these theorists: the first makes demands against the state, but always from a distance (Badiou, Rancière, Žižek), the second seeks to work within existing state structures (Laclau and Mouffe).

A shortcoming identified in the above mentioned work is the lack of attention to economic issues (excepting, to some degree, Žižek), along with insufficient attention to the nature of the state. The work of Hardt and Negri (who identify themselves as Marxists) will also be
explored in this chapter due to their attention to economic issues. A weakness of their position, however, is the notion that effective resistance involves evacuating the terrain of the state altogether.

**Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism—Marxism’s intellectual challengers**

As noted above, Marxism has become a marginalised strand within contemporary political theory and praxis. Structuralism appeared in the 1960s as the principal theoretical competitor on the left (Keucheyan, 2013, p. 25). There were attempts to blend the two together, notably by Althusser. Crucial here was Althusser’s (1977, pp. 31-39) argument for an ‘epistemological break’ in Marx’s work—with the early humanist work giving way to the more ‘mature’ scientific works after 1845 culminating in *Capital*. In general, structuralism can be seen as having discounted epistemological or reflexive interrogation as a means of generating knowledge (Dews, 2007, p. 4). Accompanying its anti-humanist impulse was the importation of linguistics to the social sciences, and the application of its precepts to a wide range of human activity (Lacan, for example, argued the unconscious was structured like a language).

As argued by leading structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972, p. 31), ‘linguistics occupies a special space among the social sciences’ as it is the only one that ‘can truly claim to be a science’. By calling upon scientific justifications, and therefore claims to ‘truth’, those who built upon the work of Lévi-Strauss (who himself had drawn heavily upon the pioneering work of the linguist Ferdinand Saussure) within the structuralist tradition argued that they were able to empirically discern the deep underlying structures of human relations. Post-structuralism does not represent a complete break with structuralism, rather it took structuralism’s core concepts and sought to problematize them and radicalise them further, aiming to dismantle stable conceptions of meaning, identity and subjectivity (Dews, 2007, p. xi).

Post-structuralism found root in the political and social events surrounding May 1968 in Paris. Derrida had planted the seed when, in 1967, he argued structuralism, despite its scientific pretensions, still depended upon philosophical assumptions. Philosophical thought, he held, was capable of challenging the role and status of the sciences (ibid, pp. 4-5). With the philosophical mood changing in step with the political unrest of 1968, thinkers who had been operating within the structuralist paradigm—such as Foucault and Deleuze—were able to drop the restrictive claims of objectivity structuralism had demanded of them (ibid, p. 2).
Althusser and his followers were critiqued for their fidelity to Leninism and ongoing connections to the French Communist Party (Badiou, 2012a, p. 18). Foucault (2000, p. 115), a former student of Althusser, argued the events of 1968 had problematized the Marxist perspective, showing it was ‘powerless’ to adequately address the multiple struggles that had erupted in France and elsewhere. Laclau and Mouffe (2005, pp. viii-xi)—the latter of whom had also been a student of Althusser—argued Marxism had reached an impasse at this time, with post-structuralism offering a means of reorienting political thought and strategy, leading them to assume a ‘post-Marxist’ position—although, assuming such a position, Norman Geras (1988, p. 35) has argued, involved creating a shallow caricature of the tradition they claimed to be leaving behind.

Post-structuralism, emerging as it did in the late 1960s, corresponds with the emergence of ‘post-modernism.’ Jameson (1991, p. xii-xiv) argues that while post-structuralism can be considered a philosophical phenomenon, and post-industrialism an economic one, the notion of post-modernism offers a means of approaching questions relating to culture. Post-modernism, he argues, is the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism.’ It is a means of orientating thought and action toward new modes of production and action. Post-modernism has commonly, however, been used as a means of denoting both post-structuralist thought and also the more general philosophical disposition of many French (and later North American) theorists.

Göran Therborn (2010, p. 127), for instance, speaks of post-modern thought having emerged as ‘a symptom of disorientation of the (ex-)Left,’ due, in no small part, to the loss of a historical arc in which its actions could be situated. As famously argued by Lyotard (1984, p. 37):

In contemporary society and culture—postindustrial society, postmodern culture—the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.

Politically, the party had lost its claim to enlightened knowledge from which to plot the path to revolution. Vanguardism, representation, the role of the intellectual, all were problematized if not outright discarded (el-Ojeili, 2003, p. 46). Thinkers such as Foucault and Lyotard rejected any political position claiming truth or universal validity for its standpoint.
Dews, 2007, p. 265); any attempt toward totalisation in thought and political practice was spurned as inherently oppressive (ibid, p. 244), a position which, Jameson (1991, p. 333) argues, undermined calls for collective action. By the 1980s the intellectual climate on the left was, to a large extent, dominated by a thoroughgoing relativism, one which (some lamented) undermined projects orientated toward collective emancipation (Badiou, 2005a, p. xii). The post-structuralist/post-modernist moment was, then, one which problematized Marxism both intellectually and politically, unseating it as the dominant theory guiding the radical left.

The decline of Marxism was concomitant with the establishment of competing theories of power and contestation, which saw considerations of the state knocked from any central analytical position. A paradigmatic example here is Foucault’s development of the notion of ‘biopolitics’ (one dialectically appropriated by Hardt and Negri, as will be discussed below, to conceptualise the subject able to resist neoliberal capitalism). Foucault (2004, p. 265), while still acknowledging the persistent presence of the state in social relations, argued old notions of juridical sovereignty had to be discarded. The question of power was to be approached through the consideration of relations between diverse actors, so we can ‘look at how relations of subjugation can manufacture subjects.’ Rather than searching...

...for the single or the central point from which all forms of power derive... we must begin by letting them operate in their multiplicity, their differences, their specificity, and their reversibility; we must therefore study them as relations of force that intersect, refer to one another, converge, or, on the contrary, come into conflict and strive to negate one another. (ibid, pp. 265-66)

Through displacing the state as the strategic field in which struggles are conducted between different class-positions, Foucault developed a dispersed notion of power. The ‘basic phenomena of the nineteenth century’, he argued, ‘was what might be called power’s hold over life’—man, as a living being, as biological entity, came under state control (ibid, p. 239). The classic power of sovereignty, as a power over death, transitioned to a new form of sovereign power held over life. This form of power, Foucault (ibid, p. 243) argued, was directed ‘at man-as-species... a “biopolitics” of the human race’ was developed.

During the classical period [from the late seventeenth century], there was a rapid development of various disciplines—universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops;
there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity public health, housing and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of “bio-power.” (Foucault, 1998, p. 140)

Foucault’s work, with its emphasis on ‘bio-power’ dispersed across multiple social relations, challenged theories of radical political action which sought to directly engage the state as the privileged site of power—as the sites of contestation are multiple, so too are the actors invested within them. Foucault’s notion of bio-power and bio-politics is an emblematic example of a post-structuralist re-conception of power that displaced the state as the prime locus of left strategy. It continues to influence thinkers today (as will be seen below with Hardt and Negri).

Central to Foucault’s project was a reconceptualization of the role played by the intellectual. He opposed the idea ‘from Marxism, from a faded Marxism indeed’ of a an intellectual able to speak ‘in the capacity of the master of truth and justice’ as the ‘consciousness/conscience of us all’ (Foucault, 1984, p. 67). In opposition the figure of the ‘universal intellectual,’ Foucault (ibid, p. 73) argued in favour of the ‘specific intellectual’: the intellectual able to occupy a specific position in relation to the production of truth within society. Such an intellectual can, through their struggles, ‘take on a general significance and ... his local, specific struggle can have effects and implications which are not simply professional or sectorial.’ Foucault exercised such an approach himself, with his academic work and activism contributing toward reform of the French justice system.

Another challenge to orthodox Marxist theorisation (as then associated with Western communist parties) was the displacement of the proletariat as principal instigator of emancipation. The eruption of new social movements, which opposed the more conservative aspects of working class culture and its compact with the social democratic state, contributed to this shift; as did changes in the composition of capital, with post-industrialism supposedly undermining the central position of the proletariat in production, a position also adopted by new social movement theorists (as seen in Chapter Two).
In sum, post-structuralism and post-modernism were intellectual and cultural shifts that emerged from the late 1960s. Scientistic modes of thought were challenged. Orthodox currents of Marxism were problematized on both intellectual and political grounds. For radical thinkers operating within, and against, this post-structuralist/post-modern shift, a number of political categories have presented themselves as in need of reconceptualization, namely: the subject, the state, power, what constitutes effective action and, by extension, what the target of action should be.

Of Multiplicity and Effective Political Action—left-theory grapples with the legacy of post-structuralism

The premise of this chapter is that despite their many differences, indeed perhaps because of their differences, the significant overlaps between the works of Badiou, Žižek, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe, provide a vital intellectual field in which to develop strategic reflections as to what constitutes effective political action today in the wake of post-structuralism. Despite many divergences, these theorists occupy a similar ontological terrain. Consider Badiou’s (not-uncritical) discussions of Rancière’s work: ‘Yes, yes, we are brothers, everyone sees that’ (Badiou, 2009a, p. 30), ‘our agreement... is ontological’ (Badiou, 2005b, p. 116). Or the similarities between Badiou and Laclau (and Mouffe) as argued by Žižek (2000c, pp. 172-3):

...the theoretical edifices of Laclau and Badiou are united by a deep homology. ... [They] both start by asserting a constitutive and irreducible gap that undermines the self-enclosed consistency of the ontological edifice: for Laclau, this gap is the gap between the Particular and the empty Universal, which necessitates the operation of hegemony...; for Badiou, it is the gap between Being and Event.

Despite similarities these thinkers are often quick to distance themselves from one another so as to promote their own intellectual projects. Laclau (2004, p. 136), for instance, argues Badiou would have been better off developing a linguistic account of ontological relations rather than one grounded in set theory. Another similarity running through the work of Badiou and Laclau, along with Žižek, is recourse to the work of Lacan. While Badiou and Žižek, and to a lesser extent Rancière, engage in a relatively constructive dialogue with, or across one another, Laclau and Mouffe have approached Badiou and Žižek in increasingly antagonistic terms, due, in no small part, to the acrimony following Žižek and Laclau’s
exchange in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (Butler et al., 2000). Rancière’s work, on the other hand, has continued to be well received by Laclau (2005, pp. 245-46) as, he asserts, it ‘comes very close to my own’; and, as will be shown below, Rancière also has constructive similarities with Mouffe’s work.

To trace in detail their many points of convergence and to pick a line through their many disagreements is beyond this project’s scope. Nor would it necessarily be a productive exercise in terms of what could be contributed toward key strategic considerations for contemporary political action. The proposition is, however, that when held at arm’s length a picture emerges of the contemporary political and subjective stakes at play when seeking to reconceptualise democracy. By considering their divergent political strategies in conjunction with those of Hardt and Negri, and with a renewed attention to Poulantzas’ theory of the state (as well be explored in Chapter Eight), an alternative terrain of political possibilities opens up.

A common assumption shared by these figures is the notion that being is multiplicity. True to the ethos of post-structuralism, there is no supposition of a ‘natural order’ underpinning human society (although this insight is as old as social theory itself), nor is there a humanist conception of the subject. There is, rather, within a given social situation, a multiplicity of elements, a radical heterogeneity. Any social order that exists between these elements arises from an ordering process that arranges them into a particular, generally hierarchical, configuration from which some elements will be formally excluded despite their persistent presence within the domain of being.

Any given social order, then, inadvertently produces an inexistent, the persistence of which threatens to undermine this order. To give a classic Marxist example, the proletariat is present within industrial society, and has been created as a social class through the process of industrialisation, yet for the greater part of the nineteenth century had no formal existence; it possessed no voice within political mechanisms and little to no substantive rights within the legal system. While all individuals may have had, in countries such as England and France, the formal legal right to property under the protection of the state, only a limited number of people—the bourgeoisie and aristocracy—possessed property of any worth, and consequently only this limited section of the population was afforded suffrage. The
proletariat was the inexistent of nineteenth century industrial society, hence the refrain of the *Internationale*: ‘we are nothing, let us be all.’ A more contemporary example, from the age of globalisation and flexible employment, is that of the illegal immigrant worker. While the citizens of the modern metropolis might walk past them on the street, and eat food in cafes prepared by their hands, the illegal worker is inexistent as they have no recognised employment rights, public presence nor say in elections.

That some people and social groups can be said to exist in a situation, and others not, attests to the play of power, which raises questions as to the role of the state. While the state persists as a unit of analysis for all of these theorists, it receives little direct analysis in terms of what it actually is.

Badiou comes closest to addressing this shortcoming in *Being and Event* (2005a). For the inexistent to remain as such, for it to be occluded from a given social configuration, ‘it is necessary that structure be structured,’ that the ordering operation—the ‘count-as-one’—binding the social (or what Badiou terms ‘a situation’) undergo its own count in order to ensure the validity of the notion that ‘there is Oneness’ (ibid, p. 93). The state (‘the state of the situation’) is ‘that by means of which the structure of a situation is counted as one’ (ibid, p. 95). A virtue of Marxism, in Badiou’s (ibid, p. 106, emphasis in original) reckoning, is the assertion that ‘the State is that of the ruling class, it indicates that the State always re-presents what has already been presented’ historically and socially. The state, then, ‘is not founded upon the social bond, which it would express, but upon the unbinding, which it prohibits’—‘the State is less a result of the consistency of presentation than the danger of inconsistency’ (ibid, p. 109).

The state, in Badiou’s formulation, then, is always ‘a separate apparatus’ whose purpose is to reinforce ‘the One’ (ibid,p. 107). To render Badiou’s formulation into terminology more familiar to those of us operating within the social sciences: social reality as held together through norms, values, accepted forms of knowledge, prejudices, and forms of cooperation, is generally consistent for the people from which it is composed. The state does not generate society, it is, rather, a set of processes ensuring the continued consistency of the social—which it does through reinforcing (re-presenting) those elements conducive to a particular configuration (‘bourgeois class rule’) and ensuring that elements which might undermine this
order (the inexistent, ‘the revolutionary proletariat’) are unable to appear. Ultimately, for Badiou, ‘the logic of emancipation requires politics to free itself from the hold of the state, from the terrible fascination with power’ (Badiou and Finkielkraut, 2014, p. 49).

Badiou’s attention to what constitutes the state tends to diminish in later works, and he has been critiqued by Žižek (2012a, p. 842) for being overly formal (and abstract) in his approach to the question of what the state is, conflating ‘a particular historical form of social organization and a basic ontological feature of the universe.’

The tendency is to generally elide the question of what the state is, and to address a more diffuse notion of power, an example being Rancière’s conception of ‘the police.’ This term encapsulates the petty notion of the police, as a visible manifestation of the state’s monopoly on violence and ability to set and enforce the law; as well as a more subtle ‘partition of the sensible,’ an ordering of who can speak and be seen, which structures how social reality is apprehended. The state is present, but always, for Rancière (1999, p. 71), in an oligarchic form.

In keeping with the spirit of 1968, both Rancière and Badiou argue against developing political projects whose aim is the capture of state power (as explored in the preceding chapter). The state remains a target of political action, but always from a distance (Badiou and Hallward, 2001, pp. 98-99), and, from this distance, it should be forced to include popular demands for equality (Badiou, 2012b, pp. 122-23, Rancière, 2009, p. 56). In Badiou’s thought, the best that could come from such a process, it would seem, is a rupture within the existing state form—through it being unable to accommodate popular demands—and, by extension, the crumbling of the whole exclusionary social edifice it structures. Such a rupture, an Event, would present those in confrontation with power a glimpse of a novel political possibility that could animate a new sequence of political action, provided the militants involved express fidelity to the ‘truth’ brought into being through this Event and instigate a new egalitarian ordering of the social. Short of such an eventual rupture, confrontation with the state has, at least, the effect of drawing state power into the open, rendering it visible and allowing those in revolt the opportunity to gauge its capacity (Badiou, 2009b, p. 72).

In Rancière’s (1999, p. 100) schema, which falls short of Badiou’s radicalism, a sequence of political action can be considered successful, for all intents and purposes, if it is able to
inscribe new egalitarian axioms on the surface of the state edifice (which the oligarchs will erase or alter the first chance they get). While the state is always oligarchic in his reckoning, it can have a greater or lesser capacity for the absorption of democratic demands. In a critique that can also be levelled at Badiou, Rancière has been found wanting in terms of explaining the means by which egalitarian politics can be institutionalised and thus endure (May, 2008, p. 180). While Badiou considers the party and capture of the state to have become redundant as means of achieving emancipatory outcomes, he persists in the argument that politics must be organised; although the forms successful future organisation might take are still unclear (Badiou, 2010a, p. 65). Critiques of Badiou express frustration with the weight he places upon the eruption of an Event as a precursor to genuine political action (Johnston, 2009, p. 79). We can find ourselves, like the characters in a Beckett play, waiting for the Event.

Laclau and Mouffe offer more tangible ideas as to how conceptualise political strategy. The diffuse elements of the social are made to cohere, they argue, through a process of hegemonic articulation that is able to arrange the diverse elements of the social within a particular chain of shared meaning (Laclau and Mouffe, 2005, p. xi). Their ontological grounding is that of radical negativity, a persistent ground zero of antagonism which persists throughout all social relations (Mouffe, 2013, p. xi). Hegemony is an attempt to contain these antagonisms within a governable form. Every hegemonic order is incomplete, contingent and precarious as it always excludes some elements, the continued circulation of which threatens hegemony.

Laclau and Mouffe oppose the notion of a ‘rupture,’ championed by Badiou and Žižek, as a means of conceptualising transformational politics (Laclau, 2005, p. 225). They argue radical politics must develop an alternative hegemony, but without eschewing existing political institutions. Rather than seeking a break with representative democracy they aim, instead, to revitalise the system from within. The state needs to be more democratic and can be made so, they argue, through deepening the democratic revolution inaugurated by the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Mouffe (1993, p. 7), in particular, advocates for a radicalisation of the existing liberal political landscape. This can be achieved, she argues, through separating the political from the economic aspects of liberalism.
Of the authors considered here Laclau and Mouffe are the most avowedly post-structuralist, with their thought embodying the intertwined theoretical and political shifts attributable to this intellectual current. Indicative of this position is their endorsement of the potential unleashed by new social movements. The lesson to be learnt with the appearance of these movements, they argue, is that there is no *a priori* privileged subject destined to revolt on whom we can hang our political hopes (Laclau and Mouffe, 2005, p. 180). Class is no longer the central category through which to consider meaningful political change. It is, rather, one of many bearers of resistance, alongside others such as feminism, the ecology and anti-racism movements (which places them alongside the new social movement scholars considered in the following chapter). Successful counter-politics, they contend, creates a chain of equivalence between these otherwise discrete sites of struggle and, through doing so, formulates a counter-hegemonic bloc, able (they sincerely hope!) to reorder the social along more egalitarian lines. Such a counter-hegemonic project, however, should fall short of trying to construct a totalising discourse of its own. Rather, having recognised that radical negativity provides the ontological underpinning of politics, an antagonistic political field would be established in which both left and right political viewpoints would be given full play—provided they can follow mutually accepted rules—within a representational framework. Their prescription is, then, a reboot of existing political structures, the viability of which, it would seem, depends upon the persistence of extra-parliamentary social movements: ‘hegemony not accompanied by mass action at the level of civil society leads to a bureaucratism that will be easily colonised by the corporative powers of the status quo’ (Laclau, 2014, p. 9).

While the above summaries are necessarily brief, moving silently over the finer points of each theorist’s work, and avoiding the points of (often heated) disagreement occurring between them, what can be seen, it is hoped, is a broadly shared set of assumptions that can operate as an ontological ground for examining politics in a post-structuralist—or a post-post-structuralist—setting. Namely: Being is multiplicity with no underlying unity or totality, both on an individual level and that of the wider social; any experience of consistency within social relations is the outcome, to a lesser or greater degree, of power relations; power relations are, however, unable to effectively order all elements in existence (due to the ever present antagonistic dimension), so an inexistent is always produced with each ordering of the social;
the persistence of the inexistent threatens the order power seeks to establish. Radical politics should, then, seek to promote the presence of the inexistent, or ally with it were it to emerge.

All these thinkers share, albeit with differing emphasis, the dictum that true politics occurs when an inexistent element—the proletariat or women in a nineteenth century context, the migrant worker without papers today—appears in the midst of a structured social order, from which it has been formally excluded, and asserts its presence with a maximum degree of intensity. It is in this sense that power is considered contingent: it can persist, when challenged by the inexistent, if it is able to reorder the social such that a degree of consistency can be maintained. Reordering implies modification (recall Rancière’s dictum that the state is always oligarchic, but can be more or less responsive to democratic demands, depending on the form and intensity of popular struggles). Against this process of ‘modification,’ of change-without-change, Badiou and Žižek emphasise the need for rupture, an Event, as precursor for ‘real change.’ It is only when the surface appearance of reality cracks irreparably that meaningful action can take place.

**Populism and Antagonism—working with what we have to fight for more**

Against the notion that ‘real politics’ depends upon a moment of rupture, Laclau developed a body of work in which populism is considered the means by which egalitarian outcomes are most likely to be achieved. When paired with Mouffe’s emphasis upon the negative antagonistic underpinning of politics and the scorn that she, along with Rancière, heaps upon ‘consensus politics’, it can be seen how counter-hegemonic projects can ensue. Divisions persist within the social. Some of these divisions are absolute—those in power either try to obliterate or paper over them—others can be constructively linked together within broad popular movements.

While populism tends to be regarded by political theorists and commentators in a negative light, Laclau views it positively, considering it to have contributed toward increased levels of equality in modern democracies. Society is increasingly heterogeneous since the advent of modernity; as a result demands are made of governments from multiple subject positions. The ‘logic of difference’ prevails, with institutional bodies able to respond to the demands of diverse groups who occupy differential positions relative to one another. If a demand issued by a particular group is satisfied by the governing body against which this request is issued,
then that is the end of the story. Power relations remain undisturbed and the group persists in its occupation of a differentiated position.

A demand starts as a request, usually directed at local power institutions (a city council, for instance) around a particular issue (such as transport). If this demand is frustrated, and those who made it become aware of others whose requests have met a similar fate (around such issues as, say, schooling and security) then a more substantial process may be initiated (Laclau, 2014, p. 149). People can perceive that

...their neighbours have other, equally unsatisfied demands. ... If the situation remains unchanged for some time, there is an accumulation of demands and an increasing inability of the institutionalised system to absorb them in a differentiated way (each in isolation from the others), and an equivalential relation is established between them. (Laclau, 2005, p. 73)

The result, he continues, could be a widening gap between the people (those issuing demands) and the institutionalised system. If the claims remain limited to the local situation, then the target remains identifiable (i.e. the local council), but with the extension of the equivalential chain then it becomes difficult to determine the referent of these claims. This leads to the discursive construct of the enemy on a larger scale—the oligarchy, Capitalism, the system, and so on. The identity of the claimants is transformed in this process of universalisation (Laclau, 2014, p. 149). From frustrated localised claims unfurls a process that leads to requests no longer being made of particular institutions but, instead, against the institutional order as a whole.

The claimants, now operating within an equivalential chain come to perceive the social as a ‘broken space’—it is as this point, argues Laclau, that ‘the people’ appears as a means of retrospectively giving a name to an imagined fullness that had preceded the rupturing of the social (Laclau, 2005, p. 85). Populism, for Laclau, is the result of a set of demands crystallising within one equivalential demand, that of ‘the people’. Equivalential relations can only offer a vague sense of solidarity, but if the equivalential chain of demands is able to crystallise within the discursive identity of ‘the people,’ then demands can achieve a consistency of their own (ibid, p. 93). Against the institutionalist discourse, in which demands had been met in their particularity and absorbed within existing structures, ‘the people’ of populism initiate a break with the existing order through the emergence of ‘a part which identifies itself with the whole’
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(ibid, pp. 81-2). When the institutional system which had presented itself as the embodiment of the *populus* is incapable of absorbing demands, it shows itself to be a false totality, an oppressive partiality. On the other hand, the demands of the people are ‘inscribed in the horizon of a fully fledged totality—a just society which exists only ideally’—[and which can thus]... aspire to constitute a truly universal populus which the actually existing system negates’ (ibid. p. 94)

Popular identity functions as an ‘empty signifier,’ which, due to it being devoid of any particular content, is able to extend outwards and represent an ever larger chain of heterogeneous social demands (Laclau, 2005, p. 96). Populism is able to initiate a ‘homogenising moment,’ as it both ‘constitutes the chain and, at the same time, represents it’ (ibid, pp. 162). The conclusion, for Laclau, is clear: ‘any popular identity has an inner structure which is essentially representative’ (ibid, p. 163). It is this function which can, potentially, become hegemonic—as the hegemonic relation is one in which ‘a certain particularity assumes the representation of an always-receding universality’ (Laclau, 2014, p. 145). There is, within this, a constitutive tension.

If representation illuminates something of the inner structure of populism... we could say that, conversely, populism throws some light on something that belongs to the essence of representation. For populism, as we have seen, is the terrain of the primary undecidability between the hegemonic function of the empty signifier and the equivalence of particularistic demands. There is a tension between the two, but this tension is none other than the space of constitution of a ‘people’ (ibid, p. 163).

The tension inherent in this process of representation, the constitutive tension that gives rise to the people, reveals that, in Laclau’s (ibid, p. 176) assessment, ‘a true political intervention is never merely oppositional.’ Rather, it disrupts the existing situation and rearticulates it within a new configuration, ‘political action has the responsibility not only of taking a position within a certain context, but also of structuring the very context in which a plurality of positions will express themselves.’

Laclau offers a perspective that emphasises the importance of formulating demands, and of using these as a means of gauging the responsiveness of a given regime. Thwarted demands provide the impetus for the construction of an equivalential chain to be carried by ‘the
people.’ From a diverse social field can arise a subject capable of sustaining difference and simultaneously structuring a more egalitarian society without, simultaneously, foreclosing on the persistent radical negativity which ultimately grounds the social—here his argument dovetails neatly into that of his collaborator Mouffe.

To acknowledge radical negativity, argues Mouffe (2013, p. xiv), is to recognise that the ‘people’ is both multiple and divided. The division that runs through the social can never be overcome, it can only be institutionalised in different ways—some of which are more egalitarian than others. Any disarticulation of hegemony needs to be paired with a process of re-articulation (ibid, p. 74). We need to radicalise existing forms of democracy, not turn our back on them—the point being to build a chain of equivalences between different movements and create a new hegemony (ibid, p. 133). The aim of struggle is not to eradicate power relations but to create new ones more conducive to democracy and to form institutions capable of limiting relations of domination (Mouffe, 2005, p. 22). Such a position, for Mouffe (2013, p. 84), must recognise the impossibility of a fully liberated and reconciled society.

Radical negativity means consensus can never be achieved. Hence Mouffe’s scorn of Third Way politics; to blur the lines between left and right, argues Mouffe, threatens democracy as it assumes the possibility of moving beyond a conflictual politics to one grounded in rational consensus (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 5-8). Such a move diminishes opportunities for developing meaningful political identities—identity depends upon confrontation with the ‘other,’ and if politics loses markers around which substantive identities can be formed people will be drawn to alternate sites of identity formation, ones that may be antithetical to democracy (such as nationalism or religious fundamentalism) (Mouffe, 2013, p. 141). Liberal democracy, if it is to function, requires genuine choice between alternatives—a clash of interests—the absence of which leads to dissatisfaction (Mouffe, 1993, pp. 4-5). Politics must mobilise people’s passions—a point the search for rational consensus overlooks. Democratic politics, Mouffe argues (2013, p. 8), should not aim to eliminate passions in favour of rational consensus, but rather ‘to “sublimate” those passions by mobilising them towards democratic designs, by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives.’

Rancière is also scornful of consensus based approaches to politics. Real politics, in his conception, is rare, and when it does occur takes the form of ‘dissensus’ from the police:
‘democratic politics is a dissensus, a dissensus from a police order that marginalises and excludes…. In the name of equality... a demos arises that dissents from the position or positions its members have been allotted’ (May, 2008, p. 49). Of concern here, for Rancière, is not competition between various viewpoints, but rather the question of who gets to speak—it is less about the content of demands, than who has a voice to issue demands (May, 2010, p. 74). Politics has a conflictive underpinning, dissensus implies the presupposition of an equality denied by the reigning social order—thus, the aim of dissensus is not to arrive at consensus, as ‘consensus consists... in the reduction of politics to the police’, it is ‘the end of politics’ (ibid, p. 42). Some form of accommodation may take place at the end of a political process, notes Todd May (2009, pp. 112-13), but this is not offered to the people by the powers that be, rather it is something that has been wrested from them through struggle—freedom and equality are not given, they are made.

There is democracy, Rancière (1999, p. 100) writes,

...if there is a specific sphere where the people appear... if there are specific political performers who are neither agents of the state apparatus nor parts of society, if there are groups that displace identities as far as parts of the state or of society go. Lastly, there is democracy if there is a dispute conducted by a nonidentary subject on the stage where the people emerge. The forms of democracy are the forms taken by the emergence of this appearance, of such nonidentary subjectification and conducting of the dispute. These forms of emergence have an effect on the institutional mechanism of politics and use whatever mechanisms they choose. They produce inscriptions of equality and they argue about existing inscriptions.

Democracy, then, is never fixed within institutions as a set of procedures, or in the roles played by particular groups or individuals. It is something that moves against the state, but never captures it. The state can register democratic demands within its structures but can never be democratic in and of itself.

Democracy, in Rancière’s (2009, p, 56) conception, involves enlarging the public sphere, not through asking the state to encroach upon various spheres of society, but through ‘struggling against the distribution of the public and the private that shores up the twofold domination of the oligarchy in the State and in society.’ The enlargement of the public sphere has, historically, signified two things:
the recognition, as equals and as political subjects, of those that have been relegated by State law to the private life of inferior beings; and the recognition of the public character of types of spaces and relations that were left to the discretion of power and wealth. This first involved struggle to include all those that police logic naturally excluded from voting and eligibility for office, all those who were not entitled to participate in public life because they did not belong to “society” but merely to domestic and reproductive life, because their work belonged to a master or a husband. ... It also involved struggles against the natural logic of the electoral system, which turns representation into the representation of dominant interests and elections into an apparatus devoted to procuring consent: official candidacies, electoral fraud, de facto monopolies over candidacies. (Rancière, 2009, pp. 55-56)

Rancière, ultimately, leads us to an ambiguous position concerning democratic politics. Institutional forms of government are treated as a given, but are also considered oligarchic in their essence. Democratic initiatives challenge these institutions, but can never find a home within them. The most we can ask is that democratic demands be registered there (even though they will eventually be dampened again through the state’s oligarchic tendencies). Ultimately, argues May (2008, p. 185), Rancière does not offer tools for organisation, but rather ‘a sketch... of a politics that responds to the passivity of our current politics.’ The danger of such an approach (as also found with Badiou, and the new social movement theorists considered in the preceding chapter) is that critique leads to a situation where calls to disengage from any direct engagement with the state enables a technocratic elite to administer society, a position all too compatible with the neoliberal project.

The closest Rancière (2009, p. 42) comes to arguing for a particular political institution occurs in his discussion of the drawing of lots in ancient Greece. Drawing lots to determine who holds a position in government has become unthinkable for us today, argues Rancière, because ‘we are used to regarding wholly natural an idea ... that the first title that calls forward those who merit occupying power is the fact of desiring to exercise it.’ Good government, he argues, can only happen if chance plays a role. Drawing lots allows politics, as perceived by Rancière (ibid, p. 49), to properly exist, as it adds a ‘title of exception’ to those normally assumed by the ruling class (through dint of birth or wealth)—it introduces ‘the power of anyone at all, [recognising] the equality of capabilities to occupy the positions of governors and of the governed.’ State government, he argues, ‘is only legitimate insofar as it is political. It is
political only insofar as it reposes merely on an absence of foundation. This is what democracy means when accurately understood as the “law of chance”.

Mouffe is more specific than Rancière about the form of politics she pitches against the consensus model. She argues for ‘agonistic pluralism.’ Since antagonism is an eradicable feature of political life, democratic politics has to find ways of managing it. Antagonism arises between enemies who share no common symbolic space. Agonism, on the other hand, is a relationship between adversaries (or ‘friendly enemies’) who share a symbolic space, but disagree as to how it should be organised (Mouffe, 2005, p. 13). Solutions are not to be sought outside the liberal representative system of democracy. It is not the system which is the problem, but the exclusion of some groups and people from it. Institutionalising antagonism—converting it to agonism—is regarded as the means of rejuvenating democracy. Mouffe’s (2013, pp. 126-27) advice to protest movements, then, is to not turn away from existing institutions but to rejuvenate them. The problem is not liberal principles, but rather that these principles are not being put into practice. No radical break with the current system is needed, we need only amplify what is already here (Mouffe, 2013, p. 134). The democratic principle of liberty and equality, as introduced through the democratic revolution, has become the ‘fundamental nodal point in the construction of the political’ and it is the point against which democratic discourse needs to hew if it is to persist in the struggle against different forms of inequality (Laclau and Mouffe, 2005, pp. 154-55).

Mouffe and Rancière, while not normally paired, offer complementary critiques of the drive in contemporary Western countries to promote consensus-based forms of politics. They diverge, however, as to what should replace it. Rancière advocates dissensus from all existing institutions, while Mouffe seeks a reformist path that radicalises existing institutions. Importantly, both highlight the futility of seeking consensus within the political sphere. When combined with the work of Laclau, it can be seen how a politics that recognises the persistence of antagonism and division in society can be constructively combined with a push to develop broad popular movements that seek to link discrete sites of grievance and resistance together into a sustained challenge to power. This challenge aims not to instigate a new totalising project, but rather to keep the space of the social open and attuned to the persistence of difference. There is much of value in such an approach—it is one that is able to effectively respond to actual political conditions on the ground—but, as iterated by Laclau
and Mouffe, it falls short of a truly radical vision that would seek to reimagine what is possible. It lacks a coherent and engaged account of the effects of political economy upon the social and upon the movements that contest a given order, and thus fails to think beyond that which already is. It lacks a truly emancipatory horizon. Political action is confined to challenge that which already is.

On the Subjective Dimension of Revolt—traversing the fantasy of a full society

Žižek, for his part, emphasises the moment of rupture, of radical discontinuity, as the precursor to genuine political action—and, in doing so, draws attention to the subjective dimension at play in political contestation. Rupture, here, involves ‘traversing the fantasy.’ This line of thought approaches the individual subject in a way that gives the lie to any notion of a rational, bounded subject. Žižek calls heavily upon Lacan, developing the notion that the subject is ‘empty,’ that consciousness is structured around a fundamental lack within the subject. Lack arises through the individual’s inclusion in the domain of language (Fink, 1995, p. 41). To come into language is, simultaneously, to move outside of ‘our self.’ Rather than being a coherent bounded organic entity, the self, as mediated through language, is social, contingent, dependent upon others (or the big Other of the symbolic system) for meaning. Consequently, the individual is faced with the trauma of a lack within their self, a realisation they are not whole, that their sense of self teeters precariously over a void (Žižek, 2008, p. 197). The self has no centre within the individual. A mythical sense of pre-linguistic wholeness—of a paradise lost—haunts the individual. Fantasy offers a release from this torment.

The individual is subject to an endless flow of other-directed desire, a search for ‘objects’ with which to fill the void within (Fink, 1995, p. 90). Sometimes these objects take the form of qualities possessed by other people, an enigmatic smile on the face of the beloved; the meaning of which must be decoded and the bearer possessed. Or it may literally be an object, a book of philosophy that once owned, read and understood, can take a position on our bookshelf and represent the filling in of a gap in our knowledge. The possession of such objects proves, however, illusory. Once the object is grasped, it just as quickly slips through our fingers and we are faced with the realisation that ‘this wasn’t it’—the sense of the void persists within (a psychological feature which helps to fuel consumerism). Fantasy can be a means of coordinating desire, it screens us from the question of what others want from us as
well as covering over the inner void (Žižek, 2008, p. 141). An elaborate fantasy world constructed by the individual risks becoming pathological, but when shared widely with others is ideological.

Here Žižek operates closer to classic Marxist lines than Badiou (with his notions of the ‘situation’ and the ‘state of the situation’) and Rancière (with his notion of ‘the police’) in approaching the question of how the social order hangs together in the form it does in the developed world. Ideology, he argues, structures ‘reality’ (ibid, p. 27). It arranges the diffuse elements comprising the social in such a way that a degree of consistency spans our relations with one another; a consistency which produces an inexistent. For ideology to function, he argues, it must be able to contain both popular content (what the people want) as well as justify, or obscure, relations of domination (Žižek, 2000c, p. 184). Ideology, therefore, always bespokes a particular set of power relations. It has the effect of producing, on the level of the social, what fantasy can produce in an individual, namely a phantasmal screen that obscures the lack, the void, which persists within social relations. Ideology seeks to erase antagonism from society and to present instead a fantasy of the fullness and completeness of social life (Žižek, 2000a, p. 113).

Žižek’s answer to all of this, then, in terms of conceptualising effective political action, is a call for us to ‘traverse the fantasy’ of the full non-antagonistic society (Žižek, 2008, p. 141)—to recognise in our own libidinal investments a consistency with the situation we claim to oppose, to recognise ourselves as a cause of the social order as much as an effect. We need to see behind the mask of totality and confront, indeed promote, the inexistent void that has persisted (despite having being obscured) within social relations. Or, in another formulation, to traverse the fantasy so that we can confront it as a fantasy (Žižek, 2014, p. 30). As mentioned above, in conjunction with Badiou, real politics, as here conceived, requires an Event. An Event breaks the symbolic deadlock, stops the ideological state apparatuses from presenting a phantasmal image of a full society, and offers a new sense of possibility, or radical choice. In lieu of an Event, however, the aspiring militant must avoid engaging in ‘pseudo-activity’: those acts which give the individual the illusion (the fantasy) of meaningful

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10 Žižek tends to use the word ‘Act’ in this context, highlighting as it does the individual’s traversal of fantasy to reach a situation in which genuine radical choices can be made. In order to avoid too much conceptual confusion I have persisted with the term ‘Event’ due to the overlaps between Žižek and Badiou on this point, and with Žižek having also recently written the work Event (2014).
action but leave the fundamental ideological coordinates of our time undisturbed (and even risks strengthening them further) (Žižek, 2006, p. 334)—the re-posting of ‘political’ material on a Facebook page being an example of such an ‘act.’ Now is the time, he argues, in a refrain similar to that of Badiou, to develop our critical faculties and analysis of the situation at hand (Johnston, 2009, p. 158).

In the case of an Event there is a chance that our actions would actually have substantive effects. In step with Badiou and Rancière, he argues that an Event in the realm of politics will, likely, witness the surging forth of an ‘inexistent’ who is able to stand in for the Universal (Žižek, 2004b, p. 166)—this being, for contemporary capitalist society, the occluded real of class struggle (a point with which Laclau takes particular exception) (Žižek, 2000b, p. 320). Class struggle, due to its grounding in economic relations, has the ability to operate as a partisan ‘truth’—either you are on the side of the oppressed or not—and thus has a universalisable capacity which places it in opposition to the exclusionary principles operating within the capitalist ideology. To take class struggle seriously involves taking political economy seriously, something Žižek (2004a, p. 271) considers Badiou, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe to fail to do—he charges them with reducing the economy ‘to an “ontic” sphere deprived of any “ontological” dignity’, the effect of which is to shut down the space needed for a Marxian critique of political economy. Žižek (2012a, pp. 999-1003) also advocates, in a move that cuts across post-structuralist orthodoxy (and the other theorists considered here) a return to the party as the principal means of organising sustained resistance to the status quo (a point which will be revisited in Chapter Eight).11 Most importantly, however, Žižek underlines the fallacy of the notion of a radical, bounded subject—an important point to bear in mind when faced with calls for consensus based decision making or with mainstream economic justifications for the market economy.

**Hardt and Negri—exodus**

The thinkers considered above all acknowledge that the state must be directly tackled by political action. This might involve rejecting state power as the basis of a radical political project (for Badiou and Rancière), but not without acknowledging the efficacy of acting

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11 It should be noted, in passing, that while Žižek is critical of others for not paying enough attention to class, political economy or the possible role of the party, his own discussion these topics tends to remain light—they provide important points of reference within his work, but they tend to be treated as givens.
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against the state, of bombarding it with egalitarian demands; or (as with Laclau and Mouffe) it might involve arguing for a counter hegemonic project that seeks to deepen and radicalise already existing liberal parliamentary structures through popular broad social movement mobilisations. Hardt and Negri offer another line of argument vis-à-vis the state—subsuming individual states within the larger category of Empire, and arguing for a total disengagement from the state-form on the behalf of radical politics (a position largely consistent with an anarchist approach to politics). They offer another line of thought that has emerged from the post-68 left.

Along with their status as thinkers of the post-structuralist moment—drawing heavily upon Foucault and Deleuze for concepts—Hardt and Negri also draw heavily upon the Italian workerist/autonomist tradition; a tradition that holds workers to be the active agents of production and capital, the force which seeks to capture and direct this productivity. The ‘working class,’ autonomists’ argue, becomes aware of itself, subjectively, through its struggles against capital. Capital, in turn must seek to decompose the working class, and does so through constant restructuring, which means that working class struggle is the driving force of capital’s development. Thus, labour has no need for capital and can, potentially, be autonomous (Dyer-Witheford, 1999, pp. 65-9). While the thinkers considered above (Žižek excepted) can be critiqued for downplaying or largely ignoring the role of the economy in their work, the same cannot be said of Hardt and Negri. They share Badiou and Žižek’s enthusiasm for communism, but view it differently. While Badiou (2010) views communism as an eternal regulative idea, Hardt and Negri view it as already present but obscured by capital. The major divergence between Hardt and Negri and the above thinkers, and the reason why they are here positioned separately, is their argument for a radical disengagement from the current system. Rather than make claims against the state from a distance, or advancing demands through existing channels, they advocate an exodus from power. A feature they do share with the thinkers considered above, however, is a relatively ambiguous view of what the state is today.

For them, sovereignty in the era of globalisation has transitioned from national governments to a form of imperial governance (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 323). There is now a ‘global sovereignty’ operating under the imperial auspices of the United States and its worldwide military apparatus. Despite its privileged position in this global order it is unable, as seen in
the wake of 9/11 and its disastrous ‘war on terror,’ to establish global hegemony (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 209). Rather, the US must strategically operate within a diffuse space of ‘network power;’ it needs to collaborate with other ‘nodes’ in this network, including other dominant nation-states, major corporations, supranational economic and political institutions, media conglomerates and various NGOs (ibid, p. 205). While there has been a relative decline in the sovereignty of nation-states in such a network, there has not been a loss of sovereignty in general. Sovereignty now resides in the ‘single logic of rule’ that orders relations conducted within this network (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. xii). They call this logic ‘Empire.’

All are welcome within Empire’s boundaries—it is a smooth space where ‘subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict’ (ibid, p. 199). As with the theorists considered above, the social is conceived in terms of multiplicities. Within Empire, they argue, differences are affirmed and celebrated, and different cultural perspectives are cultivated, provided they are non-conflictual, ‘cultural’ rather than ‘political,’ and can be set-aside when required. Empire arranges and manages these differences in terms of hierarchies and a general economy of demand. The logic structuring Empire is, ultimately, that of capital. They go so far as to argue that transnational corporations effectively control nation-states (ibid, p. 31). The world-market has deconstructed the boundaries of nation-states, so Empire’s multipolar exercise of capital-centric sovereignty is able to span the globe (ibid, p. 150).

Empire is a reactive power. It is dependent on the productive social agents it rules: ‘the political relationship of sovereignty becomes increasingly similar to the economic relationship between capital and labour’ (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 335). Imperial command, they argue, produces nothing vital or ontological, it is ‘negative and passive,’ a ‘parasite’ (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p. 361).

Set against this overarching logic of rule are the positive and active forces of the ‘multitude’ from whom the ‘ontological fabric of Empire is constructed’ (ibid, p. 361). The multitude is celebrated for its productive capacity, and is approached by Hardt and Negri primarily through economic considerations. They foreground the commons in their discussion of production (as discussed in Chapter Three), and argue for the importance of viewing this as also being an immaterial domain, an approach which leads them to argue for a break between industrial
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and post-industrial societies—Foucault’s discussion of biopower offering a means of reconceptualising the nature of contemporary production—which, in turn, dialectically, signals the changing nature of resistance. As they note, apropos Foucault,

Our reading not only identifies biopolitics with the localised productive powers of life – that is, the production of affects and languages through social cooperation and the interaction of bodies and desires, the invention of new forms of the relation to the self and others, and so forth – but also affirms biopolitics as the creation of new subjectivities that are presented at once as resistance and de-subjectification. If we remain too closely tied to a philological analysis of Foucault’s texts, we might miss this central point: his analyses of biopower are aimed not merely at an empirical description of how power works for and through subjects but also at the potential for the production of alternative subjectivities, thus designating a distinction between qualitatively different forms of power. (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 59)

Biopolitical production spans all spheres of the economy, ranging from education to healthcare, call-centres to fast-food, designers to advertising. Biopolitical production concerns not just the creation of material goods, but also of information, communication and cooperation, ‘in short, the production of social relationships and social order’ (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 334). Following Marx’s own arguments, it is held that Capital’s development—having facilitated the rise of globally linked biopolitical production under the sovereignty of Empire—has inadvertently produced the ‘tools for liberation from capital… [due] to the increased autonomy of the common and its productive circuits’ (ibid, p. 139). The multitude produces and resides within the common (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 349).

The multitude is seen to possess, with its productive capacities, the means of realising the first truly democratic society (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 219). There is, they argue ‘an institutional logic capable of sustaining a new society’ inherent in the multitudes’ networks of social production. The multitude is endowed with a constituent power that emerges from ‘the ontological and social process of productive labour; … it is a deployment of force that defends the historical progression of emancipation and liberation (ibid, p. 351). This democratic potential of the multitude lies in the correlation between its economic production and its political decision-making capacity. If capital’s obstructions are removed then people will work collaboratively to create a better society (ibid, pp. 339-40).
The autonomy of the multitude and its capacities for economic, political, and social self-organisation take away any role for sovereignty. Not only is sovereignty no longer the exclusive terrain of the political, the multitude banishes sovereignty from politics. When the multitude is finally able to rule itself, democracy becomes possible’ (ibid, p. 340).

The multitude is seen as capable, due to its creative and productive capacities, of producing a better society, on the strength of its already present capacities. All resources needed by the multitude are already present within.

How, then, can the multitude enact the paradigm shift Hardt and Negri deem it capable of? There is no need for hegemony or unification in forms such as those offered by the state, party or the people (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 175). The latter is seen as a means of synthesising or reducing social difference into a single identity so that it might assume the position of sovereign (a position that, semantically at least, pits them against the formulations developed by Laclau and Rancière concerning the emergence of the people.) The multitude, on the other hand, ‘is composed of a set of singularities—and by singularity here we mean a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different’ (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 99). The multitude ‘cannot be reduced to a unity and does not submit to the rule of one. The multitude cannot be sovereign’ (ibid, p. 330).

The rule of the multitude, then, appears on a plane of immanence grounded in its own ontological productive capacity. The politicisation of the multitude has, they argue, a negative point of departure insofar as it is it fuelled by ‘indignation,’ which is the ‘ground zero’ of revolt and rebellion (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 235). Indignation, in and of itself, though, is not enough to sustain struggle. Spontaneous uprisings suffer from the weakness of leaving no enduring organisational structures or institutions ‘that can function as an alternative to the power they opposed’ (ibid, p. 237). The question of how to stabilise insurrection in the age of the multitude is, then, a pressing one. Institutions are needed if insurrections are to survive, but as the multitude has ‘no interest in taking control of the state apparatuses’(at least insofar as the multitude is a direct expression of Hardt and Negri’s will!) then there is a need for the construction of ‘institutions of a different sort’ (ibid, p. 355). These would be institutions formed by the singularities of which the multitude is composed (ibid, p. 358). The institutional outcome of the multitudes’ self-organisation through the passage of revolt would be communism.
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The multitude is a totality of desires and trajectories of resistance, struggle and constituent power. We also add that it is a totality made of institutions. Communism is possible because it already exists in this transition, not as an end, but as a condition; it is the development of singularities, the experimentation of this construction—in the constant wave of power relations—it is tension, tendency and metamorphosis. (Negri, 2010, p. 163)

Communism already exists within the multitudes’ productive capacities, all that is needed (all!) is the shucking off of Capital.

Effective struggle, then, involves exodus. Exodus means, in part, ‘a process of subtraction from the relationship with capital by means of actualising the potential autonomy of labour-power”—it is an act of refusal insofar as it releases the fetters capital places upon bio-political labour-power (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 152, emphasis in original). To withdraw our energies from the circuits of capital and valoration would violently undermine the status quo. An exodus of labour from capital is possible because of the common, our access to it and ability to utilise it, however, capitalist society seeks to obliterate, or conceal the common through privatisation (ibid, p. 153). In a similar vein, the realisation of democracy is also seen as taking ‘the form of a subtraction, a flight, an exodus from sovereignty’—but Empire will not let us leave in peace. The emergence of democratic possibilities ‘has forced sovereignty to adopt ever purer forms of domination and violence’ (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 341). The more the multitude seeks to realise its latent potential for a truly democratic society, the more the reigning social order reveals the bankruptcy of what currently passes as ‘democracy.’

While Hardt and Negri follow a Marxist line in terms of developing a dialectical reading of the spiralling antagonism between capital and the productive capacities of the masses, their view is overtly skewed toward the immaterial pole of labour—largely ignoring the importance of extractive industries and industrial forms of production on the periphery which provide the material underpinning to the ‘information economy’ in the core (features of the contemporary economy explored in Chapter Three). Further, their focus on the antagonism between Empire and the Multitude leads to a under-developed view of the state as a strategic field of contestation. They pursue a Foucauldian (/Deleuzian) notion of micro-power, which, while an important counterpoint to the ‘traditional’ Marxist statist focus, glosses over the concrete manifestations of power that are still wielded by dominant groups in the state apparatus. While they have much to offer in terms of conceptualising what forms a
rejuvenated democracy might take, one grounded on economic considerations, their work needs to be supplemented with that of others.

**Summary—effective strategy: within, against, or outside the state?**

Post-structuralism, as an intellectual movement, challenged Marxism—providing an intellectual counterpart to the new social movements that erupted in the late 1960s. The theorists considered in this chapter offer different intellectual projects that seek to make sense of the post-structuralist moment and to also re-theorise what might constitute effective political action and strategy.

While the thinkers considered here often occupy divergent, sometimes antagonistic, positions toward one another, the various strains of their thought, once held at a distance, can provide a useful frame of reference. The consistent ontological referent of the ‘inexistent’ shared by the thinkers considered above (excluding Hardt and Negri) provides a useful theoretical mechanism from which to address questions about who might constitute the subject capable of enacting change following the faltering of ‘working class’ politics. For Badiou, Rancière and Žižek such a figure appears in the form of a rupture with the existing system. In the meantime, however, these thinkers generally hold a position which advocates engaging with existing state mechanisms, albeit from a distance. Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, seek to conceptualise the ways in which the inexistent elements of the social are able to articulate shared chains of demands that can be carried into existing institutional configurations in order to enact change. Badiou would argue the distinction between these two approaches is that of ‘real change’ (rupture) as opposed to modifications of the existing system.

The strength of Hardt and Negri’s approach is their investigation into the ways in which the economy and antagonism are explicitly intertwined. Further, Hardt and Negri take seriously the emancipatory potential of new technologies and modes of communication in the contemporary era (a point that will be explored in more detail in later chapters), something the other theorists considered here fail to do.

The argument to be developed in the following chapters holds that the call for ‘exodus’ issued by Hardt and Negri resonates most closely with the actions of the Occupy movement in developed countries—and finds important echoes in the wider protest movements of 2011.
Hardt and Negri’s position, while drawing heavily upon Marx in their development of economic arguments is, for all and intents and purposes, an Anarchist one. Anarchism appears, as will be illustrated in the upcoming chapters, to be the dominant strain of thought guiding radical resistance movements in the core today. While there is much to be celebrated in this, there are also shortcomings in this approach. Through drawing on the work of the theorists considered within this chapter a critical engagement with contemporary anarchism will be developed—grounded on an analysis of the Occupy movement—in order to better consider what form effective action toward the rejuvenation of democracy might take in the contemporary era.

Taken together, the theorists considered here present three courses for political action: reform of existing liberal democracy driven by social movements; action against the state, always from a distance; and a total disengagement from the state through exodus. The latter prevailed in Occupy, to which attention will now be turned. It will be asked, in analysing Occupy, if the movement might have benefitted from pursuing either of the first two strategies (or a synthesis of the two).
Part II: Contesting the Twenty-First Century:
An Analysis of Occupy
Chapter Five: Occupy, Democracy, and Enduring Change:
The strategic shortcomings of contemporary activism

On the 13th of July, 2011, Adbusters’ Culture Jammers HQ, called for ‘20,000 people [to] flood into lower Manhattan [on September, 17th], set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months.’ This call for action came at a time in which there were actions taking place worldwide—notably with the Arab Spring in the Middle East, and intense protest mobilisations in Europe against government austerity policies. In the months preceding the call from Adbusters there had been a slow increase in protest mobilisations within the US—there, were, for example, protests in Wisconsin opposing the corporate capture of politics in that state (Nichols, 2011, p. 6), an upsurge of student protests in opposition to fee rises and budget cuts, and a protest encampment, Bloombergville, in June 2011 outside City Hall in New York to oppose budget

cuts. Against this backdrop of multiple, yet diffuse, struggles the occupation of Wall Street proved a potent meme, spawning 750 other occupations worldwide. The financial crisis of 2008 and the economic immiseration it wrecked upon countries throughout the world finally, in 2011, met with massive popular protests.

While presenting an impressive and inspirational protest wave, Occupy, it will be argued below, never achieved its full potential. Its shortcomings are considered symptomatic of the wider situation faced by the non-parliamentary left today. Consensus exists about what is opposed, namely, the disastrous effects of contemporary capitalism—as most recently witnessed in the 2008 financial crisis—and its negative impact upon democracy. What follows from critique, however, is unclear (Worth, 2013, p. 51).

The following analysis of Occupy identifies a number of contentious issues within the movement: there was an early conflict between advocates of horizontal organisation and those who favoured verticality; there was a strategic conflict between positions which sought to engage the state in some capacity and those that sought to eschew it; following from this, was the issue of whether or not to issue demands; it was also unclear whether the movement was capital-critical or anti-capitalist; by extension, there were divergent reformist and revolutionary tendencies within the movement; ultimately the question becomes one of whether Occupy was a protest or an attempt to form a popular movement? There are no easy answers at hand when assessing Occupy.

Much of what has been written about Occupy—by both supporters and detractors—focuses on the movement’s hostility toward existing political institutions, its (supposed) refusal to issue demands and its favouring of radical tactics. This chapter aims to provide a more nuanced reading. Through reviewing sources produced by four Occupy encampments in 2011, the tensions within Occupy between radical and moderate arms will be teased out. While both groups agree what is wrong, one seeks to engage the existing political system and initiate reform while the other rejects the system in its entirety.

This chapter explores Occupy’s critique of current economic and democratic practices. It will be asked what ‘democracy’ means for the movement. How did it propose to overcome the crisis of democracy? Particular attention is paid to the role of general assemblies in the movement when seeking an answer to this question, as it was here that tensions within Occupy became most visible. The entrenchment of a ‘horizontal’—leaderless, consensus based—mode of organisation is examined, along with its attendant problems. The question of whether to issue demands is pertinent when seeking to understand this organisational approach—an exploration of Occupy’s sources reveals the refusal to issue demands (rhetorically at least) was not uniformly adopted across the movement. While Occupy was clear about what it opposed, internal tensions indicate the difficulty of finding an effective answer as to what should come next. The absence of a clear direction indicates the limits of horizontal organisation and points toward the need for a party, or some other complementary form of vertical organisation, on the left today (an issue explored in Chapter Eight).

As internally varied as the movement was, horizontalism proved to have the most influence. While undoubtedly a success in many respects, this approach raised questions about how enduring forms of struggle can be developed and concrete change enacted. Through exploring documents produced by Occupy encampments, and taking account of the appraisals offered by its supporters and critics, this chapter will traverse a range of issues faced by the movement that are pertinent to the extra-parliamentary left as a whole.

Understanding Occupy’s successes and failures is of the utmost importance for those wishing to address the crisis of democracy beleaguering the developed world today. Occupy is a movement symptomatic of our times—understanding its successes and failures is crucial for the rejuvenation of the left.

Methods

The analysis of Occupy undertaken in the following pages will draw upon a modified form of the ‘Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) Triplet’ scheme for collecting and analysing information. This technique was developed by Roberto Franzosi (1998), who noted that most newspaper articles on protests deploy the simple grammatical structure of subject-verb-object. This approach has since been used by a number of social movement researchers (see, for instance, Tilly, 1995, Wada, 2005). ‘Subject’ denotes the actor, ‘verb’ the actions, and ‘object’ the target of the action—with modifiers providing additional information (such as location and time).
The SVO model usually draws upon newspapers as the principal source of data. This can have its problems—reports are often biased and information, such as the number of participants attending an action, can be misrepresented (due in some instances, no doubt, to the influence of ‘social movements from above’). Nevertheless, ‘the type of action involved (strike, demonstration, sit-in, and so on), its location and date, or the general identity of participants (workers, students, blacks, police, and so on), of whether people were arrested, injured or killed’ can be gleaned from media reports (Franzosi, 2004, p. 172). I have previously applied this model to movements’ own print publications (see Taylor and Grey, 2014) and apply it here to activist-produced websites from Occupy encampments.

All articles and news items posted online in 2011 by Occupy Wall Street (occupywallst.org), Occupy London (occupylondon.org.uk), Occupy Oakland (occupyoakland.org) and Occupy Melbourne (occupymelbourne.org) in 2011—including 15-20 instances of General Assembly minutes posted by each group—were used as research material, creating a dataset of 423 documents. The timeframe in which this material was produced begins in the early days of each encampment and spans the months in which Occupy had the largest number of participants and the greatest visibility. Due to the close reading of data it was necessary to be wary of time constraints; consequently I restricted the timespan under scrutiny to 2011, excluded the ‘comments’ section on each page, and limited the number of encampments studied to four. The four encampments chosen are considered to provide a useful overview of the movement. The four locations, despite geopolitical differences, are all within the ‘developed world’ and, hence, share a generally convergent recent economic history. There is, further, a shared tradition of representative democracy and, more recently, of the neoliberal turn. The economic and political history sketched out in Part I of this thesis is considered broadly applicable to the different geopolitical territories in which the encampments studied were situated.

Data was processed using NVivo. It was first coded in a ‘long form’ manner—whereby each item was read through in full and provisionally coded along the way. This process allowed for a plotting of Occupy’s major themes, issues and tactics. While certain terms were searched for from the outset (such as ‘neoliberalism,’ ‘democracy,’ and ‘strike’), the repetition of other unanticipated terms prompted the inclusion of new items into the coding process as it progressed. The dataset was then coded (with both the original and the unanticipated terms)
Claiming the Century

a second time, automatically, to ensure consistency. This second coding was then analysed. The use of NVivo for the handling of data in this manner allowed for a blurring of quantitative and qualitative methods (Franzosi, 2010, pp. 67-68). An overall narrative arc for the movement appeared from the data, with the major ‘plot points’ having a quantitative weight to them (stemming from the number of times each term/issue had been raised).

Most studies of Occupy have tended to focus chiefly on Occupy in the US (see, for instance, Gitlin, 2013), or, more commonly, principally on one encampment (see, for instance, Epstein, 2012, Smith and Glidden, 2012)—with this encampment being, most often, Occupy Wall Street (see, for instance, Castells, 2012, Kreiss and Tufekci, 2013, Schneider, 2013). Further, a number of these single-camp focussed papers are written from the perspective of ‘activist scholars’ (see, for instance, Köksal, 2012, Juris et al., 2013). Studies that have taken account of multiple encampments across different geopolitical territories tend to be quantitatively driven and focussed primarily on social media use (see, for instance, Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, Thorson et al., 2013, Fuchs, 2014). The research undertaken here is unique as it pursues an in-depth research approach to a number of encampments in different states and seeks, in doing so, to place discussions of social media into a secondary position (as will be argued in Chapter Seven).

There are a number of limitations to pursuing an SVO approach to material posted on Occupy websites. The material posted may have been censored or subject to bias (as noted above by Franzosi)—the inclusion of minutes from general assemblies is considered to mitigate, to some degree, such problems. Another limitation to the SVO approach, as deployed here, is that it draws only upon online textual sources, and is unable, therefore, to produce the type of ‘thick data’ gathered by ‘activist-scholars’ and ethnographic observers.

The value of the approach pursued here, however, is that it has allowed for the inclusion of encampments across different geopolitical zones. The focus upon material produced by the movement opens the research to an ‘activist-perspective’ (as discussed in Chapter Two), allowing for the introduction of themes and issues the researcher may have otherwise missed. Further, the large amount of research available from activist-scholars will be drawn upon below to complement the principal research generated here from online sources (which in
turn, has allowed for an analysis of Occupy that extends beyond the four initial encampments studied).

Alongside the types of research noted above, there has been a steady flow of academic articles and books that have debated the pros and cons of the movement by authors who have not necessarily undertaken any detailed research of the movement itself (see, for instance, Chomsky, 2012, Dean, 2012a, Žižek, 2012b). There have also been numerous reports, articles and opinion pieces in mainstream media.

In what follows, then, SVO research is triangulated against the ethnographic data produced by activist scholars and the more general discussions of Occupy undertaken by other writers (both within the academy and mainstream media).

It should also be noted that the approach followed by this thesis as a whole has affinities with that of Tilly (1995, p. 41) in Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758-1834, where he describes his method as unfolding along ‘three parallel arcs’:

At a very general level, I describe how the British state and economy changed over the three-quarters of a century from the 1750s to the 1830s. That account relies almost entirely on other people’s syntheses of British history. ... At a second level, I hazard descriptions and explanations of alterations in the political positions and activities of Great Britain’s ordinary people; although I bring some new evidence to bear on these alterations, I draw heavily on other historian’s studies of particular groups, localities, and events. Most of the new evidence in this book falls into the third arc, which follows the ways that the bulk of Britain’s population made public and collective claims on others, when they did so. I scrutinise description after description of open contention for evidence concerning how and why popular politics and collective claim-making changed so profoundly.

The method used in his third arc is chiefly that of SVO analysis as outlined above. Chapter Three of this thesis has distinguished the major political and economic trends that provides context for the emergence of Occupy (analogous to Tilly’s first level). Chapter One explored the history of political contestation on the left since the nineteenth century (analogous to Tilly’s second level).

In undertaking this study the aim is to treat Occupy as a wider movement—and through treating it this way it is hoped lessons can be learnt to orientate future campaigns. While
some of the nuances available to those who have focussed on particular encampments may be lost, the benefits of approaching the movement as a whole allows for a different perspective on Occupy than those currently available.

Occupy’s Economic Critique—the economic crisis is also a crisis of democracy

The mass support Occupy garnered in its early days is attributed to widespread frustration with economic conditions following the financial crisis (Gitlin, 2012, np.). While Occupy addressed a wide range of issues—stretching from the local to the global, and ranging from issues of police violence to those pertaining to the LGBTQ community (see table one below)—nearly half (48.9 percent) of sources reviewed raised economic concerns. This indicates, arguably, that economic issues constituted the principal motivating factor that drove engagement with the movement. Economic concerns existed on a number of levels—stretching from concrete issues like the immediate foreclosure of homes, through to more abstract structural considerations, such as ‘neoliberalism’ (see table two below). ‘Corporations’ and ‘banks’ were among the most frequently cited targets of Occupy’s claims-making (appearing across 28.4 percent of sources). Capitalist economic institutions were frequently critiqued for acting in ways that undermined democracy. Economic problems were, then, simultaneously political problems. For example, corporate lobbying involves economic power being used to influence the exercise of political power through bypassing popular democratic processes.

Corporate lobbying subverts our democracy. Last year corporations spent £2 billion influencing the British government. We believe exploitative corporate lobbying has no place in a democratic society. Legislation to ensure full and public transparency of all corporate lobbying activities must be put in place.14

There was an acknowledgment that this was a structural, systemic problem within representative democracies. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) argued the ‘state and corporation are merely two sides of the same oppressive power structure.’15 Just as the Church and state had been separated in the past, democracy today requires the separation of corporations from

14 http://occupylondon.org.uk/occupy-london-calls-for-an-end-to-tax-havens-for-lobbying-transparency-and-personal-accountability-for-executives/ (11/28/11) – note: the date a piece was posted will only be given if it is not clearly expressed within URL handle
15 http://occupywallist.org/archive/Sep-18-2011/
the state.\textsuperscript{16} Such arguments have been long-standing on the left—echoing, for instance, Marx’s critique of the French situation in the mid-nineteenth century and more recent arguments that hold the state has been captured by a neoliberal elite (see Chapter Three).

The bail-out of banks following the financial crisis was considered indicative of the entwinement of corporate interests with the exercise of state power: ‘After huge bail-outs and in the face of unemployment, privatisation and austerity, we still see profits for the rich on the increase.’\textsuperscript{17} Occupy rejected the bail-out of financial institutions (2.6 percent of sources directly opposed this) while the public was simultaneously subjected to austerity (4.3 percent of sources critiqued austerity measures). The amount of money spent saving the banks was considered grossly disproportionate to other forms of public spending. This sense of injustice was used to fuel the rise of the movement.

The occupation comes as the failings of the financial industry and those regulating it become ever more clearer. The UK bank bailout accounts for about one third of the global banking bailout, with the total cost of bailing out at £1.3 trillion—more than 10 times the entire NHS budget.\textsuperscript{18}

As argued by activists at Occupy Oakland, ours is an age of ‘corporate tyranny’ in which ‘representatives from large corporations’ are able to lobby for the forceful eviction of encampments.\textsuperscript{19} Such sentiments were echoed in other encampments. The ‘corporate elite’ had such a high degree of political influence that they were able to evade punishment for fraud and corruption (a concern expressed across 4.7 percent of sources).

\textsuperscript{16} http://www.nycga.net/2011/09/general-assembly-minutes-926-2pm/ (26/9/11) ; see also http://occupylandon.org.uk/ga-minutes-7pm-tuesday-13th-december-2011/
\textsuperscript{17} http://occupylandon.org.uk/occupylsx-callout-be-ready-to-create-a-better-world/ (14/10/11)
\textsuperscript{18} http://occupylandon.org.uk/occupy-london-stock-exchange-sets-up-camp-in-the-city/ (15/10/11)
\textsuperscript{19} https://occupyoakland.org/2011/11/the-one-percent-solution/ (22/11/11)
Table One: *Occupy’s Targets and Areas of Concern*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target/areas of concern</th>
<th>Number of sources citing this target/area of concern</th>
<th>Ratio of appearance (across 423 sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic target</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local body political target</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose eviction of encampment</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortcomings of democracy</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘one percent’</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose war/military actions/arms dealers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppose police/police tactics</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental concern</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous/People of Colour/Immigrant issues</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s issues</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social injustice (approximate number)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of speech/to protest</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ issues</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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20 This and the following tables have been constructed from an analysis of the 423 sources gathered from the websites of Occupy Wall Street, Oakland, Melbourne and London, as detailed earlier in the methods section. Sources were coded in NVivo and it is the frequency in which coded terms appeared that provides the figures cited here.
Table Two: Occupy’s Economic Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Target</th>
<th>Number of sources citing this target</th>
<th>Ratio of appearance (across 423 sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Corporate,’ ‘Corporation’ or Bank</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebtedness</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud/Corruption</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Spending Cuts/Austerity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailout of financial institution</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreclosure of homes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total sources with economic targets</strong></td>
<td><strong>207</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such analyses informed actions that sought to call attention to, and if possible weaken, institutions that were seen as part of the problem. In some cases this involved militant direct actions. Occupy Oakland was particularly effective on this front: ‘Huge, enthusiastic, crowds swarmed through downtown Oakland with half a dozen major marches on banks and corporations that shut down Wells Fargo, Chase, Citibank, Bank of America and many others.’22 Another form of direct action taken against banks by Occupy was the occupation of foreclosed homes (with opposition to foreclosure mentioned across 2.6 percent of sources). Occupy also sought to expand its protest repertoire to less physically confrontational forms so as to include more people in the movement. Bank boycotts being an example from Occupy

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21 A single source may contain multiple targets—for instance, claims may be levelled against ‘corporations’ as well as ‘banks’ and ‘inequality.’

22 [Link to Occupy Oakland site](https://occupyoakland.org/search/Huge%2C+enthusiastic%2C+crowds+swarmed+through+downtown+Oakland+with+half+a+dozen+major+marches+on+banks+and+corporations+that+shut+down+Wells+Fargo%2C (2/11/11))
The Occupy movement has many ‘moral’ supporters – who are unlikely to ‘Occupy’ but could be persuaded to get behind a tangible campaign which registers their support and requires some commitment – and impacts upon the institutions that invoked people’s anger in the first place. This discussion will look at a boycott of one (to begin with) high street bank, working with the various Occupy movements to select a bank and encourage people to move whatever product they have with that bank elsewhere.23

Such initiatives had strategic value insofar as they sought to develop a variety of tactical responses to the financial crisis that could engage people who were unable, or unwilling, to engage in the ‘high cost’ activism that came with maintaining a continued presence within encampments. Bank boycotts also served to draw attention to the structural conditions that contributed to the financial crisis.

Discussions of ‘Inequality’ (mentioned in 8.3 percent of sources) were also used by the movement to highlight the structural shortcomings of capitalism. Consistent with Occupy’s approach, this economic issue—the uneven distribution of wealth—was simultaneously cast as a political problem.

Money, it has been said, has taken over politics. In truth, we say, money has always been part of the capitalist political system. A system based on the existence of have and have-nots, where inequality is inherent to the system, will inevitably lead to a situation where the have-haves find a way to rule, whether by the sword or by the dollar.24

Inequality, it was argued, is a systemic problem. Occupy Oakland, for example, spoke of fighting ‘against an economic system built on colonialism, inequality and corporate power that perpetuates all forms of oppression and the destruction of the environment.’25 The extent to which Occupy developed a systemic critique can be seen in the frequency in which terms like ‘capitalism’ and ‘neoliberalism’ appeared across the sources reviewed, which was 7.1 and 5 percent respectively; this relatively low rate of appearance illustrates how the

24 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-18-2011/ (1/12/11)
movement was almost as guilty as social movement theorists (as reviewed in Chapter Two) of downplaying the systemic dimension of capital.

Occupy’s systemic critique of capital is exemplified in the way specific issues tended to be situated in a wider economic critique. In a critique of war (an issue appearing across 13.2 percent of sources), for example, ‘war profiteers’ were cited as a fundamental part of the problem.

Tomorrow, the Aviation Week and Credit Suisse will be holding their 17th annual Aerospace & Defense Finance Conference in NYC. These war profiteers export death in the name of defense. They have obscene influence over our democracy with politicians in their pockets and hundreds of lobbyists working congress. They sell arms to the 1% so that war can be waged against the 99% in efficient and technologically advanced ways. #OWS will not stand silent as these dangerous parasites take our tax dollars and turn them into arms and profit.26

Such opposition to the way economic and political activity works, in the interests of the one percent, was a consistent feature of Occupy. Another example of this perceived interrelatedness can be seen in relation to environmental concerns (as raised in 11.3 percent of sources), with OWS arguing that ‘fracking is a clear example of how the power of money trumps common sense and controls our democracy.’27

While it was clear that Occupy was animated by economic concerns (and, by extension, the effects of this system upon democracy) it is unclear if the movement can be classified as overtly ‘anti-capitalist’. Occupy Oakland, for instance, spoke of opposing ‘privatization and unchecked capitalism’ (my emphasis).28 Similarly, Occupy Melbourne spoke of highlighting the ‘excesses of capitalism’ (my emphasis).29 Such qualifications—‘unchecked,’ ‘excesses’—indicate the movement was not necessarily overtly anti-capitalist, and that there was an openness from many participants, indeed a willingness even, to see reforms to the capitalist system. This is not to say anti-capitalists were not involved in the movement, but it indicates, arguably, a strategic awareness that claims like ‘smash capitalism’ were not going to endear the movement to the wider public. Mark Bray’s (2014, p. 4) research on OWS lead him to

26 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-18-2011/
27 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-20-2011/
argue, for instance, that ‘while most Occupy participants wanted to reform capitalism, most organisers wanted to destroy it (78 percent were anti-capitalist)’: a case of ‘real’ democracy in action! Another means of hedging claims-making against the economic system was to target ‘neoliberalism’ as a specific manifestation of capitalism—capitalism ‘with the gloves off’. Occupy Wall Street could speak, then, of a ‘growing international movement fighting against neoliberal economic practices, the crimes of Wall Street and the resulting income inequality, unemployment, and oppression of people at the front lines of the economic crisis.’

Occupy was clearly motivated by a desire to redress the perceived ills of capitalism, but was not advocating, during its nascent early stages, the ‘overthrow of capitalism.’

Occupy was motivated by economic concerns, which it framed to some extent within a structural analysis, and it frequently related particular issues back to wider economic matters. It was not, however, explicitly anti-capitalist when viewed across multiple encampments—rather it was capital-critical. There were few specific claims in the early days of the movement that called for an alternative economic system. The more radical thrust of Occupy was reserved, rather, for its critique of politics and its experiments with alternative democratic forms.

The Quest for Democracy—can the elites’ capture of politics be reversed?

Occupy sought to both challenge the shortcomings of the existing political system and present alternative models. As expressed in Occupy London’s initial statement (agreed upon by 500 people at the encampment): ‘The current system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives; this is where we work towards them.’

There was an explicit recognition that democracy, as conducted in existing political institutions, was compromised through its intersection with the interests of the financial elite: ‘Our elected representatives in Washington have become so tightly intertwined with the financiers and bankers that public accountability has all but vanished.’ Reversing the financial elite’s capture of politics was a vital aim for the movement, one that required a radical reappraisal of existing institutional practices.

30 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-24-2011/
31 http://occupylondon.org.uk/about/about-occupy-london-2/ (16/10/11)
32 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Dec-8-2011/
Existing political parties were seen as a major part of the problem (a point consistent with Mair’s analysis, as discussed in the introduction, and Mouffe’s work as discussed in Chapter Four). Little was seen to differentiate major political parties, all of whom were seen to operate at the behest of the one percent.

As the United States prepares for another election year and presidential candidates gather to begin their corporate-financed campaigns, we are again presented with politicians that have all been bought by Wall Street and the 1%. ... [The] liberal/conservative, Democrat/Republican dichotomy is a distraction from the real social conflict undergirding American society: the 99 percent versus the 1 percent.33

Occupy positioned itself as a movement to ‘reclaim democracy’, one that sought to move beyond the paradigm that places the political under the economic bar: ‘We will gather to resist austerity, rebuild the economy, and reclaim our democracy. We will no longer tolerate a system that only serves the very rich and powerful. Right now Wall Street owns Washington. We are the 99% and we are here to reclaim our democracy.’34 Politics would have to be insulated from the influence of the one percent if democracy was to become meaningful again. While a rough consensus can be argued to exist within the movement on this point, what should follow from this was unclear. Some sources argue that Occupy sought to ‘reclaim democracy’, which would suggest democracy has existed within the current institutional arrangements and can again—it is a call for reform. Other sources, however, called for ‘real democracy,’ for something more radical.

Occupy frequently made reference to its practices as exhibiting ‘real democracy’ (this term appeared in 9.2 percent of sources). ‘Real democracy’, as portrayed by Occupy London, recognises that ‘every voice matters.’35 Occupy London also tied claims for ‘real democracy’ to questions concerning economic and social injustice (a theme appearing across 4.5 percent of all sources).36 Real democracy encompasses, then, substantive underpinnings. Calls for ‘real democracy’ were partnered with those for ‘direct democracy’ (a term appearing in 9 percent of sources). Occupy Melbourne, for example, framed their encampment as ‘direct democracy’.

33 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Dec-29-2011/
34 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Nov-16-2011/
35 http://occupylondon.org.uk/general-assembly-minutes-1pm-10112011/
democracy’ in action. Direct democracy was considered a ‘work in progress,’ an open ended approach exploring alternative forms of democratic participation. While acknowledging that democracy entailed economic considerations, any pronouncement as to what should be done in terms of advocating particular economic reforms—or even, more radically, positing alternate economic structures—had to first pass through an open-ended democratic forum.

In sum, then, economic issues motivated the foundation (generally by groups of radicalised anti-capitalist activists) and the subsequent growth of the Occupy movement. Corporations were charged with converting economic power into political power at the expense of democracy. Real democracy involves substantive considerations. Equality involves both material and formal indices. Any collective decision made by the movement as to how to respond to the economic issues was dependent, however, upon the ability to model and exercise alternative forms of democratic deliberation and decision making within the camps. In this sense, the economic became, in a way, secondary to attempts to realise ‘real’ or ‘direct’ democracy.

**General Assemblies—can a new form of democracy be built without plans?**

General Assemblies (GAs) were the sites where ‘real’ or ‘direct’ democracy could be put into action. They were laboratories for the democracy to come. David Graeber, who was instrumental in introducing the GA model to Occupy Wall Street (see Graeber, 2013, for his account of this, pp. 24-33), situates the GA within a long lineage of radical politics: encompassing the civil rights movement, Students for a Democratic Society, feminism and ‘spiritual traditions’ (both Native American and Quaker) and, importantly, anarchist practices (Graeber, 2011b, np.). Recent manifestations of this form (with localised variances) outside of the US can be seen in the Zapatistas, the Argentinian unemployed worker’s movement and the Chilean students’ movement (Dellacioppa et al., 2013, p. 48). The GA structure was not unique to Occupy. Use of this model reflects a certain ‘common sense’ approach shared by many contemporary antisystemic movements.

Consensus-based decision making processes are central to GAs. The essence of this approach, argues Graeber (2013, p. 211), is that everyone should be able to contribute equally to making

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a decision and no one should be bound to a decision they reject. In practice, he states, this boils down to four principles: everyone should be able to express their opinion on a proposal; everyone who has concerns or objections should have them considered, and possibly incorporated into a proposal; anyone has the right to block a proposal if they consider it a violation of the group’s fundamental principles; no one should be forced to go along with a decision to which they do not consent. While these principles were applied in all of Occupy’s GAs, variations occurred across encampments (some developed ‘modified consensus’ processes, ranging from a need for ninety percent through to seventy percent support needed for a proposal to go ahead).39

GA processes were not free from conflict and internal division. Occupy was, however, a reflexive movement. It was able to identify internal problems and modify practices accordingly:

Group representatives seemed more focused on their personal agendas, giving more air-time to their personal opinions as opposed to those of the group. We would like to avoid this kind of hi-jacking. One way of redressing this involves participation in facilitator workshops. Being able to listen to other people and respect the opinions of others involves training and education. Also corollary this; most of the group speakers were white males. We need to be open to everyone. It’s a crucial part of the process of this occupation.40

The creation of ‘progressive stacks’ became a means of addressing some of these problems:

Our democracy here is radical. We do a couple of things to ensure it stays radical. As the stack taker, I’ll be taking progressive stack. That means if you’re part of a traditionally marginalized group, or are someone who has not spoken much during the meeting, I will put you on stack first. Everyone will have the chance to speak, but we use the idea of step-up-step back. If you are a part of a population that is encouraged to speak, we encourage you to

39 In terms of the mechanics of GAs, hand signals are used to signal agreement, disagreement, blocks, or the wish to speak. Facilitators oversee GAs and ensure the protocol is followed. Timekeepers ensure speakers have equal time, and stack-keepers arrange the order of speakers. GAs, typically, begin with a speech of welcome, a reading of the principle of solidarity and, in most encampments, the issuing of a ‘statement of non-violence’; after speeches come announcements, which are then followed by proposals. Proposals are put forward by the movement’s working groups and committees, if time and space allow proposals from individuals or affinity groups (who are aligned with Occupy, but retain their autonomy) are also considered (Dellacioppa et al., 2013, p. 48).

40 http://occupylondon.org.uk/general-assembly-minutes-18102011/
step back from speaking. And if you’re from a population that isn’t encouraged to speak, we encourage you to step up and speak more.41

Occupy sought to constantly critique and update its practices, especially in relation to GAs. Much rode upon their success due to their being examples of ‘direct democracy in action’, illustrating what many within the movement considered ideal political practice.

Due to their importance for the movement, GAs have attracted a lot of critical attention, from both participants within the movement and scholars. Some participants, while not denying it was an important facet of the movement, expressed frustration with GAs:

I made a joke earlier about Occupy Oakland’s General Assembly being a clever device designed to make occupiers so frustrated with bullshit that they would actually go out and do things themselves. That’s an exaggeration, of course. The GA has been responsible for some unequivocally fantastic things…. But anyone who listens to the recordings of the assembly I make every night could be forgiven for thinking the GA sometimes reaches Olympian levels of frustrating wankery. The assembly varies wildly from effective and cheer-worthy, to the epitome of left-wing masturbatory debate, politics and time-wasting.42

The frustrating nature of GAs began to alienate some participants within the movement. The rituals surrounding the GA (like the people’s mic. being used even when extra amplification was not needed, or the twinkling of fingers to express agreement with an issue) were seen as being ‘cult like’ by some participants who felt their patience was being tested to the limits by GAs (Gitlin, 2012, np.).

The ability of individuals, or groups, to block proposals within GAs caused tensions. As Graeber noted above, an important element of consensus decision making is that no one should feel bound to decisions they strongly disagree with, hence the importance of blocks. Ideally blocks would seldom be a problem, as discussion of issues within an assembly should operate in such a manner that issues can be developed and resolved and consensus reached. The problem is, however, that such ideal speech situations rarely exist outside the imagination of Habermassians and, despite the theoretical promise of consensus decision

41 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Dec-10-2011/
making, the ability to block proposals became a problem for Occupy. An imbalance tended to develop within assemblies in favour of those speaking against proposals, meaning ‘belligerent, stubborn and militant individuals tended to control conversation and decision-making’ (Smith and Glidden, 2012, p. 290, see also Epstein, 2012, p. 70, Chomsky, 2014, pp. 74-75). The ability of individuals or small groups to block proposals that the majority may agree upon is particularly problematic in this regard (Roberts, 2012, np.).

Another issue that developed in relation to GAs over time was a waning of enthusiasm due to meetings becoming increasingly bogged down in logistical details. The devolution of such decision making to ‘working groups’ sought to avoid this problem. But these tended to fall under the control of individuals who came, by extension, to exercise de facto leadership positions within the movement. Blocs formed within these groups and, in some instances, these came to operate without any accountability to the GA (Miller, 2012, p. 179).

The formation of such blocs reflects Jo Freeman’s observations on the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’ that plagued feminist groups in the 1970s in which hidden hierarchies always developed in lieu of formal structures (Freeman, c. 1973, online). The absence of formal structures of accountability within Occupy led to GAs reflecting the interests of activists who were able to maintain a continuous presence within camps, at the expense of those unable to stay due to work or family pressures (Hickel, 2012, np., Miller, 2012, p. 180, Smith and Glidden, 2012, p. 289). Such critiques highlight the tensions at play within Occupy—and within the contemporary left more generally—around organisational forms. For some participants GAs became a distraction, while for others GAs were the road to ‘real democracy.’ That the latter tended to dominate reflects the ideological prominence of ‘horizontal’ organisation within Occupy.

**Horizontalism—is democracy contagious?**

The Occupy movement does not have a hierarchy or a formalized structure.43

The ‘structurelessness’ of Occupy reflects the outcome of the battle between ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’ in the early days of the Wall Street encampment. Crudely put, horizontals reject

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leaders and formal structures opting instead for fluid non-hierarchical modes of association and decision making, of which the GA is an example. Verticals, by contrast, tend toward centralised, formalised structures that acknowledge those who have assumed leadership or spokesperson positions. While horizontals tend to emphasise the capacity of individuals to enter and exit groups easily—with the group holding no sway over individual’s actions beyond the sway of collectively developed norms and values—verticals are more likely to prize the identity and integrity of the group beyond individual proclivities. The adoption of horizontal organisational forms indicates that Occupy shares strong affinities with the Global Justice Movement (as discussed in Chapter One).

As a veteran activist from the global justice movement, Graeber (2013, p. 45) saw one of his tasks as a ‘small-a anarchist’ involved in the early days of Occupy Wall Street as ensuring that any verticals in the encampment were unable to ‘institute anything that could become a formal leadership structure.’ The deciding issue in this conflict was over whether or not to designate liaisons to interact with the police. Horizontals argued liaisons would come to assume de facto leadership roles within the group and the issue was put to a straw poll, the result of which was close to seventy percent support for the motion of there being no negotiators. ‘At that moment’ writes Graeber, ‘commitment to horizontality was definitively confirmed.’

Advocates of horizontalism view it as a constant ongoing process—a way of creating new forms of engagement between people—that has a profound influence over participants. Horizontalism, they argue, is a ‘tool for real democracy’ (Sitrin, 2011, pp. 86-7 ), it promotes ‘a culture of inclusion’ that limits the ability of individuals to dominate one another. At its best, this approach allows people to contribute to change without seeking to validate their ego in the process (Kaldor and Selcho, 2013, p. 91). Although, as noted above in relation to the issue of blocks in GAs and the de facto power accruing to the most tenacious participants, there is a gap between the ideals of horizontalism and its actuality.

The ascendency of horizontalism as the dominant organising principle of Occupy—and for the contemporary left more generally—is pegged to the influence of anarchism (Graeber, 2012, p. 141, Gitlin, 2013, p. 6, Schneider, 2013, p. 127). Saul Newman argues that ours is ‘a kind of anarchist moment politically’ in which radical politics needs to not just reject established
institutions but to attack ‘the problematic relation through which the subject is enthralled to and dependent upon power’ (Newman, 2012, pp. 148-51). For Bray (2014, p. 7), when viewed ‘from a historical perspective’ Occupy is considered [already!] a ‘defining moment in the shift from the relatively hierarchical politics of the New Left to the new horizontal anarchist politics of the 21st century radical left’.

A key expression of this eschewing of ‘vertical’ organisation in the movement was the rejection of leaders. This led, as some have phrased it, to a ‘leader-full’ rather than leaderless movement—one which practiced ‘decentralised leadership’. This approach was seen to ‘nurture individual activists’ skills in democratic participation and’, proponents argued, prevented the movement being derailed ‘through the repression of one or two key leaders’ (Smith and Glidden, 2012, p. 291). Through holding to anarchist principles—that formal leaders should be rejected, organisation should be horizontal, and decision making consensus based—it was felt Occupy would promote change on a subjective level.

Some critics argue a leaderless movement is impossible—or, at the very least, ‘is a recipe for inefficiency’ (Wallerstein, 1990, p. 49). Gitlin (2012, np., see also Epstein, 2001, p. 8) holds that the emergence of leaders is inevitable, whether or not people are designated as such. To give an example: What if an activist were able to cogently argue that anything even slightly evocative of vertical structures should be rejected by Occupy, and that the movement should pursue anarchist principles (as argued above by Graeber); what if this activist was a veteran of previous cycles of antisystemic protest (such as the global justice movement) and called upon this experience to bolster their arguments (as Graeber does above); what if this activist were also the author of a book that is widely read and cited which lays bare one of the fundamental problems of our age (such as Graeber, 2011a, on the issue of debt); what if this activist were called upon by publications with wide circulation like The Guardian (see, for instance, Graeber, 2011c) to offer opinion pieces about Occupy, and then go on to write their own history of the movement in which they position themselves as having played a central role (see, for instance, Graeber, 2013)? At what point would such a figure cease to be just one participant amongst many and, instead, become someone who holds an informal—or even a quasi-official—leadership position of sorts? Could the case be made that they were, at the very least, an informal spokesperson? (Or, as Tom Brass (2014, p. 256) puts it: ‘...advocacy of a “leaderless democracy” does not prevent Graeber from moving centre stage as a reluctant
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jefe supreme.’) As it was, argues Jodi Dean (2012b, p. 54): ‘Assertions of leaderlessness [within Occupy] incited a kind of paranoia around leaders who emerged but could not be acknowledged or held accountable as leaders.’ Recognition of leaders within the movement, however, ran counter to the horizontalist (/anarchist) position on organisation that influenced Occupy.

Perhaps someone with Graeber’s influence may be better cast as belonging to an influential core in the movement who—through their previous experiences, commitment and public profile—were able to influence the culture of Occupy. A number of commentators on the movement have noted that there was a committed core of experienced activists present in most Occupy sites who were instrumental in kick-starting encampments and who agitated for the movement to retain a radical edge (Epstein, 2012, p. 72, Hedges, 2012b, p. 165, Uitermark and Nicholls, 2012, p. 300, Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 384), an observation which dovetails with the discussion of blocs forming within encampments as discussed above. There was, however, a gap between this inner core—who were committed, radical, wary of co-option—and the outer ring of the movement, who tended in a more reformist direction. It is interesting, here, to consider the extent to which people identified as anarchist within the movement: one poll found that around five percent of participants self-identified as anarchist (as compared to six percent socialist, 30 Democrat and 30 who identified with no existing party) (as cited by, Juris, 2012, p. 265, percentages Juris considers similar to those in Occupy Boston where his own research was conducted). Against this figure of five percent, Bray’s (2014, p. 4) research findings from 192 interviews with OWS organisers found that seventy-two percent ‘had explicitly anarchist or implicitly anarchist politics.’

The inner and outer parts of the movement may have shared a similar list of grievances and concerns, but they diverged strategically. The adoption of horizontalist organisational practices meant those in the ‘core’ of the movement were able to blunt the reformist impulse.

Advocates of the horizontalist approach held it would prompt ‘democracy by contagion.’ As Graeber puts it, this had previously been a key premise of the GJM: ‘our entire vision [in the GJM] was based on a kind of faith that democracy was contagious. Or, at least, the kind of leaderless direct democracy we had spent so much care and effort developing’ (Graeber,
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2013, p. 22). With the advent of Occupy, he argues, ‘the dream of contamination, or democratic contagion, was, shockingly, starting to work’ (ibid, p. 59).

Encampments became sites of ‘prefigurative politics’ (Kaldor and Selchow, 2013, p. 89). By enacting horizontal consensus-based decision-making in encampments it was believed GAs would have an impact that would ripple throughout society (the spatial dimension of prefigurative politics is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven). Change would not pass through existing political institutions, but rather through the more diffuse, subjectively mediated, space of everyday life. Inherent to this is the notion that a movement’s influence can persist—even if outwardly it appears to falter or even fall-away—if it has had sufficient subjective impact (Sitrin, 2011, p. 93). Actions aimed, then, to induce subjective shifts within participants, opening them to new possibilities. Any meaningful political shift would be impossible if not preceded by subjective shifts, first amongst Occupiers and then throughout society as a whole. On this account Occupy (and the wider wave of protests of which it was but one iteration) has been claimed a success by some commentators, despite the ambiguous legacy following the eviction of encampments: ‘This wave of protest ... gave democracy a new locale. ... The political socialisation of thousands of men and women, young and old, in this type of horizontal and deliberative praxis is, perhaps, one of the most important outcomes of this cycle of contention’ (Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 383, see also Kaldor and Selchow, 2013, p. 88). By developing processes emphasising consensus decision-making and empowering all members of the encampment to participate in decision-making—rather than relegating important decisions to leaders—it was conjectured that, en masse, participants would come to embody the spirit of real democracy. This spirit would spread from encampments out to society as a whole.

To make demands?—reform versus revolution in the twenty-first century

Those pursuing a horizontalist approach to organisation in the movement believed the movement was revolutionary in doing so. When eschewing verticalism, horizontalists also rejected vertical institutions outside the movement, especially those of the state. The whole notion of ‘democracy by contagion’ was antithetical to any approach seeking to promote reforms through the state. As evidenced above, however, in relation to Occupy’s critique of capitalist institutions, calls were made for reform by sections of the movement (including such things as calls to end corporate personhood or addressing global tax injustice). The recipient
of such calls could, within the current paradigm, only be the state. The issue of whether or not Occupy should call for reforms or make demands evidences a division cutting through the movement. Horizontalism may have trumped other forms of organisation in the movement, but its ideological victory was not total and it was pushed to accommodate tendencies that would usually be associated with vertical forms of organisation. On the one hand that could be seen as a strength of the horizontalist approach—that it can contain different factions within the one movement. On the other, the emphasis on horizontalism obstructed the ability of the movement to push for enduring structural changes. Even though the movement was united around its critique of the current economic and political situation, there was no clear consensus as to what should follow from this critique.

While often portrayed as making no demands against the state (see, for instance, Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012p. 283), a review of the sources produced by Occupy reveals claims were directed at the state (even if only rhetorically): ‘We want to remind Parliament that their duty is to the people, not the banks — where is our bailout?’\(^{44}\) GA minutes reveal heated conversations as to whether or not the movement should engage with existing political institutions:

As we know the Democrats and Republican parties represent the 1% but they control 99% of the elected offices.....How can we get representative government through these parties? We think this could be done through free and fair elections...So we have this statement here for thorough-going electoral reform... It recommends alternative voting methods; independent, nonpartisan redistricting; smaller and more localized districts; proportional representation; expansion of franchise; term limits; ballot access reform; primary election reform; initiatives and referenda; vote counting; holiday voting; fusion voting, and combination and synthesis.\(^{45}\)

To which another member replied, after blocking the above proposal:

I have a very very strong block and nothing would change that... Occupy Wall Street is not a campaign and it should not be proposing legislation. By offering reform to congress we’re engaging with congress. Many of the things he said here... are what Obama was for.


\(^{45}\) http://www.nycga.net/2011/12/nycga-minutes-12272011/ (27/12/11)
The above quote shows how, via the mechanism of blocks (as discussed above), radical voices within the movement were able to silence moderate proposals. At issue here is whether Occupy was a movement seeking to reform existing political and economic institutions—to ‘reclaim’ a lost democracy—or to initiate a paradigm shift (to prompt a ‘revolution’). Arguments made in favour of the latter position echo those made by nineteenth century anarchists (such as Bakunin) and brings to mind debates within the global justice movement (as discussed in Chapter One). The sources from Occupy reviewed in this study indicate a split in the movement around the issue of reform or revolution.

Reform is mentioned in 6.9 percent of sources, revolution in 4.5 percent. Calls for reform to the economic and/or political system were common: ‘This is a movement that transcends political affiliation. It aims to open a dialogue on reforming finance and government so that each better serve and protect the interests and wellbeing of the 99%.’ OWS had a Political and Electoral Reform working group and, as seen in the following report to the GA, sections of the Occupy movement were clearly committed to prompting reforms within existing political practices and institutions:

Hi everyone, a quick report-back, a lot of stuff going on in our group... we have a number of subgroups working on a bunch of stuff... A viral campaign for a constitutional convention.... Another subgroup for developing constitutional amendments... Another subgroup is developing a scientific experiment, to test alternative voting methods.

With the above in mind, it would seem premature to argue that Occupy—as a whole—rejected pushes for reform to the existing political system. While ‘democracy by contagion’ may have been a strong current with the movement there was interest in finding other ways to foster a more democratic society.

Nevertheless, while sections of Occupy expressed the desire to contribute towards reform of the ‘system’, there was also a countervailing tendency calling for revolution, sometimes very openly: ‘we bring this call for revolution.... We call for a revolution of the mind as well as the body politic.’ Overall, however, sources released by Occupy tended to downplay the notion

47 http://www.nycga.net/2011/12/nycga-12102011-minutes/ (10/12/11)
of a revolutionary movement. One way of doing this was to have a third party introduce the term. For instance, the term ‘revolution’ often appeared in the title of talks being given by intellectuals; and statements from other, related, movements asserted 2011 was a moment of ‘global revolution.’ As seen in the following quote from a visiting Egyptian protester:

This is a global revolution. We all inhabit the same world – one world, not three separate worlds. To me, this feels like I am in Tahrir Square. Someone made a City of Westminster street sign that reads “Tahrir Square”. When I saw that, I had to smile. I am dreaming of one world. One world that revolts against exploitation, capitalism, racism, patriarchy, colonialism.

Through publishing such views from other protest groups Occupy was able to position itself in a global revolutionary movement, but at a safe distance.

The manner in which such statements were released afforded Occupy the chance to allow the term ‘revolution’ to circulate within its discourse without it becoming a fixed signifier for the movement. While there were a few instances of direct pronouncements from the movement that positioned it as ‘revolutionary,’ attempts were usually made to introduce some distance between this term and Occupy. Tellingly, there were more instances in which the term ‘reform’ appeared (6.9 percent of sources) than revolution (4.5 percent). The ambiguity about whether Occupy saw itself as revolutionary or reformist highlights the movement’s heterogeneity and internal tensions.

While the terms ‘reform’ or ‘revolution’ can be used to clearly state a movement’s strategic orientation, Occupy tended to shy from such explicit announcements. Instead, the argument over whether or not to issue demands provided the ground over which strategic debates were fought (13.7 percent of sources addressed the issue of demands).

When calling for occupation Adbusters signalled the need to make one strong demand (echoing the Tahrir uprisings repeated assertion that ‘Mubarak must go’): ‘On September 17, 20,000 of us will descend on Wall Street, the iconic financial centre of America, set up a peaceful encampment, hold a people’s assembly to decide what our one demand will be.’

This event was followed by this statement: ‘On September 18th, 2011, about 400 of us woke

49 http://www.theoccupiedtimes.org/PDFs/OT01.pdf (26/10/11)
50 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-8-2011/
up in the Financial District amidst heavy police presence.... We made our demands heard, which are many but revolve around a common point: our voice will no longer be ignored.\textsuperscript{51} Just as OWS positively framed the notion of demands in its early days, so too did other encampments. Occupy London framed their GA as a site for generating demands: ‘The hope is that the General Assembly will ... allow us to create a list of demands democratically – a unified message that represents the sentiment of the 99%.’\textsuperscript{52} The early days of Occupy can be seen, then, as ones in which the notion of issuing ‘demands’ was positively presented.

This enthusiasm for developing and issuing demands was expressed in the GA minutes from the first two assemblies in Melbourne. Minutes from the third Melbourne GA, however, illustrate the manner in which internal tensions formed around the formulation and issuing of demands. The following extended quote from these minutes teases out clearly the different lines of argument for and against the issuing of demands:

\begin{quote}
Opened for discussion: Two or three core demands
Andrew speaks against: ‘We cannot demand because then we agree with the current government and are asking them to do something.’
Seraph speaks for: ‘What are we trying to achieve? We should have a clear set of demands that are small and achievable.’
Owen speaks against: ‘We are too diverse to agree on only a couple of demands. We need to relate to the vast bulk of people in the public.’ Supports original proposal
Natalia speaks for: ‘We’re not in as dire straits as the Americans, it is more difficult to relate to so many people, we need to attract more people by presenting as reasonable, rational people and not a fringe radical group.’
Proposal that we have only two or three concrete demands: Dissent still shown; No consensus shown.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

The lines of contention are clear: if no demands are issued it becomes unclear what the movement is seeking to achieve and it becomes marginalised to the political fringe; but Occupy’s internal heterogeneity makes it difficult to develop a tight list of demands; and if

\textsuperscript{51} http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-20-2011/
\textsuperscript{52} http://occupylondon.org.uk/occupylsx-first-general-assembly/ (10/10/11)
\textsuperscript{53} http://occupymelbourne.org/GA-minutes/17-10-11 (I have modified the punctuation for clarity)
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Occupy is opposed to the current system, then the issuing of demands against this system is counter-productive, as the act of issuing demands to those in power validates their position.

Occupy Oakland came out strongly in favour of this later interpretation of the issue:

As Occupy Oakland’s profile and power have grown, politicians, police, and other established authorities have begun trying to open lines of communication with Occupy Oakland, and wish to identify representatives of our movement with whom they can negotiate demands.

Their proposed transaction frames our power as a commodity that we have wrested from established authorities, and we are expected to give it back it to them – to spend it – in return for their meeting certain demands.\(^5^4\)

As seen in the above quotes, strong opposition to issuing demands formed within the movement. It was argued that demands validated the system the movement sought to oppose. Such a position emphasises the divergence between those seeking to engage with the system and promote reform and those who completely rejected it.

Strongly worded statements such as those above created an impression in the public eye that Occupy was refusing to issue demands. This, in turn, caused a flurry of consternation within the mainstream media, who derided the movement for not issuing clearly articulated demands. A rising level of frustration built in the movement against this external pressure to issue clear demands. Occupy Wall Street turned this tension—between those in the movement who rejected the issuing of demands, and voices in the mainstream media and politicians who wanted to hear clear demands—into a defining feature of that encampment. They did this in a number of ways. One was to ridicule the very idea of making ‘one demand’ (counter to the early push for this to have been a defining tactic for the encampment), as seen in the following communique:

Note: Our use of the one demand is a rhetorical device. This is NOT an official list of demands. ...

On September 21st, 2011, Troy Davis, an innocent man, was murdered by the state of Georgia. Troy Davis was one of the 99 percent.

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Ending capital punishment is our one demand.

On September 21st, 2011, the richest 400 Americans owned more wealth than half of the country’s population.

Ending wealth inequality is our one demand.\(^55\)

The above source goes on to list nine other rhetorical demands, ranging across economic, political, military and legal targets. That the shift from actual to rhetorical demands in the Wall Street encampment took place in just five days (between the 17\(^{th}\) and 22\(^{nd}\) of September) indicates the speed with which the movement’s strategic objectives could change. Another way in which OWS changed its approach to the question of demands was to state that ‘We are our demands.’\(^56\) The inability of the ‘system’—mainstream media, politicians, corporations, and so on—to understand this was used as a means of fostering an identity for the movement. Either you ‘got it’ or you did not (which is a problem if you are trying to build a truly popular movement).

What it is, the demand the 1% can’t comprehend, is us.... Establishment polls confirm what everyone in the street already knows: a clear majority of New Yorkers, three of every four, support the occupation and get the “demand” in their gut.... Everywhere the lack of demands let us see each other clearly. Across the world, as if for the first time.... What can those who want democracy demand from the king, except his crown? Regime change is in the air.\(^57\)

As expressed here, ‘no demands’ was a ‘revolutionary’ stand, which thanks to ‘democratic contagion’ might infect the population at large.

While the refusal to issue clearly articulated demands became a strong rhetorical device for the Wall Street encampment, and was witnessed in other encampments too, a review of sources from 2011 show that this was not uniformly adopted across Occupy as a whole. For instance, ‘demands’ remained a consistent feature in sources from Occupy London and, tellingly, of the 58 sources discussing demands reviewed for this study, only eleven were explicitly critical of issuing demands. Of these eleven, eight were from GA minutes. None of

\(^55\) http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-22-2011/
\(^56\) http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-19-2011/
\(^57\) http://occupywallst.org/article/new-world/ (1/11/11)
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this is to say that groups did not step forward and make proclamations in the name of Occupy. InterOccupy, for instance, spoke of Occupy having ‘three goals’ (see Chomsky, 2012, p. 69). The tensions around whether or not to issue demands reflects a general ambiguity as to whether or not Occupy saw itself as revolutionary or reformist, and of divergent tendencies concerning strategy.

The American encampments appear to have become particularly strident over the issue of not issuing demands (as seen in the earlier quote from Occupy Oakland). Thomas Frank (2012, np.) argues this was

...an inspired way to play the situation in the beginning, and for a time it was a great success. But it also put a clear expiration date on the protests. As long as demands and the rest of the logocentric requirements were postponed, Occupy could never graduate to the next level. It would remain captive to what Christopher Lasch criticised—way back in 1973—as the “cult of participation,” in which the experience of protesting is what protesting is all about.

Frank’s view—that not issuing demands exhibits a lack of maturity in the movement, whereby process trumped outcomes—is similar to the critique of Occupy found throughout mainstream media: namely, that the absence of demands was ‘a sign of unseriousness’ (Gitlin, 2012, np.).

Along with the rejection of leaders, horizontalists consider the absence of a demand to be one of the strengths of the movement. By not articulating one clear demand, argues Will Bunch, Occupy ‘was an empty, free-flowing vessel for every demand and grievance, large and small, that had accumulated during the 30-year rampage of the rich and famous 1 Percenters’ (Bunch, 2011, np.). Or, as others have argued, the ‘one demand’ was obvious: it was the call for economic justice (Solnit, 2011, np.). The demand for economic justice is, however, a vague one when not attached to a strategic programme that seeks to realise this. Who hears this demand? Corporations? The state? The people? What is to follow from this implicit demand?

Jodi Dean (Dean et al., 2012, np.) participated in the demands working group at Occupy Wall Street and notes the manner in which this group fragmented in November of 2011:

[The] more liberal and independent members would take everything the rest said and would red-bait it and say: “You guys are communists; this will never wash with the 99%.” And because of the Anarchist principles of consensus that required full or close to full agreement
they were able to block proposals nearly all the time. Other people were in the group saying that the group should not exist and also blocking decisions.

This example illustrates how the open consensus structure could be bent toward the interests of factions who were able to block proposals that did not fit with their own programmes. It would seem that even if a majority of people in Occupy had hoped to issue demands a small vocal minority was able to easily override this.

As shown earlier in this chapter, a consistent theme running through Occupy’s discourse was righteous indignation at the current economic system coupled with frustration over the manner in which the political system had been co-opted by the interests of the one percent. Beyond this point of consensus, however, it becomes clear that Occupy was too internally heterogeneous—both within and between encampments—to address the question of what came next. The arguments for or against pushing for state reforms, or over whether or not to issue demands, reveal the internal impasse the movement reached by the end of 2011.

The extent to which arguments against issuing demands won out—and where any push for reform or engagement with the state was side-lined—can be traced, in part at least, to the anarchist principles underpinning the movement. As Graeber argues, ‘the first principle OWS shares with anarchists is the refusal to recognise the legitimacy of existing political institutions. A reason for the much-discussed refusal to issue demands is that issuing demands means recognising the legitimacy—or at least the power—of those of whom the demands are made’ (Graeber, 2012, p. 144). Making demands of the state or corporations is considered tantamount to ceding a movement’s power to the bodies against which the claims are levelled. Conversely, ‘the very absence of demands is a mark of the movement’s radicalism’ (Eden, 2014, p. 79). This line of argument also calls to mind Bakunin’s argument (as elaborated in Chapter One) that engagement with the state ‘contaminates’ social movements. As applied to Occupy, and the wider cycle of movements of which it is a part, this line of argument holds that the aim should not be to make the state more democratic (Sitrin, 2011, p. 88), but rather to bypass the state altogether, as any engagement with existing state institutions of political parties would lead to co-option. This is a revolutionary argument, and it pushes the movement toward an ‘all or nothing’ position.
To recall Laclau’s discussion of demands in Chapter Four: the decision to turn away from issuing specific demands against the state or other institutional complexes can be seen as a strategic oversight. Popular movements have, historically, gained momentum and mass following the inability of existing institutions to accommodate their demands (Chapter One also discussed this point in relation to the Russian Revolution). Levelling demands at institutions, rather than disempowering movements, can reveal the inability of these institutions to offer what is demanded and can thus serve as a measure of their weakness—which opens the terrain for the founding of a counter-hegemonic project. In Laclau’s formulation, ‘a chain of equivalences’ can form between previously discreet sites of discontent to form a movement able to effectively contest power. Occupy signalled an opportunity for such a project to take place, but the moment was lost. To not issue demands and to reject the state outright was strategically short sighted.

Rejecting the state leaves it in the hands of the right. As long as their hands control the levers of power they can continue to employ the monopoly on violence for their own ends, and to legislate in favour of the wealthy few. To aim for revolution requires a revolutionary subject, a subject the horizontalists imagined would arise spontaneously through democratic contagion. The likelihood of such contagion diminished over time as GAs became increasingly messy. The obverse began to happen, not only did the contagion fail to spread, many people in the movement became alienated by horizontalist practices. The upshot of all of this—of the failure of the movement to spark a widespread push for revolution, and the undermining of reformist factions within the movement—has led some to consider the situation to be worse in the wake of Occupy.

Failure to engage with current democratic institutions, some commentators have argued, threatens democracy. Benjamin Barber (2012, p. 15) in the lead up to the US elections in 2012, for example, argued that

If the myriad and varied denizens of this profoundly democratic movement decide to manifest their convictions politically and take a stand in the polls, they will contribute to revivifying democracy. If they withdraw from politics, and sit the election out while insisting the differences between the parties and candidates are marginal and the similarities overwhelming, our democracy will be worse off.
By refusing to engage in the messiness of existing democratic institutions Occupy can be seen as having arrived at a similar position to that publically elucidated by neoliberals. Each group can be seen as having its own utopic vision of a society free of dissensus and the need for compromise: ‘either the self-regulating market, or consensus-based anarchism’ (Roberts, 2012, np.). It is important to acknowledge that anarchists do not uniformly reject engagement with the state (even if the long term project is the dissolution of the state). Chomsky (2013, p. 40), for example, argues that

...aspects of the state system, like the one that makes sure children eat, have to be defended—in fact, defended very vigorously.... [In] my opinion the immediate goal of even committed anarchists should be to defend some state institutions, while helping to pry them open to more meaningful public participation.... And in any realistic perspective, the political system, with all its flaws, does have opportunities for participation by the general population which other existing institutions, such as corporations, don’t have.

Contemporary anarchists tend, overwhelmingly, to reject such a position. As Barbara Epstein (2001, p. 8) notes, apropos anarchist involvement in the GJM, there is a ‘doctrinaire side [to the anarchist mind-set], a tendency to insist on principle to the point of disregarding the context or likely results of political action.’ It seems that it is this mind-set that came to influence Occupy. The initiative to adopt a radical position derailed attempts within the movement to push for reform.

The argument over whether or not to issue demands reveals the tensions between reformist and revolutionary currents within the Occupy movement. Consensus existed within the movement as to what it opposed—namely the current economic situation and its co-option of politics—but no agreement was reached on how best to remedy this situation. A broadly ‘anarchist’ approach to politics appears to have won out, leading toward a rejection of any engagement with the state. The success of this approach, though, depends upon massive and ongoing mobilisation. To date this has not happened, leading some to argue that Occupy ended up threatening democracy rather than rejuvenating it.
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**The Problem of Endurance—the limits of anarchism**

Žižek (2011, p. 68), when addressing Occupy Wall Street, warned there was a risk that the movement would become so enamoured of itself that it would fail to initiate any sustained programme of change (a point echoing the arguments made earlier by Lasch).

There is a danger. Don’t fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap. What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal lives. Will there be any changes then?

Attention to horizontal processes, in the belief they empower participants and, by extension, can induce a shift toward a more democratic culture, risks the movement collapsing in on itself. As one participant writes,

> We were all in love with Occupy. We were in love with the idea of it. But we all had different ideas. We were all in love with a different movement, in our heads, and I think that’s where the problem came from. (Anonymous, 2012, p. 441)

That the movement sought to promote diversity and plurality meant many felt they could participate—but each participant could have their own idea of what the movement was and what it stood for—which in the long run undermined the ability of the movement to sustain itself. As Jan Rehmann (2013, p. 11) argues, rather than being fixated on developing ‘direct democracy and the consensus principle in occupied spaces’ Occupy needed to develop as a movement for ‘economic democracy’. The issue of endurance, of transforming critique and indignation into actual change remains a pressing one. The small ‘a’ anarchism identified by Graeber as instrumental in kicking the movement into being has not yet shown itself capable of carrying things over to this next stage. As Calhoun puts it, anarchism ‘lent itself to the gesture, the idealist moment, the performance rather than permanence’ (Calhoun, 2013, p. 37).

Occupy’s problem is that of duration, durability, of sustained opposition. The anarchist appeal to individualism is compatible with the neoliberal landscape—appealing, as it does, to individual autonomy. But the problem is one of persistence. The power of the anarchist moment within Occupy, argues Dean (2012b, pp. 56-7),

> ...came from the multiple, dispersed and divergent fragments it brought together under Occupy, the anarchist inspiration of the movement couldn’t persist, but would have to
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conduce another politics, the class struggle that was part of the movement from its inception. Differently put, anarchism was important as a ‘vanishing mediator’ that could usher in a politics, even if it is own terms undermined it. It incited people toward collectivity and political will, although the politics it offered eschewed bringing them together in a concrete political form.

Or, as argued by Epstein (2012, p. 81), the problem of the radical left in the US, and I would argue throughout the developed world as a whole, is that ‘the aim of radical movements has come to be understood as resistance rather than social change’. It is problematic, she holds, that resistance and social change follow different logics: ‘Resistance, measured by the intensity of opposition, calls for drama, performance, spectacle; change, measured by what opposition accomplishes, calls for thinking about how to get from where we are to the society that we want.’ Such is the ambiguous legacy of Occupy. Committed activists have, in recent history, been drawn to anarchist thought and action—they have kept the flame of revolt alive in developed countries while the more ‘traditional’ left has spun its wheels, unsure what to do after the expiration of the party-form, the failure of communism in its twentieth century form on the periphery, and the hollowing out of social-democracy within the core—but the keepers of the flame have shown themselves incapable of igniting a blaze on a mass-scale, even though the conditions are tinder dry.

The realisation faced by many, in light of the Occupy’s seeming inability to achieve any enduring change—with the one percent continuing business as usual—is that existing political structures, or the idea of the state, cannot be entirely abandoned. As one participant retrospectively notes: ‘Acting politically means confronting power, not side-stepping it. It means reshaping existing institutions, not just building alternative ones. It means directly and indirectly engaging the state, not cocooning oneself from it’ (Gude, 2012, np.).

Others have argued the failure to engage in the mundane politics of everyday democracy meant Occupy had little impact on the existing system (Roberts, 2012, np.). Whether or not Occupy should have engaged with existing structures is a moot point—considering these are the institutions and practices that have created the conditions the movement set out to critique—but the question of enduring structures is an important one for the contemporary radical left to address. Dean (2013, np.) argues that one of the reasons Occupy was unable to
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maintain its intensity, and the reason why it quickly collapsed under state pressure, was because

...we lacked organisational structures that would distribute tasks such that we knew someone would take responsibility for them. ... And maybe planning, having a clear orientation, would enable us not to be “shattered by the State.” If we collapse whenever the State intervenes we... have no movement.

Enduring structures and organisational forms are needed, but to argue for a return to those of the past shows a failure of imagination and an inability to rise to the task of long-term strategic thinking. Horizontalists/anarchists may well be right in rejecting the existing political system, but leaving everything open to spontaneity, with a faith that democracy will naturally spread throughout culture as a whole—thanks to the influence of a few short-lived encampments unable to bear the strain of their own internal tensions, let alone the external pressure of the state—does not present an attractive long-term strategy either. Now is our ‘1848 moment’: the limits of spontaneous action are clear, we face a strong enemy, and new institutions of the left need to be built.

Summary—nineteenth century problems in the twenty-first century
Occupy stridently opposed current economic conditions and the apparent capture of political institutions by the interests of capital—this much is clearly articulated throughout the sources produced by Occupy reviewed in this study. Occupy was a response to the financial crisis, and also to the crisis of democracy. The movement sought to reimagine democracy, and GAs were the laboratory to experiment with alternative democratic practices. The structure of GAs reflects the influence of anarchist thought within the movement—which argues for horizontal forms of organisation, rejects formally acknowledged leaders and refuses to engage with the state. While the tactics and ideals associated with horizontalism have become dominant in most commentaries on Occupy, this study suggests reformist tendencies also existed within the movement. In step with Gitlin’s reading of the movement, it is important to acknowledge the divergence between the radical core of the movement and its more moderate outer ring.

The horizontalist organisational approach has attracted criticism—particularly in terms of endurance. The question remains as to what a sustained form of non-parliamentary left opposition might look like. Occupy points toward possibilities while tripping over problems.
Occupy is an important event, in that it signals the rise of a contemporary impulse for a more democratic society—in which economic problems are seen to be simultaneously political by nature. The difficulties Occupy faced reflect problems that have long haunted the left (as argued in Chapter one), and indicates the need for these to be resolved if significant change for the better is to take place. It seems nineteenth century problems are also twenty-first century problems for the left.

Perhaps the most significant problem posed by Occupy is how to resolve the gulf between the committed (radical) activists—who were able to kick the movement into action—and more moderate participants; and, further still, to bridge the even greater gap that existed between the movement and the wider public (of whom many shared the same concerns as Occupy). Occupy shows that analysis and critique of the problems besetting core states today have been sufficiently developed as to gain wider purchase. The question of what comes next, however, is still unresolved. Much depends, when seeking to answer this question, on whether or not a collective identity can develop that is capable of carrying a larger project forward. As the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century were all too aware, a movement without the underpinning of a widespread class consciousness (or some other popular subjective vector) will always be limited in scope. This brings us now to the question of whether or not Occupy represented an attempt to foster such a consciousness.
Chapter Six:  
The Subject of Change:  
The return of class-based struggle?

Occupy signals the need to bring considerations of capitalism and class back into the study of social movements. Chapter One traced the rise and demise of mass class-based politics, Chapter Two reviewed social movement theory—where the waning of class-based movements was matched with decreasing levels of attention paid to questions of political economy. Chapter Three sought to counter this by emphasising the ongoing dynamics of capital—while the subjective aspects of class may wax and wane, the objective dimension persists. In Chapter Four, which considered different contemporary left thinkers in order to assess what might constitute effective left action today, it was seen that class was either downplayed or subject to a complete makeover. Although class continues to play a central role within capitalist relations of production, it is an ambiguous concept when it comes to considerations of the political today. As will be seen, this is especially the case when analysing Occupy.

Some have hailed Occupy as a ‘class-building’ movement (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 2011, np.), but the movement was reticent about expressing itself in those terms, favouring instead
the notion of it being the ‘99% versus the one percent.’ While a brilliant rhetorical device, the notion of the ‘99%’ offers little towards an understanding of the movement’s composition. Approaching the movement as an expression of the ‘precariat’ offers a better means of conceptualising how the dynamics of capitalism have influenced Occupy’s formation, by highlighting such issues as the generation divide, the role of immigrants, unemployment and debt.

While the notion of Occupy as the movement of the 99% evokes a vision of a vast body unified against the exploitative one percent, internal tensions concerning gender and ethnicity highlight difficulties the movement faced in grounding its identity principally on economic grounds. Further, its radical inclusivity was tested when dealing with issues stemming from homeless people, and those suffering from substance abuse problems. Despite such tensions Occupy succeeded in articulating a whole raft of protest claims tied to economic issues and, in the process, was able (momentarily) to bring masses of people together. Occupy signals that social movement studies need to bring considerations of class, and more generally of the dynamics of capitalism, back into the field.

Situating Occupy in relation to economic forces, and taking cognisance of how these forces influence the formation and development of contemporary class categories, reveals what is at stake in contemporary struggles today. As capitalism lurches from crisis to crisis, and the elite continues to concentrate its power by hollowing out democratic institutions, the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a resurgence of protest movements, the import of which is still unclear. An understanding of what these movements have to offer, from whom they are composed, and what they demand is vital, as our collective future may well depend on what they can achieve.

**Class Conflict—can we speak of class and class-based social movements today?**

A number of attempts have been made to ‘rebrand’ class concepts in recent years, two of the more prominent being Hardt and Negri’s notion of the ‘multitude’ and Guy Standing’s popularisation of the term ‘precariat’. The multitude was discussed in Chapter Four—to recap: in opposition to the drive for unity characteristic of the industrial working class, the multitude is a collection of singularities that resist centrifugal social powers (it can never be ‘one’); dispossession today is primarily in the form of extraction of rents from the commons—
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a process that hinders productivity and places capital in a hostile position vis-à-vis the multitude; the multitude is, for all intents and purposes, the commons, as the productive biopolitical relations between singularities is the principal productive power; communism is, therefore, immanent—it can be realised through mass exodus from capital’s apparatus of capture.

Many aspects of this model chime with the picture developed in Chapter Three as to the changing manifestations of capital in the contemporary age, and the description of the multitude matches, in many ways, the tendencies observed in new social movements as discussed in Chapters One and Two. The limits of Hardt and Negri’s model are revealed, however, when it comes to conceptualising how effective resistance might take place today. They commit the error of imagining that the strategic field of the state can be abandoned. Faith (and it is faith in the full sense of the word) is placed, instead, on the spontaneous capacities of the multitude to self-organise in ways that will, over time, coalesce into new enduring forms—a position that fails to fully account for how established power (whether imposed by individual states, or by ‘Empire’) deploys counter-measures that either exhaust or smash resistance movements. The political prescription offered by Hardt and Negri (and others, like John Holloway, 2010) accord with the anarchist ethos that drove Occupy’s strategies (as argued in the preceding chapter), an approach which ultimately exhausts itself and leaves little to show for its efforts. Through taking a descriptive neologism like ‘the multitude’ and ascribing normative values to it that are to serve as guides for resistance, a deflationary moment takes place in which the only struggles that seem to deserve attention are localised, spontaneous and transitory, the opposite of the internationalist ethos of nineteenth century social movements discussed in Chapter One.

Guy Standing’s (2011) notion of the ‘precariat’ offers another contemporary attempt at rebranding class, of identifying the contemporary subject of revolt (although, as noted by Breman, 2013, p. 134, this term has been used by others since the 1990s). The precariat, Standing argues, arose in conjunction with the introduction of flexible labour practices under neoliberalism. As of yet, the precariat is only a ‘class-in-the-making’ argues Standing, but has

58 In what follows all references to Standing come from the online version of The Precariat and thus lack pagination. Refer to http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/view/The-Precariat/book-ba-9781849664554.xml for the text on which the following comments are based.
the potential to become a ‘class-for-itself’ (in the Marxian sense of the term). A number of features mark members of the precariat, including: minimal trust relations with capital or the state; a lack of secure work identities; status frustration due to members having accepted jobs below their station (in the case of those with higher education); and a lack of ‘labour security’—as there are no macro-economic guarantees of full employment (as there once were within many developed countries), few workplace rights, no job security, dubious health and safety protections, minimal opportunities for on-the-job training, no income security and no collective representation within the job market. ‘A feature of the precariat’, writes Standing, ‘is not the level of money wages or income earned at any particular moment but the lack of community support in times of need, lack of assured enterprise or state benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings.’ Members of the precariat fall short, then, of being full citizens. They are denizens.

The notion of precariatisation is not peculiar to the contemporary phase of capitalism. Indeed, recalling discussions in Chapter Three of the ‘primitive phase of accumulation’ and the process of proletarianisation, what is being witnessed with the advent of the precariat is just the latest manifestation of one of capital’s inherent dynamics: that of dispossession. As Marx argued long before, one of the defining features of class formation with the advent of capitalism was the dependence of workers on the fickle machinations of the labour market, a market whose very logic was one which propelled workers into increasingly precarious positions of reliance on the bourgeoisie. As Jan Breman (ibid, 2013, p. 135) argues, a problem with Standing’s argument is its lack, due to its focus on the post-1945 period, of ‘historical depth’ and it thus fails to acknowledge ‘how limited in time and space even the partial gains of the mid-twentieth century have been.’ Indeed, recalling Panitch and Gindin’s (2013, p. 9) argument from Chapter Three, the ‘victories’ of the working class in securing stability for themselves in this period need to also be seen as necessary for the ‘relaunching of global capitalism’ in the post-war period.

A strong point of Standing’s work, however, is the emphasis placed on generational fault-lines—something which does not appear in Panitch and Gindin’s analysis. In the latter’s analysis capital was able to effectively ‘buy off’ the working class by drawing them into the property market and (through pensions) into the global financial market. The measures capital was able to deploy to subdue the working-class in the last generation are not available
to the majority of younger workers within the developed world today. While youth have always entered the job market in a precarious manner—having to first prove themselves before embarking upon a career—many now face an indefinite future of precarious work argues Standing. This can lead them into one of two traps. There is the trap of probationary employment. Historically, apprenticeships and internships would have led to secure employment, but no longer. In practice, probationary employment provides employers with cheap labour, and pits youth against one another as they compete for the few available positions (see also Perlin, 2011).

The other ‘trap’ is debt. In the quest for occupational identities and careers many youth incur debt through attending institutions of higher learning. Afterwards they are unlikely to find long-term employment and (in countries where student loans are not interest-free, such as the US) will struggle to meet their debt repayments. Youth within developed nations now face, en masse, diminishing prospects, a feature marking them out from directly preceding generations. Standing is not alone in highlighting this fault-line.

The increased role of debt in people’s lives in the contemporary era is having a deep subjective impact, especially in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008. Consider the following comments posted on the website of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau in the US (as cited in Rosenbush, 2013, pp. 24-25):

I am currently repaying over $200,000 in student-loan debt accumulated during undergraduate study and law school. After graduation, I had to turn down offers to work in the White House because I simply could not afford to do so.

With interest and penalties, my student-loan debt is now over $300,000. I drive a thirty-two-year-old vehicle. A recent hospitalisation combined with the hardship caused by my student loan garnishment forced me to give up my home. Without any other choices, I continue to work disabled and homeless. I assume that when my vehicle stops running and I can no longer commute, I will also lose my employment.

I have a government loan, but I suppose because I’m a woman I’m not allowed to receive any kind of pay that would ever be sustainable in this shit world. I have a degree, but it’s useless to my financial needs. It’s a fucking joke. I’ll be thirty-five in April, and I want to fucking kill myself because of money. Thanks a fucking lot for goddamned nothing.
These comments dramatically underscore the difficulty many face in dealing with the burden of student loans—giving voice to the anger, or outright despair, of a generation who expected the upward mobility experienced by preceding generations within developed countries (if a university level education can be considered a potential indicator of upward class mobility), only to find themselves faced with diminishing prospects, if not outright poverty.

As argued by Paul Mason (2012, p. 66), we are now witnessing the emergence of a new sociological type: ‘the graduate with no future’. This phenomenon is also touched on by Žižek (2012b, p. 12), who argues that the new wave of student protests is motivated by the ‘fear that higher education will no longer guarantee them a surplus-wage in later life’. Indeed, in the countries of Europe hardest hit by the financial crisis, Greece and Spain, the youth unemployment rates were, respectively, in 2013, 59.2 percent and 56.4 percent, despite this being the ‘best-educated generation,’ with forty percent of young people in Spain having degrees, and thirty percent in Greece (Henley, 2013, np.). ‘The graduate with no future’ can be seen as a subgenus of what Johanna Montgomerie (2010) has termed ‘generation debt’—encompassing those under thirty-five, whose entire working life has coincided with the era of financialisation, for whom access to credit is the most important factor determining their ability to participate in society. The younger you are, the greater the problems you may face. As put by Mason (2012, p. 67),

All across the developed world, the generation that leaves university in the 2010s will have to work longer because the guarantee of a comfortable income in retirement can no longer be met, either by private investment or the welfare state. Their disposable income will fall, because the financialisation of public services demands a clutch of new debt repayments that eat into salaries: student loan repayments will be higher, private health insurance costs will rise, pension top-up payment will be demanded. They will face higher interest rates on home loans for decades, due to the financial crash. They will be burdened with the social costs of looking after the ageing baby boomers, plus the economic costs of energy depletion and climate change.

No wonder ‘graduates with no future’ were present in large numbers in the protests of 2011 (ibid, pp. 70-73). Neoliberalism and the financialisation of the economy has had the effect of etching a deep generational divide within developed countries. This is particularly the case for the middle classes. Baby boomers benefited from the Keynesian economy and welfare
state in their earlier life, and from free or relatively cheap education. Middle class baby
boomers also benefited from the real-estate booms fuelled by the speculative new economy.
Faced with diminishing prospects and a life spent under the gloomy horizon of perpetual debt,
‘the graduate with no future’ may, potentially, seek alternatives to the current political and
economic order.

Debt is an important motif here as, in charting the effects of financialisation and in particular
the widespread escalation of debt, it can be argued that not only are new objectively visible
categories arising—as captured in the notions of the ‘graduate-without-a-future’ or the ‘debt
generation’—but that there is also a profound subjective shift taking place (Calhoun, 2011, p.
22). Recalling Lazzarato’s (2012, pp. 46-47) arguments from Chapter Three, the deepening
levels of debt can be seen as a means by which capital is able to dispossess the public of its
future (see, Beradi, 2011, for more on this theme). Through drawing on Foucault’s work
around biopolitics and governmentality, Lazzarato (2012, p. 11) argues that

...debt represents an economic relationship inseparable from the production of the debtor
subject and his “morality”. The debt economy combines “work of the self” and labour, in its
classic sense, such that “ethics” and economics function conjointly. The modern notion of
“economy” covers both economic production and the production of subjectivity.

The relationship of the individual to self, and to others, is profoundly conditioned by the
economic structures in which they are situated. The financialisation of society, and the
primacy of debtor-creditor relations, has led to the creation of what Lazzarato terms the
‘indebted man’ [sic]. He argues that ‘debt/money functions by constituting a legal, economic,
and moral subject (creditor and debtor)’. This creates a powerful vector for subjectivation,
presenting ‘a mechanism for the production of individual and collective subjectivity’ (ibid, p.
146). The debt-economy is anti-democratic—undermining already weak representative
institutions—so that choices effecting whole peoples are conducted by ‘an oligarchy, a
plutocracy, and an aristocracy’ (ibid, p. 158-59). With the financial crisis ‘citizens were
excluded from evaluation, choice, and decision-making, which was taken over by the experts
(financiers, bankers, politicians, the IMF) whose actions and theories are at the root of the
crisis’ (ibid, p. 145). It is within such a matrix of spiralling debt, compounded by diminishing
employment opportunities and the whittling away of public amenities under austerity, that
the indignation driving the protest movements of 2011 took root.

Hardt and Negri’s notion of the multitude encompasses our common productive capacity;
they ground the idea of the subject-able-to-resist within its positive capacities. Standing, on
the other hand, along with others who develop new sociological categories to encompass the
subjective impacts of the contemporary economy, provides a negatively grounded notion of
the ‘new dangerous class.’ In either case, the moment of positive affirmation must take place.
Standing notes that the precariat has yet to become a class-for-itself. While the conditions of
its becoming are negative, it possesses both negative and positive political potentialities. On
the one hand its political energies can be channelled into neo-fascist currents (Standing cites
the Tea Party as an example of this, although the Golden Dawn in Greece, or the Front
Nationale in France, better illustrate this tendency due to their overt xenophobia). Alternatively, the ‘good precariat’ may be represented by the fight for the redistribution of
securities (to be achieved, principally, through the fight for a ‘basic income’) and to curtail the
special privileges accorded to the elite, a project Standing labels ‘a politics of paradise.’
Indeed, some commentators have argued that Occupy provided the precariat with a chance
to find its voice and organise (Dellacioppa et al., 2013, p. 105).59 The claims Standing makes
for the ‘good precariat’ are, however, largely unsubstantiated (to attribute a political strategy
to a group that, as he acknowledges, is only a class-in-the-making is premature), but he points,
importantly, toward fruitful political possibilities for the precariat.

While this thesis is sympathetic to the spirit in which categories like ‘the multitude’ or ‘the
precariat’ are offered—as attempts to revise class-based politics in an a ‘post-class’ era—it is
more useful to retain a more classic Marxist notion of class. Arguments as to the inevitable
victory of the industrial working class have, rightfully, been jettisoned; and the critique
presented by new social movements provided vital correctives to class-based politics in the
twentieth century. Class is not a static category and, as seen in Chapter Three, it has been
subject to constant conceptual updates. The power of class as a category is the identification
of objective conditions—exploitative relations formed around the production, ownership and

59 Although, it should be noted, the only mention of this concept of the precariat in the Occupy sources
reviewed in this study was a passing reference to the term in an address to Occupy Wall Street given by Noam
Chomsky on the 26th of September 2011.
distribution of resources and privileged positions—that provide subjective vectors along which collective political projects can form. As Marx and Engels were well aware, in common with other socialists in the nineteenth century, it was only through encouraging identification with a category whose address is universal that a strong movement can form. Such a category does not, it needs to be emphasised, necessarily exclude others. It is possible, for example, to be simultaneously indigenous, lesbian, a punk, Buddhist and working class without any one identitarian marker cancelling others out. A notion such as the precariat is useful insofar as it signals such things as generational fault lines, but, as suggested by Breman (2013, p. 132), Standing does a disservice to the nearly two-thirds of people aged 25-34 who identify as working class (in part because they have precarious jobs) when he suggests they have ‘identity confusion.’ If notions such as the ‘precariat’ or ‘generation debt’ are to be deployed, then it is, arguably, more useful to do so as sub-categories of, rather than replacements for, ‘working-class.’

**Occupy as a Class-Building Movement?—the ‘99%, a concept too diffuse for building a movement**

Occupy, it has been argued, was a ‘class-building’ exercise (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 2011, np.) that actively sought to create, or redefine, ‘class-consciousness’ (Roth, 2011, p. 26, Knight, 2012, np., Dellacioppa et al., 2013, p. 409), as the movement highlighted the ‘class-division’ running through (and undermining) democratic institutions and practices (Dean, 2011, p. 92). The sense that class issues were back on the agenda was also recognised by its opponents. Consider then Presidential hopeful Rudy Giuliani’s (2011, np.) comments in 2011: ‘I believe that Barack Obama owns the Occupy Wall Street movement. It would not have happened... but for his class warfare.’ Warren E. Buffet (2011, np., see also , 2011, p. A21) also argued that contemporary US political and economic issues needed to be understood in terms of class: ‘[I]f there’s a class war, you know, we’re the ones that are waging it, the rich. And our soldiers are... the lobbyists.’ Occupy was positioned by some, then, as a movement that actively sought to bring ‘class-consciousness’ back onto the agenda, and was situated within a political environment riven with class-conflict. While these discussions of class are generally on a more abstract level, rather than posed in terms of the more concrete categories found within a Marxist discussion of class, they signal the importance of teasing out the question of class in relation to Occupy.
It is interesting to note, then, that Occupy tended to shy away from overtly designating itself as a ‘class-based’ social movement. Of the 423 sources reviewed in this study, only eleven explicitly referenced class—and not without a certain ambiguity. There was clarity on the question of class when discussing external groups. There was the ‘ruling’ or ‘political’ class which the movement opposed: ‘we are foremost here to oppose the growing power of the ruling class.’\(^{60}\) There was also a working class with which it could align itself: ‘the West Coast Port Blockade is crucial to achieving solidarity with the working class who live next to and work in the Port of Oakland.’\(^{61}\) Internally, however, things were not so clear. There were attempts to present the movement as spanning multiple positions: ‘you will see all walks of life supporting the movement, including middle class working families.’\(^{62}\) The movement even met with derision for being too middle class:

> All I see is middle-class privately educated people having fun attaching themselves to the latest ‘cause’ apparently on behalf of us working classes. Please. Tell us what you suggest to solve the problem other than growing dreads and wearing fair trade underwear.\(^{63}\)

Such critiques emphasise points made in the preceding chapter as to the danger of Occupy being treated as an end unto itself, of protest becoming a posture rather than a project. In a response to this comment, however, the important point was raised that the question of what constitutes the ‘working class’ today is hard to ascertain:

> about half of them [the occupiers] are unemployed i rek and wot does working class mean these days any way. doesnt it simply mean those who have to work for a living. we now only have 2 classes, the 1% and the 99%. britian is full of snide as it is, dont be devided at the starting post [sic].

Class was clearly an issue for many in relation to the Occupy movement, although the movement itself was reticent about identifying itself in such terms. It tended, instead, to portray itself as spanning different class positions. This ambiguous stance reflects, in no small

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60 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-30-2011/
61 https://occupyoakland.org/2011/12/this-saturday-massive-day-of-outreach-for-the-1212-port-blockade/
63 I have made an exception to my practice of excluding the comments section from my analysis in this instance, due to the interesting discrepancy whereby class is mentioned more than twice as many times in the comments section as opposed to the ‘official’ Occupy documents (11 percent of sources as opposed to 4.5 percent). http://occupylondon.org.uk/statement-regarding-resignation-of-reverend-canon-dr-giles-fraser/ (30/9/11)
part, the adoption of the ‘99%’ moniker. The corollary of this being that it was a movement of ‘everyone’ against the hyper elite ‘one percent.’

Occupy constantly referred to itself as ‘the movement of the 99 percent against the 1 percent.’ The ‘one percent’ (a category mentioned in seventeen percent of sources), as noted in the previous chapter, was considered to have a malign influence by converting their economic power into political power, the result being ‘collective impoverishment’. Their position was secured, it was argued, through their command of the police. Further, they were seen to be manipulating the global economy for their own ends at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the world’s population. Along with the charge of ‘collective impoverishment’ the one percent were indicted for profiting from pollution, war and the financial crisis.

The concept of the ‘one percent’ was first penned by former World Bank vice president Joseph Stiglitz. ‘The 1%,’ he wrote ‘were the ones creating the rules for how the political system works, and had turned it into one based on legalised bribery’ (as cited in Graeber, 2013, p. 38). The one percent (in the US) saw its real income nearly quadruple between 1979 and 2007, dwarfing the modest gains of the rest of the population (Krugman and Wells, 2012, p. 7). Spurred by Stiglitz’s argument, Graeber (2013, p. 40) suggested that Occupy position itself as the ‘99% movement’. If both the Democrats and the Republicans represented the interests of the one percent, he argued, then Occupy could ‘represent the 99% whose lives are essentially left out of the question’. Once deployed, the notion of the 99% became a powerful and frequently used rhetorical device (appearing in twenty-seven percent of sources)—with the term becoming a ‘national shorthand for income disparity’ that ‘dared listeners to pick a side’ (Rehmann, 2013, p. 7).

The rhetorical power behind Occupy being the ‘movement of the 99%’ lay, perhaps, not in the slogan’s ability to name a division, but rather in its expansiveness, as it spanned the diverse groups negatively impacted by the financial crisis. It offered a sense of collective strength and hope: ‘We are the 99%, and... our voice unites across gender and race, across

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64 See, for instance, http://occupywallst.org/archive/Dec-3-2011/
65 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-18-2011/
borders and continents as we call for equality and justice for all.” The dominant ideology today creates a mindset in which the problems faced by individuals are just that, ‘individual problems’—something that stems from faults within the individual and are thus to be seen as problems of their own making for which they are solely responsible. Previously problems (insofar as related to our material condition) would have commonly been attributed to external, structural features for which collective solutions could be found (thanks to explicitly working-class based political parties and unions). The marginalisation of structural explanations, and the absence of collective means for combating them, has contributed to a pervasive sense of alienation and powerlessness in recent history. To give people the sense of belonging to the ‘99%,’ a group exploited and dominated by the one percent, pointed toward other possibilities. A sense of this can be gleaned from the ‘we are the 99%’ Tumblr page. Consider, for example, the following quote:

I am a 20 year old college student [with] a 3.7 GPA. I work two jobs and still cannot afford to put any money into savings. I’ve been struggling with severe depression and anxiety for years but can no longer afford my medicine or a psychologist. I often have to choose between food or clean clothes. This isn’t how life should have to be. I am the 99%. 

An analysis of this Tumblr page revealed the two most frequently appearing words were ‘job’ and ‘debt’ (particularly student debt), with 26 being the median age of contributors (Konczal, 2011, np.). These images evoke the difficulties of getting by in the wake of the financial crisis, and contributors’ demographics signal the generational element at work within Occupy.

When considering this generational aspect it quickly becomes apparent that the movement of the ‘99%’ was not representative, necessarily, of the population as a whole. As argued by David Runciman (2012, pp. 7-9) the notion of the ‘99%’ is too diffuse; it refers to a body of people too vast to ever agree on anything; it offers, therefore, a ‘false promise’ of unity. That one percent of the population has been able to garner an increasingly larger share of the wealth does not imply the other ‘99%’ will be able to unite around this stark economic fact. While it is a powerful rhetorical device, the ‘99%’ is arguably too indistinct as a conceptual category to offer much towards an understanding of what Occupy’s actual composition was.

68 http://wearethe99percent.tumblr.com/post/11464256889 (10/1/11), emphasis in original
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Is it more useful to understand Occupy as a *generational movement masquerading as a mass-popular one*?

Cordero-Guzman’s (2011, p. 4) survey of visitors to Occupy Wall Street’s website found 64.2 percent of respondents were under 35 years of age (1.9 percent were under 18, 24.4 percent were aged 18-24 and 37.9 percent were in the 25-34 age bracket). That this was an online survey may have skewed the sample somewhat towards a younger demographic, but considering the high levels of Internet penetration and usage in the US—trending toward a hundred percent (Pew, 2013, np.)—it is safe to assume the sample is broadly representative of the movement. Cordero-Guzman’s (2011, p. 7) survey found 26.7 percent of respondents were currently studying and the movement as a whole was highly educated: ‘27.4% [of respondents] have some college (but no degree), 35% have a college degree, 8.2% have some graduate school (but no degree), and close to 21.5% have a graduate school degree’ (ibid, p. 2). Considering the high number of younger participants in the movement, and the levels of current or prior engagement with higher education, it comes as no surprise that the movement grappled with issues pertaining to youth and students. Of the sources drawn upon for my own research, 8.3 percent specifically refer to youth and 17.3 percent to students. As noted by Todd Gitlin (2012, np., see also Mitchell, 2011), the early profile of Occupy was of a movement largely composed of students and financially indebted youth.

The apathy of youth is often included in the catalogue of ills besetting democracy (see Loader, 2007). Only one such lament was found in the Occupy sources reviewed for this study.\(^{69}\) As shown in Cordero-Guzman’s (2011, p. 3) survey, Occupy was a youthful movement. (Considering that only 7.2 percent of participants were in the 55-64 age bracket it is, perhaps, the apathy of older generations that is a greater problem!). This suggests youth are not apathetic as such, but are sceptical as to what can be achieved through engagement within established political institutions.\(^{70}\) Occupy was attractive to a youthful demographic because it was able to speak to their problems, and because it offered different forms of political engagement and contestation. Occupy actively sought to capture and foster youth


\(^{70}\) Such a situation could be seen to foster a vicious cycle. Youth are considered to have no interest in mainstream liberal political institutions. In response politicians are less likely to develop policy for, or seek the approval of, youth, which, in turn, leads to further disengagement from this cohort.
engagement. The majority of sources referring to ‘youth’ (21 of 35 sources) concerned the movement’s internal activities—such as youth working groups or assemblies.  

With youth an active force in Occupy, and with the majority of participants having some form of higher education, student-related issues were also very visible within the movement. Students were referred to as active members of Occupy (as noted in 25 of the 73 sources in which students were mentioned), but more commonly as actors external to the movement (41 of 73 sources), with Occupy often promoting upcoming student actions. Through highlighting the actions of students outside the auspices of Occupy, the movement was able to forge links with student groups and to highlight a wider web of resistance. Economic issues affecting students—such as education cuts—were also addressed by Occupy.

The dominant student-related issue raised was that of student debt, which was positioned as just one more instance of the damage the economic system has brought to bear on peoples’ lives. Occupy tended to avoid narrowing its claims to those of its core youth constituency, however. Instead the view offered was always a wider systemic one where multiple groups were being disadvantaged: ‘Family farmers are struggling, students face mounting debt and fewer good jobs, and household incomes are plummeting.’ Fighting student debt was tied to a campaign against debt more generally. Occupy Wall Street, for instance, listed one of its achievements as having ‘helped homeowners win easier terms on mortgage debt and college grads on student debt.’ Occupy Oakland was particularly radical on the issue of student debt. In a gesture that evoked the burning of draft cards in opposition to the Vietnam War, Occupy Oakland called for protestors to burn student loan letters. Such fights signal resistance to the notion that the finance industry can own the debtor’s future; a future that, if the logics currently at work in the economy are not challenged, is one of diminishing prospects in which many graduates will fail to even meet the interest payments on their loans. Through focussing on issues such as student debt, Occupy developed a mode of address that related issues pertaining to a particular group (as based on such qualifiers as age, ethnicity or

71 See, for example, http://occupylondon.org.uk/ga-minutes-7pm-monday-14th-november-2011/
72 See, for example, http://occupylondon.org.uk/ga-minutes-7pm-thursday-26th-november-2011/
73 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-16-2011/
74 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Nov-4-2011/
75 https://occupyoakland.org/2011/12/ga-minutes-12-18-11/
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sexuality) to universal problems stemming from the contemporary economic system. Hence while Occupy may not have overtly framed itself as a ‘class-based’ movement it consistently behaved as if it were—insofar as ‘class’ is tied to economic status, and that a shared sense of economic exploitation can provide the grounds for the development of a sense of a common cause.

The pressing issues faced by youth and students—unemployment and debt—were, of course, experienced by many other groups. A shared sense of exploitation, of indignation at the structural violence wreaked upon individual lives by contemporary capitalism, has the potential to unite disparate groups into a class-for-itself. While coy about its use of the term ‘class’ Occupy continually drew attention to the economic factors that would delineate the contours of a class-to-come, perhaps even of a class-becoming. Through raising issues pertaining to unemployment (as seen in 6.9 percent of sources) and personal indebtedness (5.2 percent of sources) Occupy traced the lines along which disparate groups could find common cause. Such issues were consistently linked to wider structural factors, and were often mentioned in conjunction with the capitalist logic motivating the actions of banks and corporations (as noted in the preceding chapter).

The swelling numbers of unemployed provided a means to vividly portray the disastrous impacts of the financial crisis. The unemployed, if drawn into and empowered to act by the movement, presented a powerful subjective vector for sustained revolt: ‘We call for the unemployed to volunteer, to learn, to teach, to use what skills they have to support themselves as part of the revolting people as a community.’76 While the unemployed did not form a majority within the movement—70.7 percent of Occupiers responding to an early Occupy Wall Street survey were employed (50.4 percent full-time, 20.4 percent part-time), as opposed to 13.1 percent who were unemployed (Cordero-Guzman, 2011, p. 7)—they were identified as being organisationally important, not least because they were more able to maintain a sustained bodily presence within encampments.

The unemployed also embody the structural violence of the system. They are discards, bodies surplus to capital’s requirements, a warning of the perils of a flexible labour market in which there is no guarantee of—let alone mainstream political will for—full employment. The threat

76 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-14-2011/
of unemployment functions, then, as a prompt for the employed to support the movement: ‘The average 35-year-old in the 99% has a net worth less than $3,000.00. Occupiers ask the public to consider, “How long does it take an unemployed member of the 99% to go through $3,000.00 and become homeless?”’. High levels of unemployment, and the prospect of these levels rising, were seen as motivating factors for involvement with the movement. It is a threat, inherent to the structuring of the economic system, that could visit people’s lives at seemingly any moment and as such acts as a spur for collective action against the current economic-political system.

The burden of debt functioned in a similar manner. As noted above, indebtedness is seen as constituting one of the dominant subjective vectors within contemporary society. Following the financialisation of the economy personal indebtedness has become central to the functioning of capitalism. As with unemployment, the issue of debt offered a means for Occupy to align individual problems with systemic failings. The economic system was presented as operating on an abstract level that failed to take account of the damage it wrecked upon individual lives: ‘You are in debt to people who make money by moving money from place to place using computers.’

The negative impact of the economy on individuals—it turns them into ‘debt slaves’!—was at the forefront of participants’ conceptualisation of the current conjuncture. In a move consistent with Occupy’s approach to economic issues, individual problems were cast against a systemic backdrop. The system causes our problems, debt damages the majority and benefits ‘a wealthy elite’:

Since 2008 hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs and millions have experienced pain and hardship because of reckless financial practices. The debts incurred have been loaded onto almost every person in this country while a wealthy elite further enrich themselves.

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78 http://occupywallst.org/archive/Sep-14-2011/

79 http://occupylondon.org.uk/occupylsx-first-general-assembly/ (10/10/11)

80 http://occupylondon.org.uk/about/statements/statement-on-economy/ (6/12/11)
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Occupy highlighted the sharp class divisions cutting through contemporary society. It did this through tracing the lines between individual issues (such as indebtedness) and the systemic features of contemporary capitalism. In doing so Occupy drew together disparate social groups and pointed toward the possibility of a collective solution to individual problems. Occupy, while reticent about couching its actions in any overt class-based rhetoric, contributed towards the formation of class-to-come—or, rather, Occupy was the expression of a class-becoming. It drew attention to the structural violence of the system, in doing so it lay the grounds for connecting the objective dimensions of the economy—the dynamics of capital—with the subjective lived experiences of those suffering under austerity.

Any discussion of class-becoming today needs to consider the role of immigrants, especially sans papiers.81 Standing (2011, np.) considers immigrants, operating as they are within the context of flexible markets and porous borders, to be the ‘light infantry of global capitalism.’ Their movements have the net effect of driving down wages within developed countries. While this situation is a result of structural factors, migrant communities are often treated as convenient scapegoats for the economic hardships faced by workers (precarious or otherwise) within developed countries—a card often played by nationalist political parties (Worth, 2013, p. 73). Against such a negative rendering of immigrant communities, Badiou (2012b, pp. 92-95) considers such groups ‘to represent the whole of humanity’. Their status as the ‘inexistent’ of a given social configuration positions them as an example of ‘generic’ humanity, one devoid of identitarian markers (the ontological basis of Badiou’s arguments was unpacked in Chapter Four). Markers such as the ‘French people’ are state constructs that impose norms upon the population. Siding with precariously employed immigrants, and other inexistent groups, is then, argues Badiou, of great import for radical left organisations.

It is interesting, in light of such claims, to assess Occupy’s relation toward immigrant communities. Was a movement composed largely of ‘precarious’ youth able to align with this other constituency? The answer, unfortunately, appears to be no. ‘Immigrants’ only appeared in 1.9 percent of the sources reviewed—and in a number of these sources they were simply

81 ‘Immigrant,’ it is noted, is a very diverse category. Some are highly skilled, can secure high-paying jobs and are able to enjoy full social benefits. Others are low- or unskilled and are employed in low tier ‘cellar jobs’ within their destination country, often illegally and without papers. It is the latter exploited category of immigrants that is being considered here.
addressed as another minority group (along with people of colour and the LGBTQ community) whose situation needed to be considered in Occupy’s claims-making. When immigrant issues were directly addressed, it was commonly within the rubric of their being part of the 99%:

Immigrants are part of the 99% and on December 18th we will march with the Occupy Wall Street movement to demand immigrant justice including putting an end to wage theft, and stopping detentions and deportations of our beloved community members.... As the Occupy movement goes global we also recognize the destructive role that these corporations play in exploiting resources and labor in our home countries which forces millions to migrate.82

Consistent with Occupy’s claims-making, the plight of this group was situated within the wider structural effects of the economy.

When making such connections Occupy was breaking vital ground in the attempt to bring together people of diverse backgrounds, with it situating immigrant groups alongside indebted students, for example. The overly diffuse notion of the ‘99%’ arguably deprived this common ground of its potency, however. The destitute and marginalised were placed on an equal footing with the affluent two-income middle-class family who had to rein in their discretionary spending to ‘ride out’ the financial crisis. Such a comprehensive category makes sense as part of a push to build a properly populist movement (of the type discussed in relation to Laclau in Chapter Four) that aims to make inroads into electoral politics, but it proved unsuitable for advancing the strategy that Occupy ultimately chose (as discussed in the previous chapter).

Efforts were made to engage immigrant communities in the movement. Occupy Wall Street, for instance, spurred the formation of an Immigrant Worker Justice Working Group, which immigrant workers have since credited with having empowered them to organise and take effective action (Knight, 2012, online). An uncertainty remains, however, as to what might have been achieved had active alliances between the most disadvantaged groups been pursued by Occupy rather than the broad approach that was followed. The ability of future economically motivated social movements to include immigrant workers, students, the

82http://occupywallst.org/archive/Dec-16-2011/
unemployed, and the precariously employed will bolster the chances for a more successful form of counter politics.

**Tensions within the 99%—the difficulties of managing diversity in dispersed structures**

Occupy sought to build a wide-ranging inclusive movement that was underpinned by the notion that ‘99%’ of the world’s population shared similar economic concerns. Occupy’s commitment to radical inclusivity proved problematic on three fronts, however. First, the movement struggled to manage issues of internal diversity—highlighting the longstanding problems economically-focused social movements face in incorporating diverse groups. While leading activists and theorists may acknowledge the equal importance of recognition and redistribution (to borrow Nancy Fraser’s terminology), the ‘rank and file’ may still fall short. Second, the openness of encampments to all comers led to practical problems that sapped the movement’s energy—the violence capitalism wreaks on the most disadvantaged sections of society came to bear on the camps’ fragile infrastructure. Third is the question of violence—especially in relation to the actions of the Black Bloc.

The primary problem engendered by commitment to radical inclusivity arose from Occupy’s attempts to include claims made on behalf of specific groups and identities—particularly in relation to gender, sexuality and ethnicity (see table 3). Despite the best of intentions, internal tensions arose in relation to these groups.

**Table Three: Claims made on behalf of specific groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups for whom specific claims are made/or for whom specific areas of concern are identified</th>
<th>Number of sources referring to this group</th>
<th>Ratio of appearance (across 423 sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People of Colour and Indigenous issues</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s issues</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ rights</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Occupy was accused of not taking feminism seriously (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 282) and of giving women’s issues short shrift (anon., 2012, p. 443). The extent to which such claims
can be seen as applicable to the movement as a whole, as opposed to experiences within particular camps, is outside this study’s scope. Eight and a half percent of sources reviewed here directly addressed women. Tellingly, over half of these (20 of 36 sources) were related to internal issues, particularly those of female safety. For instance, Occupy Melbourne reported women were ‘being made to feel uncomfortable or [were being] harassed by some of the male members of OM’—with the result that female participation dwindled.\(^{83}\) Beyond concerns for personal safety, there was also a sense—in the early days at least—that women’s voices were not heard in Occupy. Women’s participation in GAs, it was noted in some camps, waned over time (Smith and Glidden, 2012, p. 290). Women also struggled to be heard outside the movement: ‘Ten people [from Occupy Wall Street] were interviewed for news coverage. Only one of them was a woman. The 99% are not 90% men.’\(^{84}\) Women’s objections that they were being pushed into the background recall similar issues besetting left social movements in the 1960s and ‘70s—when women were typically expected to type up the minutes and make cups of tea. Those issues contributed, in no small part, to the rise of second wave feminism and the splintering of many movements along gender lines. (for a fuller discussion of this point see Taylor, 2008). The extent to which a similar internal fracturing might occur within contemporary social movements remains to be seen, but is evidently possible if such issues are not addressed.

Occupy did seek to explicitly address issues relating to women. As with other areas confronted by the movement, however, this was unpacked along predominantly economic lines. For instance: ‘We oppose the unfair cuts and regressive taxes, currently inflicted on those vulnerable groups least able to bear the burden. Women especially pick up the pieces, often through unwaged work.’\(^{85}\) That externally directed claims made on behalf of women were outnumbered by discussions taking place within the movement—concerning women’s concerns with safety and voicelessness—indicates that Occupy struggled, in practice, to deal with issues of gender equality.

Similar trends can be seen in issues pertaining to the LGBTQ community, which only appear in 3.1 percent of sources. Again, many of these sources were concerned with problems faced

\(^{83}\) [http://occupymelbourne.org/GA-minutes/30-11-11](http://occupymelbourne.org/GA-minutes/30-11-11)  
by this group within encampments.\textsuperscript{86} That few, if any, specific claims were put forward on behalf of the LGBTQ community—and that they were typically grouped alongside claims concerning women—indicates Occupy was not advancing ‘identity politics’ in any major way.

Occupy also struggled when addressing issues relating to ethnic groups and people of colour (as present in 9 percent of sources). One activist, for example, spoke of having to fight hard to ensure that Occupy Wall Street’s founding document acknowledged racism as an ongoing problem within the US (see Maharawal, 2011). Other camps faced similar problems, with frequent incidents of participants engaging in unreflective racist behaviour (Juris et al., 2013, p. 437). Regarding Occupy’s relations to indigenous peoples, Adam J. Barker (2012, pp. 329-30) argues Occupy (at least within the US context) failed to address the legacy of colonialism and presumptuously assumed indigenous issues were commensurate with those of the ‘99%.’

Perhaps part of the problem here is Occupy’s tendency to approach all social problems as principally economic by nature. Occupy London, for instance, held a workshop which aimed to develop ‘practical solutions to overcoming the continuing oppression that is felt by people of colour or ethnic difference,’ which involved ‘looking at the history of oppression, white privilege and cultural oppression through economic globalisation.’\textsuperscript{87} Through providing economic explanations for indigenous problems, or issues of racism, Occupy sought to unite the vast body of the 99% on an economic ground from which they could combat the one percent. As tensions built within the movement, and the voices of women, members of the LGBTQ community, people of colour and indigenous people fought to be heard, Occupy sought to transform itself internally.

The ways in which issues affecting indigenous peoples or people of colour varied between camps, reflected the historic circumstances of different states. The very term ‘occupation’ proved problematic in some circumstances, with indigenous activists working to raise consciousness about ‘the long history of violent occupation that has been integral to Western culture’ (Smith, 2012, p. 376). Occupy Melbourne, for example, sought to foster a culture in which participants’ assumptions concerning colonialism and racism were constantly challenged:

\textsuperscript{86} See, for instance, https://occupyoakland.org/2011/10/ga-minutes-10-19-11/
We are here because we want a genuine democracy, a humane economy, justice. We cannot achieve these goals while the crimes of colonisation continue. An end to colonial activity is central to our aims. A racist society has socialised us all into racism. We will strive to recognise and respond to racist behaviours in our occupation of Melbourne and we invite criticism of our actions; we want to be better.  

‘Progressive stacks’ were developed as a practical means of addressing racism within the movement, and of promoting a movement culture able to include and respond to critique. Stacks worked in the following manner: ‘Speakers may be requested to drop down on the speakers list so that voices that are marginalised in mainstream society (for example, the voices of people of colour, women, disabled people, LGBTI people) or that have been less heard in GAs are prioritised.’ Another practical means of addressing issues pertaining to particular groups, and of encouraging greater diversity, was to form specific working groups. While the movement was critiqued for falling short, at times, in its ability to meaningfully include diversity, the openness and flexibility of its (minimal) organisational structure allowed it to respond to such problems. It is unfortunate, however, that the very nature of these organisational structures meant they were not able to persist through time and continue to develop a means of marrying diversity to an universalisable platform of economic critique.

At issue here, in part, was the energy the movement had to expend in dealing with the problems arising from its emphasis on radical inclusivity. One of the greatest internal problems faced by Occupy concerned the place of the homeless and those with drug and alcohol problems. It was here that the difficulty of sustaining an open movement of the ‘99%’ approached the limits of the possible. The plight of the homeless highlighted many of the social problems Occupy was seeking to redress—inhabiting, as they do, one of the lowest positions (materially speaking) within the 99%. The homeless presented problems for the movement. It is not uncommon for homeless people to be suffering from mental health issues and/or problems with alcohol and drug addiction, issues Occupy encampments were ill-

89 http://occupymelbourne.org/GA-minutes/1-11-11/
90 See, for instance, http://occupywallst.org/archive/Nov-1-2011/
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equipped to deal with (Epstein, 2012, p. 70, see also Smith et al., 2012, p. 365). Further, to revert to Mancur Olson’s terminology, the homeless in some instances confronted Occupy with a ‘free rider’ problem—whereby the proximity of the camps to areas customarily used by the homeless saw Occupy’s resources being drawn upon without active engagement with the movement being offered in return.

The homeless pushed Occupy’s commitment to inclusivity to the limit. As noted by observers of Occupy El Paso:

The initial conflict between the homeless and the occupiers is ironic because the homeless are at the bottom, but part of the 99%. If the homeless were not allowed to coexist with the Occupiers, then many Occupiers expressed the movement was being like the 1% by imposing their priorities over a less powerful group. The contradiction seemed to be that the Occupiers were standing against social inequalities, but among their earliest acts was to push the poorest of the poor out. (Smith et al., 2012, p. 364)

The dilemma posed by radical inclusiveness was faced by most Occupy camps. As noted by a participant in an unnamed UK encampment:

We didn’t want to exclude people, but this did make life difficult. The problem wasn’t with the people, it was with some of the behaviours. Little old grannies were stopping by to wish us luck and give us blankets and cake, and then getting abused by aggressive drunks clutching cans at 10am. This wasn’t helpful. How to balance being inclusive to messed-up alcoholics, against being inclusive to grannies? You can’t, in practice, be inclusive to everyone. (Anonymous, 2012, p. 443)

This difficulty presented to the movement by the homeless and people with substance abuse issues forced Occupy to confront the limits of what was possible. It was incredibly difficult to contain diverse groupings of people, some of whom had special needs, within a relatively unstructured environment over an extended period of time.

In trying to accommodate the most marginalised and maligned members of society—which invariably, in the short term at least, introduces an element of danger to the movement—the more ‘respectable’ parts of the movement chose to withdraw to a ‘safer’ distance. Further, the issues of safety raised by women discussed above were tied, in part, to the presence of
highly marginalised groups within the encampments. These problems illustrated the extent to which the construction of an ideal-society-in-minutiae within encampments would be hampered internally by those who bear the physical and psychological scars of the current system’s violence (Schein, 2012, p. 338). Occupy encampments faced the difficult decision to either exclude people from marginalised groups, and thus recant the ideal of inclusiveness, or provide the basic necessities of life to the most disadvantaged—even though they may not be actively participating in the movement—and thus place the movement’s resources under strain. There are also reported instances of the police sending homeless people to Occupy encampments (Herring and Glük, 2011, p. 164)—this may be because the police genuinely felt Occupy could assist such people, but considering the violence suffered by Occupy at the hands of the police it can plausibly be argued it was a deliberate tactic to place the encampments under strain. Further, the emphasis on radical inclusivity can be seen as leaving the movement ‘vulnerable to infiltrators hired by corporations and the state’ who were able to sway agendas (Hickel, 2012, np.). These issues delineated the outer limits of what was possible for Occupy—future movements will need to have contingency plans in place to ensure both safety and inclusiveness.91

The third manner in which radical inclusivity within the movement became problematic concerns the issue of violence—in particular the tensions that built up around the presence of Black Bloc actions, which were justified by some under the rubric of ‘diversity of tactics.’ As Black Blocs tend to be derogated both within mainstream media and sections of the left, it is useful to first consider what these groups are before discussing the problems they introduced to Occupy. The Black Bloc has its origin in the German autonomous movement of the early 1980s (Dupuis-Déri, 2013, p. 24), but became recognised globally following the Seattle protests in 1999 (ibid, p. 32, see also , Graeber, 2013, pp. 61-62). Francis Dupuis-Déri (2013, p. 41) considers Black Blocs to embody key anarchist principles, as ‘embodied in procedures and practices such as general assemblies and horizontal, non-hierarchical

91 Despite the contention, the sources reviewed for this study were mostly positive in relation to homelessness. Of the 43 sources reviewed (10.2 percent of the overall sample) only three noted anything negative concerning the conduct of homeless people. That such a small number of sources released by Occupy expressed discontent with the issue of homeless people indicates, perhaps, that while there were various negative issues arising from the presence of homeless people, acknowledging these problems in public was seen as damaging as it problematized the movement’s image of radical inclusiveness.
structures.’ It is, he argues (ibid, pp. 2-3), ‘a tactic... a way of behaving in street protests’—sometimes violent, but often also just a non-violent presence within marches. As the most militant and potentially violent element of a protest, one that is often willing to break the law to further the aims of the demonstration, Black Blocs risk the condemnation of fellow protestors as well as of the police and public. It is important to not associate the Black Bloc tactic as belonging to a specific group—Black Blocs are ‘ad hoc assemblages of individuals or affinity groups that last for the duration of a march or rally... a tactic that consists in forming a mobile bloc in which individuals retain their anonymity thanks in part to their masks and head-to-toe black clothing.’ Their purpose is to present a ‘radical critique of the economic and political system’—they are ‘a huge black flag made up of living bodies, flying in the heart of a demonstration.’

Demographically, Black Blocs tend to be composed overwhelmingly of young, white males (ibid, p. 35). Not surprisingly, then, Black Blocs, with their frequent recourse to violence, are often derided as expressions of macho ‘hyper-masculinity’ (see, for instance, Hedges, 2012a, np.). Such claims should be tempered, however; not just because of the essentialist notion of gender they contain (“men are from Mars, women from Venus”), but also because Dupuis-Déri’s (2013, pp. 104-112) research reveals instances where women have participated in large numbers within Black Blocs, and even instances of women-only blocs.

Actions associated with Occupy Oakland brought discussions of the Black Bloc into the wider Occupy movement. The first instance was on November 2nd 2011, when the windows of a number of banks, a Whole Foods Market, and the office of the president of the University of California were smashed (Dupuis-Déri, 2013, p. 8, see also , Gitlin, 2012, np.). It was the actions of the Black Bloc, in confrontations with police, during Occupy Oakland’s attempts to occupy a vacant convention centre on 28 January 2012, that really stimulated debate within the movement. Those actions precipitated a number of solidarity marches (some of which also turned violent) by other Occupy encampments the following day (Schneider, 2013, p. 124).

Particularly controversial on this front was Chris Hedges’ (2012a, np.) article ‘Black Bloc: The Cancer in Occupy’, which, as is clear from the title, took a dim view of the Black Bloc. The actions of the Black Bloc in Oakland were, he argued, ‘a gift from heaven to the security and
surveillance state,’ as they justified the use of violence by the police and could be used to sway public opinion away from support of the movement. The earlier spectacle of police attacking nonviolent protestors had, paradoxically, been a boon for the movement, he argued, as it had won ‘the hearts and minds of the wider public and those within the structures of power (including the police) who are possessed of a conscience’. Commentators had noted previously that police brutality, such as that witnessed during the ‘Battle of Brooklyn Bridge’, had provided massive PR boosts for Occupy (see, for instance, Bunch, 2011). Violent actions from the Black Bloc were seen to undermine the moral high ground Occupy had previously held (Hedges, 2012, np.).

Black Bloc participants, Hedges assets, ‘detest those of us on the organised left and seek, quite consciously, to take away our tools of empowerment.’ The autonomy such groups claim for themselves was considered to flout the democratic norms of Occupy: ‘They hear only their own voices. They heed only their own thoughts. They believe only their own clichés. And this makes them not only deeply intolerant but stupid. … They can only be obstructionist.’ Gitlin (2012, np.) was similarly scathing in his assessment. Since Black Bloc groups tend to attach themselves to already existing movements, he argues, they should be regarded ‘as parasites in the strict sense, for they cannot thrive except on the bodies of larger hosts.’

Hedges (2012, np.) was also critical of the ‘thought-terminating cliché of “diversity of tactics”.’ This concept developed out of the controversy surrounding the Black Bloc following the Seattle protests of 1999 where, in the ‘absence of an enforceable statement of non-violence, diversity of tactics filled in as a way to promote solidarity despite tactical differences’ (Bray, 2014, p. 223)—a reflection of the networking logic underpinning the movement (Juris, 2005b, p. 413). Advocates of the Black Bloc approach support it because, Dupuis-Déri (2013, p. 126) argues, they tend to ‘view a social movement as heterogeneous, as a movement of movements, and hold that the multitude cannot be “represented”.’ Thus, the argument runs, no one section of the movement can be suborned to a majority viewpoint. It is a way of letting multiple groups with different agendas coexist (Bray, 2014, p. 226).

This becomes very problematic, as seen with Occupy, when the majority of participants consider the movement to be non-violent. (To give some sense of the prevalence of this attitude, over twenty percent of the sources reviewed asserted this position). Nathan
Schneider (2013, p. 125), in his ethnographic research on Occupy Wall Street, noted the problems this caused within the encampment. Members of the Direct Action Working Group, who favoured diversity of tactics (and for which they had GA-passed guidelines), derided the ‘peace police’ in the movement who tried to control others’ behaviour; they insisted that ‘nonviolent discipline was... not only oppressive of one’s comrades in general but probably sexist and racist as well.’ As Mark Bray (2014, p. 225) notes, there can be a tendency among some activists to advocate diversity of tactics ‘as a badge of honour signifying their revolutionary identity.’ Needless to say, such an attitude can be damaging to a movement’s ability to develop a coherent strategy and form a collective subject. As Schneider (2013, p. 123) notes: ‘although diversity of tactics allows us to coexist, we mustn’t limit ourselves to a tacit acceptance of inept or counterproductive tactics in the absence of larger strategic perspectives.’

While the pursuit of Black Bloc tactics in Occupy worked against the wider movement’s commitment to non-violence, the tactic should not necessarily be discarded in and of itself. In some instances there may be strong local reasons for adopting such a tactic. Graeber (2013, p. 209), for instance, argues that this tactic made sense in Oakland since the city had been marked by ‘decades of extreme police brutality’. Violence against police is justified in demonstrations in this instance, the argument runs, since the police will visit violence upon protestors in any case. There may be opportunities to snatch minor victories through the use of force, and—because of the history of the area—large sections of the community will be sympathetic to such actions. Bray (2014, pp. 245-246) makes a similar observation, that ‘the black bloc should be used when it makes sense socially and strategically’—and in the case of Oakland it made sense, he argues, as this militant action was situated ‘in relation to the needs of the community.’ The problem is, he notes, that ‘the black blocs often don’t work in the United States.’ Calling upon his own experiences in Black Blocs, he observes that: ‘As I participated in more and more of them over the years, it became increasingly clear that they rarely accomplished anything, even on a symbolic level. What was once a surprise tactic became very predictable and containable.’

The spontaneous nature of a movement such as Occupy meant it started without clear guidelines for constructively engaging minorities. The emphasis upon radical inclusivity also led to groups and individuals being able to operate under the name of Occupy, or within
encampments, in ways that cut across some of the core values of the movement, or which threatened the safety of people within some encampments. This reflects some of the same organisational issues faced previously by the ‘movement of movements,’ and these problems will persist as long as the radical left shies from the task of building new lasting organisational forms. The three tensions found within Occupy, as listed above, showcase the difficulties that will bedevil social movements as long as they seek to crowd-source solutions to problems that need not have occurred in the first place, as it was glaringly obvious to anyone who has studied the history of social movements that these issues would occur. In the absence of enduring structures there is no institutionalised memory able to anticipate these avoidable issues before they occur, the result being an endless cycle of recurring problems.

Summary—a missed opportunity on the path to class consciousness
Despite the claims of some commentators Occupy does not appear to have been a ‘class-building exercise’, although it did highlight the need for the formation of a collective subject capable of sustaining protracted challenges to the status quo. While some, such as Hardt and Negri and Standing, have sought to reconceptualise the terms on which class should be understood, the basic categories of Marxist class analysis were found, ultimately, to persist as the most useful through which to conceptualise the antagonisms inherent to capitalism. Within this conceptual apparatus, however, it was acknowledged that an emphasis upon such factors as indebtedness and generational fault lines can offer a powerful means of focusing antagonism—and are thus of strategic value for organisation.

Rather than effectively develop such vectors Occupy positioned itself as the movement of the ‘99%’—a useful designation for highlighting the structural inequality at play within contemporary capitalism, but ultimately too diffuse a category for meaningful and enduring subjective identification with a movement. Further, Occupy struggled to manage its internal heterogeneity—the loose consensus-based approach pursued by the movement led to some difficulties in effectively formulating, early on, practices able to effectively engage minority and feminist insights. Radical inclusivity also led to elements entering the movement that were perceived by some as a threat to safety. Insistence on a ‘diversity of tactics’ saw tension around the presence of Black Blocs in some encampments.
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The movement’s continued insistence upon the economic basis of the problems shared by the diverse range of participants was an important development—one that aimed toward universal outcomes to be achieved through deep structural change. As radicals in the nineteenth century were all too aware, however, a movement able to realise such change needs to develop a collective identity if it is to persist and prosper—hence the value of fostering class consciousness. Such an identity needs to be able to clearly identify the divisions that cut through society, and the social groups who benefit from or suffer from these divisions. While the ‘99%’ may have named a division, it was too broad a category to effectively contribute toward the foundation of an enduring collective identity. While Occupy may have failed to overtly foster a collective identity through which it could endure, the next chapter turns to considerations of the movement’s spatial dimension to enquire whether the key to forming a lasting movement might be found there.
Some would argue the formation of a collective subject able to carry and sustain an enduring campaign of social change is no longer an issue worth considering. Instead, it is held, the same technologies that facilitate high-speed global finance, allow us to shop comfortably from home and to share videos of cute kittens on social networking sites, are also capable of providing a technological fix for ailing democracies. Cyber-optimists believe new media, as an actor in its own right, will spread and rejuvenate democracy. For those holding such a position the crucial spatial dimension of contemporary social movements is that of cyberspace.

In what follows it will be argued that new media is, indeed, of vital importance for social movements today, but any enthusiasm as to its potential needs to be tempered with a healthy dose of cyber-scepticism. Further, against those who hold that the organisational form of movements today is directly correlated to their use of new media, it is argued here that the influence of anarchism is, perhaps, more significant.
The analysis of Occupy unpacked in the pages that follow finds the movement was more analogue than digital. Face-to-face encounters, the occupation of physical space, ‘classic’ protest tactics, reclaiming the city—such were the dominant themes within Occupy. The movement was more about cityscapes than it was cyberspace, as important as new technology was for the wider diffusion of the movement.

**Cyber-Optimism—searching for a technical fix to the crisis of democracy**

The Internet, and other forms of new media, have been credited with the capacity to reverse declining trends of political/civic participation (Dahlgren, 2007, p. 67)—recruiting younger people (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008, p. 262, Loader et al., 2014, p. 143) and those previously excluded from participation (Ester and Vinken, 2003, p. 672, Kahn and Kellner, 2007, p. 18, Vromen, 2007, p. 49). Faith in the ability of the Internet to rejuvenate political participation has been longstanding. Early proponents claimed that ‘with a PC and a modem as his or her new mouthpiece, the citizen of the twenty-first century will enjoy a democracy simply inconceivable to earlier generations of the disenfranchised and oppressed’ (Hirschkop, 1998, p. 208, see also Negroponte, 1995, Rheingold, 1993). Some have argued this will take place through improved practices and levels of participation within existing political institutions, with more direct forms of representation between elected leaders and their constituencies (2007, p. 362, Coleman, 2004, p. 20). Or even that entirely new extra-parliamentary democratic institutions and modes of engagement will come into being (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001, p. 9, Dahlgren, 2007, p. 57).

Central to the Internet’s role in facilitating new democratic potentialities, some optimists have argued, is the manner in which it allows individuals to bypass the mainstream media’s choice of what is considered newsworthy (Tumber, 2001, p. 30, Bennett, 2004, p. 144, Zúniga, 2008, pp. 8-9). Blogging was hailed ‘revolutionary’ for this reason (Ringmar, 2007, p. 130). The formation of Indymedia centres as a part of the global justice movement was also considered a major breakthrough. Many of its technical developers were involved with the open source movement, and its creation was seen as part of a burgeoning ‘communication commons’, one with relative autonomy from corporate and state media (Kidd, 2003, p. 51) whose users tended to perceive themselves as belonging to an ‘alternative-public’ (Milioni, 2009, p. 423). Although the corollary of this is that it is usually ‘only the resolute, determined and online literate researchers’ who tend to find such alternative media sources (Lewis, 2008, p. 206).
The promise of ‘networks’ is a recurring feature within this literature. As argued by Mario Diani (2001, p. 117) a defining feature of social movements is their ‘networks of informal relationships between a multiplicity of individuals and organisations.’ This feature of movements is considered analogous to the Internet (Castells, 2005, p. 154, Fenton, 2008, p. 40)—with a dialectical relationship unfolding between the two. Horizontally organised, flexible and open, the supposedly democratic form of the Internet is considered to have normative effects upon movements, fostering new forms of organisation (Lim, 2006, pp. 103-04, Della Porta, 2011, p. 811, Kavada, 2009, p. 819, Bennet and Segerberg, 2013, p. 8). As Hardt and Negri have argued:

The networks of information, communication, and cooperation... begin to define the new guerrilla movements. Not only do the movements employ technologies such as the Internet as organising tools, they also begin to adopt these technologies as models for their own organisational structures. (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 82)

Further, these new movements are seen to operate free from the constraints of national borders and place (Sassen, 2007, pp. 349-50). The global justice movement (discussed in Chapter Two) is considered the paradigmatic example of such a movement (van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004, p. 121, Fuchs, 2008, p. 278, Zivkovic and Hogan, 2008, p. 187, Castells, 2009, p. 342, Juris, 2005a, p. 206). W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2013, p. 42), drawing on Latour’s actor-network theory, go so far as to argue that networking technologies have become ‘agents’ in their own right—while traditional forms of collective action were driven by organisations (such as a party) the rise of ‘connective action’ (their term for digitally networked social movements) means the network itself is the organising agent (ibid, pp. 33-34).

Another important theme within this cyber-optimist literature is the notion that, through connecting people into vast networks, the Internet can reverse trends of social atomisation. Yes, individualism persists, argues Castells (2009, p. 55), but today it is a ‘networked individualism’—one which has the potential to contest the power embedded within mass-media (recall the discussion in Chapter Two, as to the importance for Castells of ‘challenging codes’). Rather than prompting a withdrawal into the isolation of virtual reality, he argues,
the Internet promotes an expansion of sociability. Networked individualism is a culture, not an organisational form. It starts with the ‘values and projects of the individual but builds a system of exchange with other individuals’; it can inspire ‘project orientated social movements’ (ibid, p. 362). As others have argued, younger people are becoming politically engaged, via the Internet, with the personalisation of political issues within ‘lifestyle narratives’ (Gerodimos, 2008, p. 984, Kotilainen and Rantala, 2009, p. 660, Bennet and Segerberg, 2013, pp. 52). Networked communication, from this optimistic perspective, facilitates new movement forms and promotes a participatory culture that productively links individuals together.

W. Lance Bennett (2003, p. 144) argues along similar lines, holding that ‘there appears to be a relationship between communication practices and the evolution of democracy itself.’ We are moving toward a ‘media democracy’, one supposedly marked by the shift from passive to active forms of media consumption. This shift is not to be reduced to technological processes; rather, it correlates to the rise of a participatory culture. The work of Pierre Lévy (1997, pp. 50-55) is drawn upon here, particularly the notion that society is becoming increasingly organised around ‘collective knowledge.’ ‘Molar society’—as coagulated within rigid vertically structured institutions, bureaucracies and nation-states—is giving way to a horizontally organised ‘molecular society’; one composed of ‘self organised... groups [able] to realise the ideal of direct democracy within very large communities’ due to developments in technical infrastructure (see also Jenkins, 2006, pp. 3-4).

Most cyber-optimists are also aware that there are potential problems arising from new media, but, as Robert W. McChesney (2013, p. 12) argues, they ‘mostly tap into an untethered love of some combination of technology, gadgetry, markets, utopianism, progress, and individualism that is quintessentially American and downright intoxicating; you get the benefits of a revolution without the politics.’ An alluring aspect of this promise is the notion that the striated terrain of twentieth century politics, over which antagonistic political forces battled for the ascendency of radically divergent ideals, can be substituted for a smooth space of informational flows; one in which the Internet is able to aggregate our individual political proclivities into an algorithm to which we can all dance in happy consensus. No longer will people be asked to suspend their own individual whims in the short term so that a collective good may be achieved in the long run. Antagonism is seen as a thing of the past within
domestic politics. Just as the invention of robot vacuum cleaners supposedly saves the individual from the burden of keeping their house in order, so too will the Internet miraculously set the public and political spheres in order.

Beyond the more utopian lines of argumentation it can be seen that the Internet provides a number of practical resources to social movements. It is a cheap and fast means of internal and external communication that simplifies the process of mobilisation for groups with loose, flexible organisational structures (Della Porta and Mosca, 2005, p. 168) and it assists in the mobilisation of previously unaffiliated actors, allowing them to easily access information about movement organisations and upcoming events (Mercea, 2011, p. 165). It offers a means of bypassing mainstream media, allowing activists to report on their movements and the issues they are addressing. For those already mobilised the Internet mediates multiple engagements across different movement organisations, and it helps them stay in touch with members of the looser activist network of which they are a part. Such activists, situated as they are between different organisations and wider networks, can function as nodes that link diverse groups together (Walgrave et al., 2011, pp. 341-42). If nothing else, new media offers cheap and effective means of communication for movements (Rosenkrands, 2004, p. 74). It is, perhaps, these more modest claims for what new media offers that are best attended to, rather than those that proclaim a new society is emerging from the Internet’s silicon-lined bowels. Recalling arguments unpacked within Chapter Three: the dynamics of capital are constant, as long as they reign all facets of the social will be bent to their purpose.

Cyber-Scepticism—capital has colonised the Internet

While much hope has been pinned on new media’s power to rejuvenate the political, there is also plenty of scope for scepticism. The Internet is undoubtedly a useful tool for political groups and activists, but it is not necessarily radical in and of itself. Further, some of the claims made about its potential to totally rejuvenate the political sphere appear to be greatly inflated. For instance, while the Internet is useful for informing and mobilising younger people around political issues, a significant body of research has found that those who use the Internet for political purposes have already formed their political identity offline (Livingstone et al., 2007, p. 24, Vromen, 2007, p. 49, Calenda and Mosca, 2007b, p. 92, Calenda and Meijer, 2009, p. 893, Mercea, 2011, p. 165). The Internet is not some magical medium that, in and of itself, is able to transform democracy; what happens offline is arguably still a lot more
important. Further, what can all too easily be overlooked, yet needs to be borne in mind, is that it facilitates the full spectrum of political activity, including Islamic terrorism (Castells, 2005, pp. 123-24) or right-wing extremism (Kahn and Kellner, 2007, p. 33).

A cyber-sceptic position seeks to deflate, but not totally discount, cyber-optimists’ claims. Attention is drawn to the Internet’s short-comings vis-à-vis the mediation of anti-capitalist struggles. Rather than providing an effective means of mobilising the disenchanted, sceptics argue the Internet only reinforces existing levels of participation—the medium may be have changed but the demographics have not (Lusoli and Ward, 2003, pp. 14-16, Calenda and Mosca, 2007a, p. 39, Calenda and Meijer, 2009, p. 893). Some sceptics claim the Internet is so fatally intertwined with capitalism that any anti-capitalist political project relying upon the medium is doomed to fail—an updated version of Audre Lorde’s argument that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, 1984, online). After all, the argument goes, the most adept users of the Internet have been those motivated by the logics of capital (Winseck, 2002, p. 35). What is missing from many commentators’ arguments around the effects of the Internet, notes Christian Fuchs (2012b, pp. 387-388), is a grounding in political economy. A ‘technological fetishism’ is often in play; ‘an ideology in the sense of Marx’s fetishism concept and Luckács notion of reification: in the explanation of society, the social relations underpinning contemporary capitalism are ignored, and technologies are presented as causes.’

Jodi Dean’s (2009, pp. 226-27) concept of ‘communicative capitalism’ is particularly useful for developing this cyber-sceptic position. This concept

...designates the way values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies. ... Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realised in and through intensifications of global telecommunications. This material realisation exposes the inadequacy of these ideals for radical democratic politics in a world of digitalised information and communication networks, the world that facilitates and furthers the neoliberal economic project. Expanded and intensified communicativity has neither enhanced opportunities for the articulation of political struggles nor enlivened democratic practices—although it has exacerbated left fragmentation, amplified the voices of right-wing extremists, and delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers. ... In communicative capitalism, rhetorics of access,
participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism.

The contemporary political paradigm as formed and perpetuated by networked telecommunications infrastructure ocludes, qua Laclau and Mouffe, the antagonism necessary for politics (p. 24). In place of antagonism, Dean argues, we are immersed within three fantasies: those of abundance, participation and wholeness. Abundance refers to the manner in which improved communications are believed to enhance democracy. Dean is pessimistic. She sees a swirling mass of content in which most contributions fail to elicit a response. Within this paradigm what is considered relevant is that communication circulates—that it is ‘repeated, reproduced, forwarded’ (p. 27)—not that it is understood (a concern shared with others, see O’Neill, 2002, p. 331). The ideology underpinning communicative capitalism presumes that while we might know on one level that our contributions merely circulate (rather than resonate) we continue to contribute to the abundance of information; believing in doing so that we are engaging in something that matters.

This latter point underlines the fantasy of participation (aka technology fetishism): we act as if our thoughts and ideas are registering, as if we believe that our contributions matter. Borrowing from Žižek, Dean terms this ‘interpassivity,’ which occurs when we let a fetish object become active in our stead (a claim that could be levelled at most cyber-optimists). The fetish objects in this case are the networked communication and information technologies that have captured and reformatted our political energies. Politics has been reduced to communicative engagements, mere contributions to the circulation of content, all of which offer no threat to the reigning neoliberal status quo. The fetish obscures the trauma caused by the left’s complicity in the collapse of the welfare state. It ‘protects the fantasy of an active, engaged subject by acting in the subject’s stead’ (p. 37). The processes of condensation (technology fetishism reduces the complexities of politics), displacement (‘ordinary’ people’s engagement with the Internet is ‘teeming with politics’) and denial (the assumption that the Internet/technology is immanently political) populate the fantasy of participation.
Further, the fantasy of wholeness encourages us to imagine our contributions matter all the more as we can locate them in ‘the most significant of possible places—the global’ (p. 42). The Internet fosters fantasies of unity and wholeness through participation in this ultimate sphere of networked interaction. Dean characterises the Internet as a ‘zero institution,’ an empty signifier, with no determinate meaning or positive function. It signifies the presence of meaning, a harbinger of imagined totality, action and belonging. Participation in this fantasy allows the left to escape into a virtual world of action without upsetting those who operate in the ‘real’ sites and flows of power.

The logic of the Internet is such that it ultimately threatens movements through fostering an illusion of action: with many on the left believing that creating and disseminating information online is, in and of itself, a meaningful political act. Jodi Dean (2009, pp. 31-2) terms this phenomenon ‘communicative capitalism.’

Networked communication and information technologies are exquisite media for capturing and reformatting political energies. They turn efforts at political engagement into contributions to the circulation of content, reinforcing the hold of neoliberalism’s technological infrastructure.

Cyber-optimists, this position argues, celebrate the arrival of the Trojan Horse, and unreflective use of the Internet by neoliberalism’s opponents will be undermined from within by the very logics they seek to oppose.

Discourse around networks and their potentialities folds all too easily into the reigning neoliberal paradigm (Rossiter, 2006a, p. 20). The excitement of early web pundits about the possibility of ‘perfect information’ being developed within ‘open systems’ sounds not unlike Hayek’s argument for the importance of networks and information flows for market economies (Winseck, 2002, p. 34). Despite the potential of networked technologies for stimulating new levels of democratic participation, or new forms of activism, the fact that the design of open technologies was seen as vital for competition in the marketplace should not be overlooked (ibid, p. 35). Indeed, it can even be argued that the most intensive and competent user of ICTs has been finance capital (Sassen, 2006, p. ix). ICTs’ emphasis on speed, argues Hoofd (2009, p. 201), makes them inseparable from neoliberal globalisation. She considers the most proficient users of these technologies to constitute a ‘speed-elite.’ Hoofd
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(like Dean) is critical of the way in which left-wing activism has come to rely on upon new media. The current left-wing problem, she argues, is that

...to respond to the democratic humanist call has become to accelerate neoliberal capital and its right-wing logic of oppression. In this sense, if one were to be unfriendly, new media alter-globalist activism fosters a kind of globalist neo-colonialism through pushing all these (predominately white and masculinist) technologies of the (speed-elitist) subject.

Hoofd (ibid, p. 202) goes on to assert that ‘new media activism is indeed a close cousin of neoliberal capitalism, rather than a successful countering’. The degree to which technology determines a particular form of social interaction is, of course, contentious, but it is important to consider the extent to which certain logics embedded within a medium impact upon users’ actions.

While Hoofd argues that new media is inherently bound to neoliberal practices, others argue that it has become more so only recently—that the Internet may once have possessed radical political potential for its users, but has since been colonised by capital (McChesney, 2013, pp. 96-97). This line of argumentation calls upon the notion of an ‘online commons’ that has been enclosed, as witnessed by an Internet predominantly composed of ‘.orgs’ in the 1990s, but dominated by ‘.coms’ by the early 2000s (Golding, 2002, p. 26, Kidd, 2003, p. 56, Salter, 2003, p. 139). User-generated sites such as YouTube, originally hailed as ‘revolutionary’, have become institutionalised, constrained by legal and economic forces (Kim, 2012, p. 54, Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 75). New predatory class relations are seen to have developed with the rise of new technologies (Kroker, 1996, p. 175, Wark, 2004§ 20-21) accompanied by new forms of exploitation. The rise of a ‘participatory culture’ has, Fuchs argues (2012a, p. 143), led to the ‘outsourcing of work to users and consumers, who work without pay … [and] free labour produces surplus value that is appropriated and turned into corporate profit’. The example Fuchs uses is Facebook, which uses the information users post about themselves to produce data that is sold to advertising clients. In effect, he writes, users are

...double objects of commodification. They are first commodified by corporate platform operators, who sell them to advertising clients, and this results, second, in an intensified exposure to commodity logic. They are permanently exposed to commodity propaganda

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presented by advertisements while they are online. Most online time is advertising time. (ibid, p.146)

The Internet has ‘opened up many new areas for commodification, extending the reach of capitalism into heretofore-unknown corners’—and with this commodification ‘the possibilities of resistance through this medium seem to diminish’ (Chaves, 2010, p. 34). In short, the Internet has proven to be just as prone to commercialisation and ideological control as traditional media (Morgan, 2010, p. 314)—the dynamics of capital persist, even as they manifest in new forms and colonise new territories.

Networked movements are not, in and of themselves, necessarily more democratic, and they risk becoming bound to the conditions they seek to oppose due to their reliance on the medium that has facilitated the rise of neoliberalism in the first place. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2007, p. 353) argue:

There is a structural homology between the new protest movements and the forms of capitalism that have been established over the last twenty years. This homology affords these highly mobile movements the opportunity to recover some purchase precisely where the traditional organisations have lost their footing. But it also means that they must come to terms with the kinds of tension characteristic of the emergent forms of capitalism, not least of which is the tension between flexibility, mobility and speed on the one hand, and the continuity of an engagement that is always vulnerable to becoming hazy if it is not continuously stimulated by events that can make it actual—that is, real—on the other.

This, indeed, appears to be one of the problems faced by the left today—to step from the virtual to the real, to convert the accumulation of ‘likes’, visits and views into projects for substantial qualitative change.

The horizontal, leaderless networks whose form is supposedly fostered by Internet use—as seen with the GJM—can fall short of their promise. The tyranny of structurelessness, as identified by Jo Freeman (and discussed in Chapter Five in relation to GAs), pervades ‘open’ online networks. Hierarchies are present in even the most open and least organised networks (Sassen, 2006, p. viii), as has been found with the open source software movement. This movement developed around the notion of openness and yet became subject to tacit flows
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of power and ‘soft control’, whereby only some participants could assume positions from which to make effective ‘interventions’ (King, 2006, pp. 51-53, Wainwright, 2012, p. 104).

The structure of the web, more generally, presents problems in regards openness. This problem has been raised in relation to the selectivity of search engines (Dreyfus, 2001, p. 94, Nissenbaum and Intona, 2004, p. 22, Jeanneney, 2007, p. 30), but more problematic is the manner in which ‘power laws’ create ‘clusters’ and hierarchies within networks (Ravasz and Barabási, 2003, p. 1). An example of the power law at play within open networks can be seen in the distribution of readers across blogs. There is a small ‘A’ list of blogs which attract a great number of readers, and a large number of blogs with next to no readers. Through applying power laws the reason for this hierarchy is explained as follows: ‘In large systems where many people are free to choose between many options, a small subset of the whole will get a disproportionate amount of traffic... even if no members of the system work towards such an outcome’ (Shirkey, 2006, p. 36). The appearance of hierarchies within supposedly open networks sounds a note of caution for those who seek to relate the structure of communications technologies to the form of new social movements as if the later were a model for the other.

It is not just the encroachment of capital into the Internet that is seen to diminish its radical potential, but also the continuing presence of the state. Globalisation, as carried out through a global market reliant on ICTs, is said to have led to a situation in which the nation-state has been decisively undermined (Castells, 2005, p. 304). Yet it is important to consider the extent to which ‘the network refrain appeals to [governments’] neoliberal sensitivities, which search for new rhetorics to substitute the elimination of the state infrastructures with the logic of individualised self-formation’ (Rossiter, 2006b, p. 47). In considering the onset of the digital era, Abraham Newman and John Zysman (2006, p. 392) argue,

Governments have acted to mediate the transformation: promoting the technological infrastructure necessary for the digital era, establishing the fictitious commodity of information through intellectual property, and embedding digital markets in the social norms. Far from being a neutral intervention, state actions influence the character of the transformation, including its political effects.
States still format political thinking, networks are not automatically democratic, and it can be argued that we are witnessing a period of post-democratic governmentality in which ‘representative democratic’ political practices are increasingly detached from their constituencies, and technocratic expertise and managerialism have come to dominate social life (Dean et al., 2006, pp. xxi-xxvii).

While the Internet, as a decentralised network, evades aspects of state control, it can never fully escape the state (Boas, 2006, p. 376, Sassen, 2007, p. 342, Fenton, 2008, p. 42), especially when considering states’ use of Internet surveillance (Lyon, 2007, p. 462, Fuchs, 2008, pp. 268-77, Morozov, 2011, pp. 150-52) the scope and reach of which was dramatically illustrated by a flood of documents released by Wikileaks in 2012. Further, the Internet needs to be seen as shaped by state policies, rather than having ‘naturally developed’ into its current form (McChesney, 2014, p. 92). In considering the vested interests of neoliberal states in the promotion of networked technologies, and the enhanced ability to conduct surveillance via new media technologies, it can be argued that new media (as tied to globalisation) has not led to the disappearance of the state as a prime actor within the contemporary world, and social movements should be wary of over-reliance upon the Internet.

Having traced the lines of contention between cyber-optimists and cyber-sceptics, it is interesting to evaluate where analysis of Occupy should fall within debate—especially considering (as will be shown below) the tremendous amount of research on the movement’s media usage. Does Occupy present the next step toward the realisation of optimists’ hopes? Or was the movement more wary of the utopian promise of new media?

**Occupy—analogue or digital?**

Studies of Occupy’s media usage tend to be conducted along cyber-optimist lines; with the movement’s genealogy traced from the Lacandon Jungle, through Seattle 1999 and the global justice movement (Calhoun, 2013, p. 28, Hamed-Hosseini, 2013, p. 429). Occupy’s usage of new media is taken as a sign of this pedigree (Halvorsen, 2012, pp. 429-430, Theocharis, 2013, pp. 37-38, Vicari, 2013, p. 477). More immediate links are also drawn to the Arab Spring and European protests in 2011—with particular emphasis placed upon the influence of the Spanish Indignados (Castañeda, 2012, p. 310). The Arab Spring has been labelled a ‘cyber revolution’ (Allagui and Kuebler, 2011, p. 1436) or, more commonly, the ‘Twitter Revolution’
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(Hounshell, 2011, online). The latter term was first applied to Iran’s Green Revolution of 2009, when Western pundits attributed the penetration of new media into Iran with the awakening of a desire for democracy (Morozov, 2011, pp. 1-6). In the case of Tunisia, Castells (2012, p. 27) argued the Internet was the pre-condition for revolt, and Paul Mason (2012, p. 14) characterised the Tahrir uprising as ‘planned on Facebook, organised on Twitter and broadcast to the world via You Tube’.

Such excitement over the supposed link between new media and democratisation recalls Western exuberance during the fall of communism in the Eastern Bloc. Then, as now, there was a sense that the East is validating the West through its push for democracy. Faced with this process, argues Žižek (1990, p. 50), ‘the West looks for its own lost origins, for the authentic experience of “democratic invention”.’ The East ‘functions for the West as its Ego-Ideal: the point from which the West sees itself in a likeable, idealised form, as worthy of love.’ The Arab Spring provided a chance for Western commentators to celebrate the manner in which Western technology exported a radical call for democracy to authoritarian states and thus, dialectically, promised to rejuvenate democracy back in the core. Just as the Arab Spring has been framed as an Internet enabled democratic revolution, so too has Occupy.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 49) have portrayed Occupy as a paradigmatic example of ‘crowd enabled connective action.’ As such, it exhibits two key features (ibid, p. 183). First, through offering the easily personalised frame of the ‘99%’, Occupy allowed for widespread sharing and co-production—the ‘linchpins of connective action’—which, in turn, allowed for wide diffusion across social networks (ibid, p. 53). Second, Occupy possessed what Bennett and Segerberg (ibid, p. 183) have termed a ‘moderate power signature.’ While acknowledging that ‘power laws’ are an issue online (as discussed above), they argue that ‘the “tails” of these steep power distributions can also serve important roles’—such as driving people toward the dominant nodes, and thus assisting in the aggregation of otherwise diffuse online populations (ibid, pp. 153-154). Since ‘some layers of the [Occupy] network [were] structured in moderate power signature terms’ they were able to foster ‘a flow of influence and recognition among smaller nodes that looked to larger ones for signals of various sorts’—with smaller encampments able to link to those of major cities (ibid, p. 183).
Bennett and Segerberg are not alone in making such arguments for the importance of the Internet for Occupy. Castells (2012, p. 168, see also Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 284) argues that this movement ‘was born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet, and maintained its presence on the Internet’. The numbers seem to bear this out at first glance, with up to 80,000 viewers a day visiting live streams from Occupy sites (Costanza-Chock, 2012, p. 382); the Facebook page for Occupy Wall Street had close to 400,000 visitors per day during early October 2011 (Cordero-Guzman, 2011, p. 2). A profile of visitors to the Occupy Wall Street website during early October 2011 (Cordero-Guzman, 2011, pp. 1-2) revealed the following media use statistics: 66.4 percent in the sample agreed somewhat or strongly that they regularly use Facebook; 28.9 percent in the sample agree somewhat or strongly that they regularly use Twitter; 73.9 percent in the sample agree somewhat or strongly that they regularly use YouTube. On the surface, therefore, such findings support cyber-optimists’ emphasis on the importance of the medium for social movements. When compared against national trends of Internet usage in the US, however, this becomes questionable. The Pew Research Centre (2013, online) found 71 percent of users regularly visit YouTube, 67 percent use social networking sites like Facebook, and 16 percent use Twitter. With the exception of Twitter usage, these figures show Internet usage profiles for those visiting Occupy sites were, overall, quite consistent with US national averages. This point should make it clear that while the Internet is important for contemporary social movements, this is no more so than in other areas of social life—there is nothing ‘exceptional’ about social media usage in Occupy; it is, rather, ‘normal’ everyday behaviour.

Despite the deep penetration of the Internet into all spheres of contemporary social life, and optimism as to it fostering a democratic ‘participatory culture’, democracy continues to lurche from one crisis to the next (as argued above in the Introduction). Why would Internet usage by social movements make them ‘more democratic’ when the same trends in other spheres of social life have not increased everyday substantive experiences of democracy? Arguments for the power of the Internet to change social life for the better closely mirror the types of arguments made by defenders of the free market—both believe a decentralised communicative structure (‘the market’/‘the Internet’) is able to process individual choices in such a manner that the greatest good ensues for the greatest number of people. Consider, for instance, Castells’ (2012, p. 229) enthusiasm on the subject: ‘The role of the Internet goes
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beyond instrumentality,’ he writes, ‘it creates the conditions for a form of shared practice that allows a leaderless movement to survive, deliberate, coordinate and expand.’ Participation for its own sake becomes valued over the realisation of any tangible outcomes from collective action (Kaldor and Selchow, 2013, p. 91, see also, Fuster-Morell, 2012, p. 387, Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 383, Theocharis, 2013, p. 51). Social media—an ‘actor’ in its own right—is, from this perspective, somehow able to aggregate our individual predilections, concerns, varying degrees of commitment, and opinions into an upward trend of democratisation. Given the extent to which anarchism was an active ideology within Occupy (as argued within Chapter Five), and the global justice movement before that, it seems far more productive to approach contemporary movements through this paradigm rather than through attributing agency to the ‘invisible hand of media democratisation.’

Against the body of cyber-optimist literature on Occupy, what follows will argue that social media, although important for Occupy, was no more so than it is for life in other social spheres. While it is useful to consider the ways in which social media allows or encourages particular types of interaction, it is interesting to note that the movement tended more toward analogue forms of relating than digital forms.

Although online information was the principal means by which Occupy was researched for the present project, the image that emerged was of a predominately offline movement. It was orientated towards the occupation of—and contestation within—physical space, not cyberspace. Analogue protest tactics with a long pedigree, such as strikes, vigils or pickets (see table four), were most frequently used.

Emphasis was repeatedly placed upon the importance of direct action for the moment:

One of the strengths of the Occupy movement at present is its concentration on direct action. We should work to ensure that the movement retains this focus: demonstrations, occupations, and strikes, up to and including city-wide and national general strikes. These must remain the movement’s tactics of choice.92

The action that received most explicit attention, as expected, was occupying a physical-space within the city (8.7 percent) (although the direct occupation of space was implicit in every

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92 http://occupylondon.org.uk/ga-minutes-friday-13th-january-2012/
statement bearing the name of Occupy). Occupation is the original direct action from which all others stemmed. Other prominent forms of direct action mentioned (as either supported or undertaken by the movement) included strikes (7.8 percent), pickets/blockades (5.4 percent), and entering buildings for protest or occupation (2.8 percent). Taken together, the forms of direct action discussed here appeared in a fifth of all sources.

**Table Four: Occupy's Actions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Action</th>
<th>Number of sources referring to this type of action</th>
<th>Ratio of appearance (across 423 sources)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupation (as action)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educative action (teach/teach-in)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strike</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picket/Blockade</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigil</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter Building (to protest/occupy)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rally</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petition</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mic. Check</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tours</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash mob/smart mob</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger Strike</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next dominant strand of action undertaken by Occupy was direct public address, either through some form of education (8.5 percent) or by holding rallies (2.8 percent). In coding for the ‘educative function’, I collated instances when Occupy spoke directly of ‘teaching’ people, or of providing a ‘teach-in’ or ‘teach-out.’ This category could be expanded dramatically with the inclusion of sources referring to the various ‘Occupy universities’—in which case just over a quarter (26.2 percent) of sources could be said to refer to the movement’s educative
function. The spirit animating this drive to educate within the movement can be sensed from the following statement from Occupy London:

The Bank of Ideas is a thriving community centre in a previously disused UBS [the Union Bank of Switzerland] office block on Sun Street. ... Open to guests and friends, the Bank of Ideas has seen nearly 200 free lectures, debates, film screenings, classes, performances and community group workshops in the two weeks since its doors opened. Countless journalists, artists, performers, photographers and film makers have ventured through its doors intrigued and inspired by this social project run entirely by volunteers, a space valuing the trade of skills and ideas over that of monetary gain.93

The physical occupation of a space that had previously housed an institution directly associated with the one percent was fused with the provision of free education by the movement. The movement’s emphasis on physically situated education sites, along with rallies, indicates the importance of addressing the public directly, in face-to-face contexts—with nearly a third of sources (29 percent) referring to such actions.

Alongside the deployment of classic forms of direct action, and those which had an educative function, were a number of other offline actions. Some of these were primarily symbolic; two recurring examples being vigils (3.3 percent) and hunger strikes (1.2 percent). Others were more innovative, such as the city tours (discussed below) and ‘mic-checks.’ The people’s mic was widely used in Occupy as a means of disseminating discussions among large groups in the absence of powered amplification; speakers’ statements were ‘amplified’ through repetition by members of the crowd close to the speaker, so those on the fringes of the group could hear. What started as a necessity had unforeseen benefits: speakers had to be succinct and the crowd could censor superfluous or disagreeable statements by refusing to repeat them.

The peoples’ mic was originally used in the 1980s in anti-nuclear rallies and later by the global justice movement (Costanza-Chock, 2012, p. 381), but its morphing into ‘mic-checks’ may be an innovation unique to Occupy. The term refers to a group of occupiers entering a public space outside camps and deploying the people’s mic as a means of disruption. Consider, for example, this report of an Occupy London action: ‘Boris Johnson hosted a “People’s Question Time” at Queen’s Theatre in Hornchurch. In the middle of the event about policing, transport,
and the 2012 Olympic Games, Boris got mic-checked. The mic-checkers made the following statement using the people’s mic:

Mic-check: / We find it amusing / That Boris Johnson / Is pretending to listen to questions / While the government for the people / Consistently ignores its people’s voices / We stand in this theatre / As people stand up all over the world / Demanding that those in authority hear us. / We will have an open and fair society / Where those in need are taken care of / Before the interests of corporate wealth / Where the London we can be proud of / Is not just cleaned up for 2012 / But where its children are fed, / Its people have homes, / And its democracy is real. / This is just the beginning. / In the name of God and mammon, / We’re not going anywhere.

Mic-checks allowed for the disruption of public space—both the content conveyed and the act of speaking collectively was radical. It is telling that the areas in which Occupy was innovative were analogue in nature.

To the extent that an act of communication is, in and of itself, an important action undertaken by a group, my research suggests that a hundred percent of Occupy’s actions involved an online component, considering that all the sources reviewed in my research were gathered from the movement’s websites. Nevertheless, it is telling that there were very few discussions of online, Internet-mediated actions by the movement. There were often referrals to Twitter feeds, or Facebook pages conveying specific instructions or information relating to an action, but hardly any of the actions mentioned relied specifically upon information communication technologies. This point was supported by Theocharis et al. (2014, p. 217) who found in their study of contemporary movements (including Occupy Wall Street) that Twitter supported protest communication, but did not seem to have driven collective action and organisation. There were few actions that depended primarily upon new media. For instance, only seven of the sources reviewed here mentioned flash-mobs or smart-mobs. No reference was made to ‘denial of service attacks,’ such as those executed by the Electrohippies during the Seattle protests of 1999 (Jordan, 2007, p. 76). Such actions are today commonly associated with the prominent hacker/hacktivist group Anonymous, who were only referred to twice in the sources here reviewed (these references both mentioned a support video made by

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94 http://occupylondon.org.uk/boris-gets-mic-checked/ (9/11/11)
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Anonymous that had attracted 70,000 views by September 8\textsuperscript{th} 2011). Rather than calling for hacktivist attacks to swamp corporation or government websites with traffic, actions took classic forms: ‘Thousands of #OccupyWallStreet protesters to barrage bank CEO’s with 6,000 angry letters from the 99% WHAT: Mass march to deliver 6,000 letters from the 99% to the 1% WHEN: 1pm, Friday, October 28.’\textsuperscript{95}

Another common form of online action is the e-petition (labelled ‘clicktivism’ by its detractors). Avaaz.org, a site whose main activity is mobilising for e-petitions, indicates the popularity of this form of action—it boasts over 40 million members across 194 countries, and over 200,000 actions taken since January 2007 (as of early 2015).\textsuperscript{96} Yet of the 11 references (2.7 percent) made to petitions in the Occupy sources I reviewed, only one referred to an e-petition.\textsuperscript{97} Occupy Melbourne and Occupy Oakland both hosted petitions, but these were paper-based, with copies circulating the camps for signatures.

There was some explicit discussion of the Internet across the sources reviewed in this research. Sometimes the tone harmonised with cyber-optimist literature: ‘Technology allows us to have a truly global conversation about this: we can link up and effect change.’\textsuperscript{98} But mentions of the Internet were just as likely to be tied to concerns about reaching the wider online public: ‘Minutes aren’t getting up onto the web. People on the web aren’t seeing what’s happening here.’\textsuperscript{99}

Bennett and Segerberg’s (2013, pp. 205-212 ) reflections on their interactions with Occupy Seattle are interesting on this point. They noted a tension between core activists within encampments, who were wary of becoming too involved with social media, and tech-developers involved with the movement who sought to broaden participation through the development of online platforms. To highlight this tension they cite preliminary data from a survey of 5000 Occupy participants that indicates those most committed to high-cost actions were the least likely to use social media. The commitment of ‘rank-and-file’ activists to face-to-face engagement was frustrating for Bennett and Segerberg, as it limited the movement’s capacity to scale up—they considered online deliberation and decision making the surest

\textsuperscript{95}http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-27-2011/
\textsuperscript{96}http://avaaz.org/en/ (9/2/15)
\textsuperscript{98}http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-27-2011/
\textsuperscript{99}http://occupywallst.org/archive/Oct-27-2011/
means of sustaining the movement over time. Occupy, as an example of ‘crowd enabled connective action’, they argue, needs to be seen as having two distinct layers: the encampments which animated protest, and the networked online crowd that ‘roared above them.’

Juris (2012, pp. 260-261) also draws attention to this division. In his terminology there is a ‘networking logic’ and a ‘logic of aggregation.’ The latter, he argues, was dominant within Occupy. The networking logic, in his formulation, connects pre-constituted actors and groups, whereas the logic of aggregation brings individuals together within a physical space, prompting the formation of a collective subject (one plagued, however, by the constant threat of disaggregation) (ibid, p. 266). The networking logic became dominant following the eviction of encampments.

Here lies, perhaps, one of the major fault-lines that will continue to shake contemporary movements in the years to come: the rift between those whose primary focus is the immediate and local, and those who seek to emphasise the online sphere. Both spheres, of course, have considerable productive overlap—this was, after all, the means by which Occupy as a wide-ranging movement was formed—but tensions arose around the weighting of the interaction between the two. In considering this tension it is useful to question, once again, the extent to which the movement’s form is analogous to its use of social media. If there was a direct correlation between the two, then surely the tension noted between Bennett and Segerberg would not be so pronounced. After all, if technology is the ‘agent’ that organises movements like Occupy, then would not the attitude of core activists—who, it should be noted, have no official capacity to shape the direction of the movement—be largely irrelevant? It would seem, rather, that the split between radicals—who were chiefly of an anarchist persuasion (some avowedly so, others as ‘ideal type’ anarchists)—and the reformists (as noted in Chapter Five) echoes the division between those within the movement who emphasise face-to-face engagement over online interaction. This is not, to be clear, considered a clean division between anarchist/face-to-face and reformist/online factions, but the existence of such divisions should caution against attributing too much of the movement’s organisational form and procedures to the influence of social media. The role of political ideologies, and particularly the hegemony of anarchism within contemporary activism, needs
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to be drawn into such discussions (which commentators like Bennett and Segerberg, and Castells for that matter, fail to do).

It is apparent that, despite the exuberance of cyber-optimists at the role of the Internet in Occupy, the movement’s own engagement with the medium was ambiguous. The primary sources upon which this study draws pay next to no attention to the medium. While it can be argued that those involved with the movement were proficient users of the Internet, the same could be said of most people in the developed world today. The Pew Research Institute (2013, np.) suggests 92 percent of adults in the 30-49 year old age bracket, and 98 percent of 18-29 year-olds, are regular users of the Internet in the US. Such high Internet usage should not be taken, in and of itself, as indicative of a culture that is tending towards increased democratisation. As argued by Evgeny Morozov (2011, p. 80), the Internet’s saturation by free easily accessible entertainment is more likely to de-politicise populations with high levels of Internet penetration.

**Occupy’s Spatial Dimension—towards a reconceptualization of everyday life**
The attention paid to Occupy’s online presence has come at the expense of fully appreciating the importance of physical space for the movement. Castells (2012, pp. 168-69), one of the most enthusiastic champions of networked digital technologies, draws attention to the importance for the movement of occupying physical space, but he considers encampments ‘hybrid spaces’:

> The movement’s material form of existence was the *occupation of public space*. ... Thus, the Occupy movement built *a new form of space*, a mixture of spaces of places, in a given territory, and a space of flows on the Internet. One could not function without the other; it is this hybrid space that characterised the movement.

Even when considering the physical dimensions of the movement, the Internet is at the forefront of his analysis—stalking the streets. Against this position a (minor) counter-trend has arisen within the literature on Occupy, which seeks to downplay the Internet’s influence. This counter-trend, to which this thesis seeks to contribute, argues that while the Internet is undoubtedly an important line of consideration when assessing Occupy, the movement was essentially an off-line one (Gaby and Caren, 2012, p. 369).
Analysis of Occupy should emphasise the importance of territory. The movement highlights ‘the limits of the “facebook revolution”... [and offers] an important reminder that alternative imaginations for other worlds need territories as much as the connections that unite them across space’ (Halvorsen, 2012, p. 431). The co-presence of bodies on streets—the composition of a body by multiple subjects, animated by the desire for political change—carries a weight that promises so much more than the digital clamour of voices and images streaming through online networks (Harvey, 2012, p. 162).

A consideration of Occupy’s physicality, of its spatiality, offers a number of useful avenues for thinking through the movement’s import, which will be explored in some detail below: encampments rendered visible the inequalities present within, and the privatisation of, the city, with the camps contributing toward the fight for the ‘right of the city’ and the related transformation of everyday life. To this extent, camps sought to establish a degree of autonomy—to remove themselves from the circuits comprising the political and economic status quo—in order to establish a prefigurative space, a harbinger of a possible society to come; encampments, and some of Occupy’s protests, also signalled the manner in which the strategic occupation of physical space can work to disrupt the flows of capital.

Occupy sought to render visible the rapid growth of inequality within supposedly developed nations—and how these, in turn, were global processes. The encampments were a means of reasserting the ‘spatial dimensions of exclusion and inequality by forcing society to recognise that capitalist accumulation happens in certain places, and that these places can be named, located, and objected to’ (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 280). Guided city tours were an innovative means of drawing attention to the spatial elements of inequality, taking in the physical location of banks and financial institutions which had received tax-payer bail-outs: ‘Take a participatory tour of the city of London. Explore the city, learn about the public/private space dynamic and interact with the surroundings by playing twister, dancing the kaylee and other creative interventions.’

The tours were a means of challenging the privatisation of the city—an insidious process made visible through the actions of private security firms which sought to disperse tour participants from what were ostensibly public spaces (see Kóksal, 2012, for a participant

100 http://occupylondon.org.uk/d15-occupy-everywhere/ (14/12/11)
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observation analysis of a tour). Occupy drew attention to the manner in which cities are sites of inequality and have become increasingly privatised: ‘Occupy London has highlighted how our right to the city is being undermined by the privatization of space which puts much of the City out of bounds to ordinary people and protest. We must reverse this process of enclosure and create our city together.’ Occupation, as a tactic, was both a means of highlighting the divestment of public space and, some have argued, a bid to reclaim terrain in order to build an alternative city (Schein, 2012, p. 337).

The ‘right to the city’ was, then, an important aspect of Occupy as a movement. Recent precedents for this approach can be found in such initiatives as the ‘reclaim the streets’ movement born in the UK in the 1990s—which would illegally close streets, set up a sound system, and hold a large-scale free party. As stated by London Reclaim the Streets, in 1996:

We are basically about taking back public space from the enclosed private arena. At its simplest, it is an attack on cars as a principal agent of enclosure. It’s about reclaiming the streets as public inclusive space from the private exclusive use of the car. But we believe in this as a broader principle, taking back those things which have been enclosed within capitalist circulation and returning them to collective use as a commons. (cited in Fourier, 2003, p. 54)

Reclaiming the city means recognising how it has been organised to safeguard class power. Keeping order has led to the ‘suppression of the street itself’ (Debord, 1995, pp. 121-22). Cities have been shaped by the dynamics of capital, subjected to acts of creative destruction and restructured in order absorb capital surpluses, with the effect of depriving the mass of people of the right to the city (Harvey, 2008, p. 37).

Henri Lefebvre was amongst the first to develop arguments concerning the right of the city. He argued that humans have a need to accumulate energies that can be spent in play, and that the commercial and cultural infrastructures that flow from the city planner’s pen are not able to meet these needs. Rather, we should be engaged in the creative activity that forms a living city (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 147). The urban environment needs to be reimagined as a place that can let play and creativity become suffused within our experience of the everyday: ‘Would not specific urban needs’, he asks (ibid, p. 148), ‘be those of qualified places of

101 http://occupylondon.org.uk/today-at-occupy-london-reimagining-the-city/ (17/11/11)
simultaneity and encounters, places where exchange would not go through exchange value, commerce and profit?’ Such needs are stifled, however, due to the city becoming a site of alienation, an ‘object of cultural consumption for tourists.’ In light of this, he argues (ibid, p. 150), we ‘must make the effort to reach out towards a new humanism, a new praxis, another man, that of urban society.’ Such change requires a ‘social force, capable of investing itself in the urban through a long political experience, [that] can take charge of the realisation of a programme concerning urban society’ (ibid, p. 156). Recalling the discussion in Chapter Three— which argues that capital denies the vast majority of people the full use of their creative capacities within production—Lefebvre (2014, p. 338) argues that we must look within everyday life for the creative ground needed to launch a political programme capable of overcoming alienation. The ‘right to the city is like a cry and demand’ (p. 158, emphasis in original)—a cry against what has been lost, and the demand for a meaningful urban space in which human potentialities can flourish.

For Harvey, a faithful advocate of Lefebvre, the right to the city is ‘a right to change ourselves by changing the city.’ This is a common rather than individual right, as collective power is needed to change the process of contemporary urbanisation (Harvey, 2008, p. 23). To struggle for the right to the city is essential for anti-capitalist movements.

Only when politics focuses on the production and reproduction of urban life as the central labour process out of which revolutionary impulses arise will it be possible to mobilise anti-capitalist struggles capable of radically transforming everyday life. Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced, and that one of their claims is the unalienated right to make the city more after their own heart’s desire, will we arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense. (Harvey, 2012, p. xvi)

Through empowering people in their everyday life, through asserting the right to the city that their labour has built and maintains, urban social movements promise to free creative impulses and reverse the alienation imposed upon the city by the dictates of capital. The revolutionary impulse must always return to the question of the everyday, as it is here that radical politics both begins and ends (Merrifield, 2002, p. 79).
Claiming the Century

Occupation, as a tactic, brought issues of the everyday right to the centre of the Occupy movement. The cohabitation of thousands of protestors within city squares required a massive collective effort to construct and maintain the infrastructure necessary for everyday life, such as kitchens, security, communications, and when such infrastructure could not be readily constructed within the encampment, to negotiate its use within adjoining areas—for instance, the use of toilets in fast-food outlets. As a ‘protest camp’ Occupy involved a massive and sustained physical and emotional labour from participants to build and maintain the encampment as a site of both protest and as a space for daily life (Feigenbaum et al., 2013, p. 2 & p. 40). Further, Occupy’s aim to reclaim space within the city, for protest and also for reimagining everyday life, expressed a classic feature of protest camps: namely, the quest for autonomy—the attempt to separate oneself from, and to illustrate the shortcomings of, the capitalist state (ibid, p. 218).

Occupying autonomous terrain, argue Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 102), is essential for resistance movements. To occupy such a space, in their reckoning, first requires an act of exodus (as discussed in Chapter Four). Capital depends upon our productivity, so withdrawing our productive capacities from the circuits of capital and valoration is a violent act that undermines the status quo (ibid, p. 152). They point to the struggles of the autonomia movement in Italy in the 1970s as an example of such a politics. It was a politics orientated toward the urban environment that ‘succeeded temporarily in redesigning the landscape of the major cities, liberating entire zones where new cultures and new forms of life were created’ (Hardt and Negri, 2005, p. 82). Occupy, to some extent, sought to achieve similar goals—at least in so far as encampments formed (semi-) autonomous spaces. Many in the movement regarded the reclamation of space—and the holding of this space as an autonomous zone—as of the utmost importance (Schneider, 2013, p. 104, see also Graeber, 2013, p. 259). In this respect Occupy can be seen to operate in the lineage of other movements that have fought for the right to the city and to develop autonomous terrain.

To the extent that Occupy was an autonomous space, it was also a prefigurative one—a model for an alternative conception of democracy, a chance to experiment with different ways of living with others. As noted by Kaldor and Selchow (2013, p. 89), occupying physical space was important ‘both in terms of message and in terms of autonomy.... The occupations of squares or temporary sit-ins are a way of constructing temporary autonomous zones where
prefigurative politics can be practised’. Encampments were seen as being prefigurative through the ‘very processes of creating the infrastructure to sustain a camp and forming a community based on the voluntary association of individuals’ (Brissette, 2013, pp. 224-25). In constructing the space of the encampment through holding a physical territory—however precariously—and sharing the rhythm of everyday life, Occupy sought to prompt subjective shifts within participants.

Of import here is the way in which the encampment, the (semi-) autonomous zone, came to congeal around the ‘encounter.’ To encounter others within the context of a protest, to be part of a crowd, argues Andy Merrifield (2011, p. 108, see also Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 383), promises the transcendence of individual powerlessness, to ‘universalise, make coherent what seems, on the face of it, only specific, lived experience’. Against those who emphasise the importance of cyber-space for contemporary social movements Merrifield (2011, p. 114) underscores the importance of physical space for protest:

Participants will come together not only as a singularity sharing passions and affirming hopes, but also a force that creates its own historical space. For the politics of the encounter will always be an encounter somewhere, a spatial meeting place. It will always be an illicit rendezvous of human bonding and solidarity, a virtual, emotional and material topography in which something disrupts and intervenes in the paralysis.

In a similar vein, Hardt and Negri (2009, p. 255) argue that the ‘politics of the metropolis is the organisation of encounters. Its task is to promote joyful encounters, make them repeat, and minimise infelicitous encounters.’

While Occupy encampments offered a site in which a prefigurative politics—a politics of the encounter—could unfold, the tactical deployment of this approach was not without shortcomings. The first of these is the temporary nature of the encampments as opposed to the Autonomist struggles mentioned above, which sought to redevelop the already inhabited city by organising rent boycotts, youth centres, community radio stations and so on, as one tactic within a wider repertoire. While occupation was a brilliant tactic, the displacement of encampments proved an all but fateful disruption to the movement (Calhoun, 2013, p. 30).

The occupations may have held the promise of the society to come, but the temporary nature
of the spaces they inhabited (public squares) meant they left no enduring structures or sites. As Emily Brissette (2013, p. 226) argues,

> Living the vision of a transformed world in the here and now may provide meaning and a sense of authenticity, but it will ultimately prove illusory if the wider world is left as is, if transformation goes no further than the borders of this or that experiment. The promise of the prefigurative depends on its articulation with the strategic.

Overall, Occupy can be seen as having failed to fully articulate a long-term strategy for change. It favoured, instead, a prefigurative approach to politics. But this approach was limited by the temporary sites the movement chose for occupation.

While the temporary nature of encampments was problematic in terms of the movement’s longevity, the tensions that arose from the movement’s central city locations highlighted the extent to which the urban environments have been shaped in line with the dictates of capital. Occupy can, in part, be seen a struggle for the right of the city. Through considering the movement’s mass, its physical presence within the city, the importance of ‘the encounter’ becomes clear: protest camps create important sites for the creation of alternative conceptions of everyday life. Just as considerations of Occupy on this localised level contribute towards an understanding of how social movements are shaped by, and seek to resist, the dynamics of capital, so too is it important to consider contemporary movements on a global scale.

Occupy was undoubtedly a movement with global reach. Its encampments spread across all continents and throughout Oceania, and Occupy had active links with other protest movements around the world. Aiding this globality was the movement’s rapid online diffusion (Pickerill and Krinsky, 2012, p. 284). The structural conditions underpinning the movement are also significant: a global financial crisis (as discussed in Chapter Three) prompted a global protest movement. Just as capital has sought to privatise and enclose the city whilst simultaneously developing networks of rapid international financial flows, Occupy (and other contemporary movements) present the counter-movement: the attempt to reclaim the city

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(however temporarily) and to extend networks of global resistance on the same technological infrastructure.

As seen in the sources reviewed for this study, the influence of movements within Europe, with which they were in dialogue, was important for Occupy. The events in Tahir Square in Cairo were also very influential (appearing in 26 sources). This can be attributed in part to Tahrir’s overtures to Occupy, and its framing of the contemporary moment as one of global struggle.\(^{103}\) Tahrir protestors also marched upon the US embassy in Cairo in a show of solidarity with Occupy (Mitchell, 2011, np.). Commentators on the movement went so far as to label the events of 2011 a ‘global revolution’—one comparable with the events of 1848, 1917 and 1968 (Brissette, 2013, p. 222)—with Occupy part of a ‘global cycle of contention’ (Tejerina et al., 2013, p. 377, see also Rehmann, 2013, p. 3). The movement also saw itself in such terms. Occupy London, for instance, considered itself as part of a ‘global emancipatory movement,’\(^{104}\) and Occupy Oakland spoke of a ‘global uprising.’\(^{105}\)

As part of a self-consciously global movement, Occupy sought to articulate a vision for global change. Even when faced with pressing local issues concerning evictions and the ongoing pressure of camp maintenance, Occupy maintained an awareness of its global dimension. Just as the economy had global ramifications, as highlighted by the fallout of the financial crisis, so too must resistance operate on this scale. Occupy, in its most utopian moments, hoped to contribute toward global structural changes: ‘We want structural change towards authentic global equality.’\(^{106}\)

Structural change on a global scale, however, requires a movement capable not simply of building links with groups worldwide but of sustaining these links. Many activists, as individuals, no doubt walked away from Occupy with contacts from around the globe with whom they may well continue to share ideas and to whom they may reach in the case of future actions, but such relations remain opaque to outsiders. Considering how to link the particular and localised with the global and universal in enduring ways may prove to be one of the most important issues contemporary movements of the left will need to address if they

\(^{103}\) [http://occupylondon.org.uk/occupylsx-general-assembly-minutes-3102011-7pm/](http://occupylondon.org.uk/occupylsx-general-assembly-minutes-3102011-7pm/) (3/10/11)


are to claim the century. Occupy signalled the importance of the encounter, of reclaiming the city, of grounding politics within the sphere of everyday life; it also illustrated the manner in which this can take place in the context of the global. It was an important experiment, one that positively highlights the potentialities of the left today—it is hoped that careful consideration of the findings from this experiment can contribute toward an enduring counter-politics. One initial finding to be borne in mind, it would appear, is to avoid overestimating the promise of the Internet for politics—it provides a tool, but one that could easily turn against the user if used in an unthinking manner (programmed, as it is, with the logics of capital), a caveat which recalls Marx’s arguments as to the distinction between the forces and the relations of production.

**Summary—social media is secondary, struggle is in the city**

Against the arguments of cyber-optimists for the importance of new media to Occupy (and other contemporary movements), it is asserted here that a healthy dose of cyber-scepticism is needed. New media was important for the movement, but celebratory accounts of its efficacy tend to overlook the ideological dimension of contemporary movements—especially in relation to the hegemony of anarchist ideas—and underplay the importance of physical space. Analysis of Occupy reveals a movement whose focus was primarily directed toward physical space. It was more analogue than digital. Further, the importance of everyday life, the right to the city, was at the forefront of Occupy’s practices, signalling the importance of this domain for those seeking to develop effective movements, although the temporary nature of Occupy’s encampments limited its scope to fully explore this potential.

It is interesting to note, also, the tensions between the movement’s ‘inner core’ who tended to be wary of overreliance on new media, and those who sought to amplify the online dimension. Those emphasising the importance of physical space are, arguably, more attuned to the manner in which the strategic holding of space (as seen in the blockade of the Port of Oakland) can be a very effective means of disrupting capital, calling attention to the continued material dimension of the economy. By developing strong sites of local struggle—grounded within attempts to reclaim the city from capital—that can simultaneously link to others within a global framework, it is possible to imagine an **enduring** project of deep social change. While it is important not to fetishize the potential of new media, it clearly plays an important role in
the future of protest, but one that has to be seen as secondary to that rooted within the local and quotidian.
Intermission:

Occupy After the Evictions

The encampments studied in this thesis all met with eviction in late 2011 or early 2012. Occupy Melbourne’s encampment was evicted October 21st 2011 (only a week after its establishment) but continued to hold GAs and actions consistently until mid-2012. Occupy Oakland was evicted on October 25, 2011—with a more radical cohort of Occupiers (including a Black Bloc, as discussed in Chapter Six) launching an attempt to occupy Oakland Town Hall, which led to violent confrontations with police on 28\textsuperscript{th} of January 2012. Occupy Wall Street was evicted from Zuccotti Park on November 15\textsuperscript{th} 2011. Occupy London was evicted from St Paul’s and the Bank of Ideas in February 2012 (although the majority of occupiers had voluntarily left St Paul’s in late December 2011), leaving a smaller site in Finsbury Square as the last redoubt, which was eventually evicted in June 2012. In almost all cases there were allegations of excessive police force in relation to evictions, and Occupy has continued as a presence within numerous court cases since.

Occupy has persisted in a number of different forms post-eviction. For instance, Occupy Democracy sought to set up an encampment at Parliament Square in London October 2014 to promote discussions as to how to achieve ‘real democracy’ (Bonner, 2014, online)—but a heavy police presence quickly shut the occupation down. The Occupy meme has also, prominently, been taken up by pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong. This began under the auspices of a group named Occupy Central with Love and Peace (OCLP) whose aim was to pressure the Chinese government to grant universal suffrage and to respect international democratic norms. Occupation began on the 28th of September 2014, with the movement scaling up very quickly to include large numbers of students committing widespread acts of civil disobedience: Organisation became decentralised and outside the influence of OCLP (the founders of which surrendered to police in December of 2014). Another Occupy spin-off, based in the US, has been the Alternative Banking Group, which has been ‘agitating for reform’ of the financial system along with exploring how to give ‘the 99 percent a representative voice in the political and regulatory processes’ (Bradley, 2013, online.). While these different iterations on the Occupy theme explicitly address the state and existing political processes, most of the offshoots from Occupy tend to be directed toward localised initiatives and persist with horizontalism.

There have been a number of projects, for instance, that have actively enacted autonomist and/or mutual aid principles. One of the most visible of these has been Occupy Sandy Recovery, which describes itself as ‘a grassroots disaster relief network that emerged to provide mutual aid to communities affected by Superstorm Sandy’—this initiative took place shortly after the cyclone struck New York on the 29th of October 2012 and persists through to the time of writing in 2015. Occupy Our Homes is another initiative that directly engages with people’s everyday life, supporting the disadvantaged to fight banks and halt the eviction of homes. Their website contains a petition page for those facing foreclosure, once they have secured the signatures of a hundred supporters an organiser will get help them

108 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Central_with_Love_and_Peace accessed, 10th March 2015. It would be fascinating to explore in depth the different approach taken in Hong Kong as opposed to that pursued within the core states studied above. A different political context has created a movement every bit (if not more) radical than that seen in the West, even though its claims-making appears modest and reformist when viewed against the movements studied here. Context is everything. The common theme, however, is the pursuance of a deepening of democracy.


110 http://occupyourhomes.org/about/ accessed 10th March, 2015
develop a public pressure campaign (Bradley, 2013, np.). Occupy Our Homes has also shifted from a purely defensive stance (saving homes) to an offensive one, with it studying community land trusts as a means of securing long term affordable housing (Schneider, 2014, np.). There has also been the formation of a number of workers’ cooperatives by activists associated with Occupy (ibid, np.).

Along with these locally grounded initiatives there are also ongoing projects aimed at a more general level of engagement. Occupy Theory, for instance, has created a space in which discussions around movements, and movement related issues, are able to continue and deepen—with the magazine Tidal being the group’s primary project (Bradley, 2013, np.). Along with pieces from movement activists, a number of high profile academics like Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Michael Hardt have contributed pieces to Tidal, the last issue of which was released February 2013.111 The pieces published in Tidal, it should be noted, tend to be largely sympathetic toward horizontalist approaches that exclude engagement with the state. Another way in which this horizontalist ethos lives on can be seen in the online open-source decision-making platform Loomio, which was modelled on Occupy’s GA structure. This project was started by activists from Occupy Wellington, New Zealand who have formed a not-for-profit worker owned cooperative to develop and run the project. The programme is available on a ‘pay according to your means’ basis112—making it a useful tool for activist groups, as well as larger groups, such as Podemos in Spain.

Strike Debt is, arguably, one of the most exciting post-eviction currents to run out of Occupy. As noted in Chapter Six, indebtedness and the associated state of precarity that comes with it formed a powerful subjective motivation for those participating in Occupy—there were some debt-focussed activities undertaken by encampments, such as Occupy Oakland’s call to publically burn student loan letters—but this issue was not fully capitalised on in the crucial months of late 2011. A number of Occupy participants started Strike Debt in late 2012—launching the campaign with a New York City Debtor’s assembly, followed by a ‘Night of the Living Debt’ protest march (Piven, 2014, p. 225). One of their earliest actions was the ‘Rolling Jubilee.’ After realising people’s debts were available to purchase on the secondary market

at five-cents on the dollar, a crowdsourcing campaign was launched and netted $600,000 that was then used to buy $20 million of debt which was then forgiven (Taylor, 2014, np.)

While the Rolling Jubilee was a great initiative insofar as it was able to attract a lot of public attention to the issue of debt—from predatory lending practices through to its handling within financial markets (issues discussed here in Chapter Three)—Strike Debt considers this to have been a limited approach. Debt has to be comprehended as a structural issue, ‘a form of domination and exploitation’ (Strike Debt, 2015, np.). Ours, they argue, is a ‘debt society’—with debt ‘at the heart of the financial capitalism... [a] system... rigged to benefit those at the top’ (Strike Debt, 2012, pp. 10-11).

Debt tends to normally be experienced in an individualising and alienating way, with those in serious debt often ashamed to reveal their situation. Effective organisation around debt, it is argued, needs to transform the identity of the isolated debtor into a collective one (Cafentzis, 2013, p. 7). Strike Debt aims to foster ‘debt collectives, effectively debtor’s unions’, to form an organisational base for collective bargaining and debt strikes against the ‘creditor class’ (Strike Debt, 2015, np.). As the ‘tie that binds the 99%’, debt is seen as the foundation for effective collective action. ‘We abolish the trajectory of a life that begins with the assumption of debt before birth, and ends with a post-mortem settlement of accounts’ (Strike Debt, 2012, p. 11). As Francis Fox Piven (2014, p. 226) argues, there is, here, a realisation of what he calls ‘interdependent power’—in a reprise of Hardt and Negri’s arguments (explored above), power is conceptualised not just in terms of the control of resources, but also in the capacity to ‘refuse, to withdraw or threaten to withdraw from systems of institutionalised cooperation.’

Underlying Strike Debt’s project is support for a jubilee—a full cancellation of all debts—although action should not stop if such a goal were achieved, as there needs to be ‘a total transformation of the current financial paradigm’ (Strike Debt, 2014, np.). Debt profiteering needs to be stopped, a new economy created, a new form of collective life enacted. In a continuation of the ‘no demands’ position—it is held that people are realising that the way to achieve such ends is ‘not to ask for anything, but to start creating new institutions of our own by which we can collectively provide for our needs’ (ibid, np.). Small-scale examples of this can already be found, they argue, in such things as ‘community-supported agriculture as an
alternative to the industrial food system’, worker cooperatives, and community land trusts that provide alternative models for affordable housing. The success of such endeavours depends, however, on the creation of a ‘new banking system that offers non-exploitative forms of credit and is run for the benefit of all, not just the lenders’ (ibid, np.). An important step toward achieving such goals involves ‘dissolving the bonds that bind us to corporations, financial institutions, and governments all over the world’ and to forge, instead, ‘new bonds with one another based on equitable and sustainable forms of exchange’ (ibid, np.).

Strike Debt’s analysis is a powerful one, and it signals the ground on which effective transformative struggles may be waged in the twenty-first century. As with Occupy more generally, however, it suffers from the limitations of the horizontalist/anarchist approach to organisation and mobilisation. It offers a powerful analysis of the current situation, and correctly indicates the need for a grounded approach from which to envision change, one that begins in the sphere of everyday life. The limitation, however, lies in not fully analysing the possibilities of effective state-directed actions. In eschewing any engagement with existing institutional frameworks, Strike Debt, as with most other currents that have flowed from Occupy, appears to be drying up to trickle— with ever diminishing numbers of people involved. The question of how to build an effective large scale movement appears to be more pressing than ever.
Part III: Claiming the Twenty-First Century
Chapter Eight: 

Reconceptualising Effective Action:

Within and against the state

Moving beyond the limitations of Occupy, and other forms of contemporary activism that hew to the horizontalist line, entails apprehending what the state is and how it can be effectively engaged. This requires an ongoing dialectical relationship with extra-parliamentary social movements. In that sense, the persistence of movements like Occupy is essential for the furtherance of radical political projects. The limitation of Occupy, then, was the absence of an accompanying movement to contest power within the state. In part this was because attempts to promote such initiatives were quashed within the movement itself by the effective hegemony of anarchism, both ideologically and structurally. Effective political strategy requires the ongoing presence and mobilisation of movements which seek to create and operate within autonomous spaces (as Occupy sought to do), but which also level demands and critiques against the state (which Occupy, for the
most part, failed to do). Such movements need to coexist within a constructive field of tensions with an organisation—a party—that shares a similar vision but which seeks to act within the state. Recovering the work of Nicos Poulantzas, as will be shown below, contributes toward such an approach. For the left to effectively deal with divergent tendencies it should situate itself under the ‘communist horizon’ in order that different actions work toward a common goal.

Before advancing these arguments, the substantive points of earlier chapters will be reiterated so as to orientate the discussion to come.

Chapter One traced the long arc of contention from the French Revolution through to the alternative globalisation movement. A persistent set of problems has beset the left. The failure of the spontaneous uprisings of 1848 indicated the need for enduring organisational forms—organisations whose growth and persistence depended upon class-consciousness. The crushing of the Paris Commune signalled the fragility of small-scale experiments in communism. Marxists recognised the need to capture state power if revolutions were to be safeguarded; anarchists disagreed. By the 1960s the left had been able to assume positions of state power—either through revolution or reform—in both the core and periphery. The ‘total transformation of society’ failed to follow from this, however. A resurgence of spontaneous, decentralised, anarchist-inflected forms of political contestation took place after 1968. This political turn, coupled with capital’s ferocious assault on workers in the neoliberal era, has led to the demise of collective class-based politics. The alternative globalisation movement signalled the return of anti-capitalist struggles in the core, although this time without any mass popular base. The left has successfully challenged capital in the past and fought for alternatives. Is this possible today without the backing of organised labour?

Chapter Two critically appraised the way social movement studies have been influenced by the changing nature of contestation. In reacting against the ‘old left’, new social movements generally rejected Marxism and ‘economistic’ thinking; it is unclear, however, what social movement theory gained from doing the same. Indeed, rather than developing a body of literature that movements can draw upon to develop strategy, social movement theory has become an academic exercise with little real-world value. ‘Activist scholars’ have sought to
overcome this impasse through championing militant engaged studies of movements, generally from an anarchist position. A Marxist approach to social movement studies also values activist knowledge, but tempers this with considerations of the wider structural factors at play—especially those of political economy.

Chapter Three turned to questions of political economy so as to overcome the limitations of conventional social movement studies. The various historic manifestations of capital, changes to the state form, and the claims-making of social movements were seen to be interlinked, something most movement studies fail to register. The shifting emphasis of social movement contestation—from class-based issues to those of identity politics—is dialectically entwined with the rise of neoliberalism. Through accommodating some of the radical claims advanced by movements after 1968, co-opting sections of the working class through easy access to credit and the investment of their pensions in the stock market, and crushing the final vestiges of radical labour in the 1980s, capital was able to overcome the economic crisis of the 1970s. The logics of this ‘fix’ eventually played out in the financial crisis of 2008. In the aftermath of the crisis the destructive dynamics of capital were starkly visible: material inequalities had deepened, workers were subject to austerity and unstable labour markets, and—with the bailout of financial institutions—the elite capture of political institutions appeared almost complete. The dynamics of capital have contributed to the ‘crisis of democracy’ within core states, and the absence of effective social movement mobilisation signals it will not be resolved any time soon. That resistance was so slow to come in the wake of the financial crisis indicates just how weak the radical left had become. While the disastrous effects of capital are clear, answers as to how to effectively mobilise against it are desperately needed.

Chapter Four turned to the field of left political theory. Answers were sought as to what might constitute effective political strategy. Left thought, in response to the crisis of Marxism, the ascendancy of post-structuralism, and the emergence of new social movements, has developed an ontology of multiplicity. A number of themes follow from this: the notion of totality is rejected in relation to the social; theorisation of the state is downplayed and power is approached as a diffuse field; power’s goal, it is argued, is to maintain an illusion of totality, which has the effect of producing ‘inexistent’ elements within the social with whom radical politics should ally. Three divergent political strategies are offered: (I) Inexistent elements can be linked together within a ‘chain of equivalences’ (a popular movement) whose aim is to
form a counter-hegemonic block capable of radicalising existing democratic institutions (Laclau and Mouffe); (II) Actions can be taken against the state from the standpoint of the inexistent, whose condition may improve as a result—or the state could rupture, unable to absorb radical demands, clearing the ground for a new (communist) political sequence (Badiou and, to a lesser extent, Rancière); (III) The state can be completely rejected as a site of contestation, with action instead taking the form of an exodus from power (Hardt and Negri). Political economy tends to be absent from the works of the left theorists considered here (with the exception of Hardt and Negri, and to a lesser extent Žižek), as is any concrete theorisation of the state. The political strategies considered here provided a means of assessing Occupy’s actions. In turn, such an assessment offered a chance to reflect upon and update, or go beyond, what these left theorists have to offer.

With this in mind, Chapter Five turned to an analysis of Occupy. The movement was a belated response to the financial crisis, and signalled that this was also, concomitantly, a crisis of democracy. While Occupy was clear in what it opposed, what followed from this was unclear. Some participants sought reform of the state and economy. A more radical line predominated, however, and a horizontalist/anarchist position became hegemonic in the movement. Problems ensued: consensus decision-making was fetishized; blocks were used against those seeking to engage with the state or issue demands; opaque interpersonal networks formed in which informal leadership developed free of democratic accountability; and a gulf opened between the radicalised core inside Occupy encampments and the wider movement. The loose inclusive nature of anarchism, with its strident critique of capital, contributed to Occupy’s early success. Paradoxically, while anarchists are critical of neoliberalism their political approach is compatible with the individualistic mindset it has fostered. Spontaneous organisation, a faith in the contagious nature of democracy, and a rejection of any vertical organisational structures meant the movement was short-lived. The external aggression of the state was undoubtedly a factor in the movement’s decline, but arguably less so than the limits set by anarchism. How might a movement such as Occupy persist and coalesce into a concerted campaign against capital? Historic examples underline the importance of class consciousness, yet the current moment is one in which such consciousness is at a low ebb.
Chapter six opened with discussions as to whether Occupy was a ‘class building’ exercise. There are many attempts to try and reformulate and/or rebrand class today. A number of left theorists have mistaken the defeat of working class movements, and the wavering of the subjective dimension of class, as an end to class itself as a meaningful category for analysis and mobilisation. Occupy reflects this current ambiguity surrounding class. This thesis has argued that the basic categories of Marxist class analysis continue to be the most effective for conceptualising the antagonisms inherent to capitalist relations of production. Marxist categories can be used to explicate, for example, the structural factors at play behind the current high levels of indebtedness faced by many people today—illuminating the ways in which the objective movement of the economy interfaces with the subjective experience of life under neoliberalism. Rather than effectively articulating the immediate subjective vectors through which capital wrecks violence on the lives of vast numbers of people, Occupy positioned itself as the movement of the ‘99%’, a concept too diffuse to form a meaningful basis for collective organisation. Occupy’s radical inclusivity created a situation in which the movement was unable to effectively manage its internal heterogeneity, both demographically and ideologically. New social movements highlighted the need for the left to account for and accommodate diverse social groupings; the spontaneous nature of Occupy meant these lessons had to be relearned on the fly. Occupy signalled the need for a collective subject grounded in class antagonism, one organised in such a way that the lessons of the past could be drawn into the present.

Chapter Seven opened with a discussion of theorists who attribute social media with the capacity to make up for the shortcomings of contemporary collective action. Occupy demonstrated the limits of such thought. The movement was principally an offline one, drawing attention to the importance of the city—of reclaiming space from capital so as to reimagine everyday life—as an important dimension of contemporary resistance. Here again, however, the limitations of the movement were all too apparent, as temporary encampments meant such experiments could never take root. Further, the displacement of encampments by the state brings to mind one of the important lessons learnt in the nineteenth century, and seemingly forgotten today: the pursuit of autonomous spaces within antagonistic states is all but impossible. The tactic of occupation, in itself, is insufficient for the formation of an enduring movement. Occupy raises important questions as to how movements can be
effectively grounded in physical space—rooted in the everyday lived experience of participants—so as to sustain ongoing projects, whilst simultaneously maintaining an international presence through social media.

In synthesising the findings of this thesis a few themes recur. Addressing these themes is important if movements are to effectively challenge the crisis of democracy. Tension surrounds questions of what constitutes effective organisation, and some of these questions are charted in Table Four below. It should be noted the two columns of this table do not designate fixed sets of properties across which there can be no exchange. For example, anarchists have historically formed some of the most radical class-based organisations. To give another example, Hardt and Negri self-consciously position themselves within the Marxist tradition and yet reject any engagement with the state. The tension that can arise between properties listed in these opposing columns can be productive. The party is not the movement, but it is part of the movement—without a broader social movement the party becomes a moribund institution of little import for the radical left. Yet without a party the social movement (or ‘movement of movements’) remains diffuse and unable to secure any substantial victories (beyond, that is, influencing those who do hold power). The purpose of charting the opposing positions in this table is to outline a field of tensions in which today’s radical-left needs to position itself.

Table Five: Conflicting Organisational Tendencies

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<th>Horizontalism</th>
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<td>New social movements</td>
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Having contextualised the space (conceptual and actual) in which social movements operate, and having analysed Occupy so as to better understand the possibilities and limitations of contemporary activism, it is now time to offer some general strategic reflections as to how
the crisis of democracy may be overcome. To move forward I am electing, first, to take a (theoretical) step back to consider the work of Nicos Poulantzas, who offers important lines of thought through which to construct effective strategy.

**Nicos Poulantzas—recovering the state**

Nicos Poulantzas’ *State, Power, Socialism*, originally published in French in 1978, offers important Marxist considerations for left political strategy, especially in relation to the state. At the time Poulantzas wrote Marxism was in crisis (as discussed in Chapter Four). Consequently, the analysis offered by Poulantzas at this time remained marginal, while thinkers like Laclau and Mouffe, who embraced post-structuralism and post-Marxism, became more prominent. A depressed Poulantzas committed suicide in 1979, convinced his theoretical endeavours were a failure (Löwy and Watson, 2015, np.). His suicide is doubly tragic because the work undertaken in this thesis indicates *his theory was on the right path*. Thirty-six years later, an assessment of the current historical conjuncture shows the left would have fared much better had his thought been more widely accepted; the insights of Poulantzas’ work need to be reclaimed if the left is to move past its current impasse in the core.

Poulantzas was involved in a pitched intellectual battle with post-structuralist thinkers, and Foucault and Deleuze appear frequently as antagonists throughout his work. He took umbrage with their characterisation of Marxism as having an impoverished view of power due to its focus on the state. Poulantzas’ (1980, pp. 36-37) retort was that Foucault and Deleuze were overly wedded to *juridical* definitions of the state:

> All the apparatuses of hegemony, including those that are legally private (ideological and cultural apparatuses, the Church, etc.), all these form part of the State; whereas for Foucault and Deleuze, the State is always limited to the public kernel of army, police, prisons, courts, and so on. This allows them to say that power also exists outside the State as they conceive it. But in fact, a number of sites of power which they imagine to lie wholly outside the State (the apparatus of asylums and hospitals, the sports apparatus, etc.) are all the more sites of power in that they are included in the strategic field of the state.
Poulantzas argues for a more diffuse notion of state power, one which does not grant the state a generative power vis-à-vis the production of the social, but which sees it as a strategic field in which factions vie to control and regulate the social.

A shortcoming of the theorists considered in Chapter Four is the insufficient attention paid to the state; this reflects, to a degree, the rejection of the (communist) party. With the party spurned, attention moved primarily to social movements as the state was no longer viewed as the principal avenue through which to pursue change. The shortcomings of contemporary activism highlight the need to restore consideration of the state as a conceptual variable. Chapter Three argued the state has continued to be a major actor in the neoliberal era (despite the reigning doxa).

Poulantzas (ibid, p. 17, see also 1978, pp. 22-24) argued the state is always involved in the constitution and reproduction of the relations of production which, under capitalism, are necessarily exploitative. To understand the capitalist state involves appreciating the conflict of interests present within capitalist relations of production and, by extension, how class struggle is present within these power relations (ibid. p. 25). Social struggle between classes is a ‘game of provisional compromise’ played on an unstable field (ibid, 141)—policies always reflect the outcome of strategic compromises (Levine, 2002, p. 176). Struggle occurs between capital and the masses, and also within capital itself.

The various fractions of capital (monopoly or non-monopoly capital, industrial, banking or commercial capital) do not always stand in a uniformly contradictory relationship to the popular classes (or a given one of them); nor are their political attitudes to these classes always identical. In a particular conjuncture, or over a longer period, differences of tactics or even of political strategy are among the prime factors of division within the power bloc itself. (Poulantzas, 1980, p. 143)

The capitalist state needs to represent the long-term interests of the whole of the bourgeoisie, but does so under the hegemony of one of its factions (ibid, p. 307).

The State organises and reproduces class hegemony by establishing a veritable field of compromises between the dominant and dominated classes; quite frequently, this will even involve the imposition of certain short-term material sacrifices on the dominant classes, in order that their long-term domination may be reproduced. ... It should never be forgotten
that a whole series of economic measures, particularly concerning the expanded reproduction of labour-power, were imposed on the State by the struggle of the dominated classes. (ibid, p. 184, emphasis in original)

The state is able to secure the long-run hegemony of the capitalist class by granting certain material demands to the popular masses. These may, at the time, be quite radical in their import, such as the provision of universal health or education—but with a change to the relations of force in favour of the bourgeoisie, such demands can be covertly stripped of their radical content (ibid. p. 185). An example is the privatisation of public assets in recent years (as argued in Chapter Three). The granting of material demands to the public is increasingly taking place through the private sector, reflecting the absence of popular demands with universal import being imposed on the state following the defeat of organised labour. The means of aligning factions of the working class with bourgeois projects has (as shown by Harvey, Panitch and Gindin in Chapter Three) involved enmeshing them in financial markets through their pension funds and access to easy credit. The bailout of financial markets by the state (a move overwhelmingly in the interests of the capitalist class) could, consequently, be justified to sections of the working class on the basis that it protected their assets.

The play of compromise, of give and take, which takes place under the auspices of the state means that ‘the precise configuration of the ensemble of state apparatuses... depends not only on the internal relation of force in the power bloc but also on the role they fulfil in respect to the dominated classes’ (Poulantzas, 2008, p. 311)—a position which signals Poulantzas’ debt to Gramsci (1971, p. 182), who had argued that the interests of the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point.

The state, then, needs to be seen as a relation of forces—it is the material condensation of the struggle that takes place among classes (Poulantzas, 1980, pp. 128-29). No one class ever has complete control of all state institutions (Bratsis, 2002, p. 259). The state is constituted through, and riven with, class contradictions. It must not, therefore, be seen as monolithic.
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(this being the shortcoming of Badiou’s approach to the state, as explored in Chapter Four)—class contradictions are present within the state’s material framework and patterns of organisation (Poulantzas, 1980, p. 134). The rigidity of the state ensures that its manipulation at the hands of the bourgeois is a slow process (ibid, p. 138). Rather than assuming a position that works only against the state, as Badiou and Rancière advocate, it needs to be realised that the state, while rigid, can be subject to change from within.

To illustrate the unfixed nature of the state Poulantzas (ibid, pp. 146-47) offers a ‘relational theory of power’ as a means of explaining (primarily class) struggle. Power, he argues, is not a quantity or object; nor is it an essence, or substance, possessed by a dominant class. Insofar as power can be held by social classes, it

...should be understood as the capacity of one or several classes to realise their specific interests. It is a concept designating the field of their struggle—that of the relationship of forces and of the relations between one class and another. ... The capacity of one class to realise its interests is in opposition to the capacity (and interests) of other classes: the field of power is therefore strictly relational. (ibid, p. 147, emphasis in original)

The power of a class is a positional one—113—it stems from its objective place in political, economic and ideological relations. Each class’s position, and the degree of power which stems from holding this power, is delimited by other classes and/or class fractions. ‘Power ... depends on, and springs from, a relational system of material places occupied by particular agents’ (ibid, p. 147). State power, then, has no intrinsic essence but is rather the relations of social classes and forces. The state itself is the ‘strategic site of organisation of the dominant class in its relationship with dominated classes’ (ibid, p. 148). In assessing the state today it can be seen that the interests of the capitalist class are paramount, free as they are from any concerted countervailing pressures—history shows this is not an inevitable arrangement.

The relationship between the dominant and dominated classes is never straightforward. While its ‘specific framework involves exclusion of the popular masses from a directly physical presence in certain of its apparatuses’ (ibid, p. 152), the organisation of the bourgeois state is subject to dislocation and displacement. As the state is a field of strategic relations, power

113 Space constraints have led to the omission of any significant engagement with Antonio Gramsci, whose work influenced Poulantzas. Gramsci’s (1971, pp. 106-114) discussion of struggle as involving at times a ‘war of a position’ and at others a ‘war of manoeuvre’ clearly influences Poulantzas here.
needs to be seen as mobile, as moving between apparatuses. Different state institutions house competing/rival class (or other) social relations (Levine, 2002, p. 176). Strategically the question must always be asked ‘who is in power to do what?’ The state needs to be comprehended as a complex with higher (ruling) levels and subordinate levels. The aim of Marxist political analysis is to identify the sites within this complex where real power is concentrated—with ‘real power’ denoting, here, the *institutional resources* (administration, executive power, budget) which allow the social class in power to maintain their superior position within political struggles (Codato and Perissinotto, 2002, p. 61). Prime examples being the Federal Reserve or central banks which are, essentially, autonomous institutions, insulated from popular demands; or the appointment and tenure of Supreme Court judges.

There are, however, always opportunities to tip the balance of powers one way or another—something which Occupy, with its failure to engage the state, did not take into account. If there is no concerted opposition to capitalist rule, then practices seeking to maintain social cohesion will adhere exclusively to the interests of the capitalist class—a disorganised working class poses no threat to the stability of this class: ‘Although capital may indeed be able to adjust to the various working-class concessions and even to an expansion in social-welfare policies, there is no need to do so without a challenge coming from below’ (Levine, 2002, p. 181). Although the key strategic points within the state are occupied by those who seek to perpetuate capitalism, it would be a mistake, argues Poulantzas (1980, p. 153, emphasis in original), to cease conducting struggles within the strategic field of the state:

> We... know that, alongside their possible presence in the physical space of the state apparatuses, the popular masses must constantly maintain and deploy centres and networks at a distance from these apparatuses: I am referring, of course, to movements for direct, rank-and-file democracy and to self-management networks. But although these take up political objectives, they are not located outside the State or, in any case, outside power—contrary to the simplistic illusions of anti-institutional purity. What is more, to place oneself at any cost outside the State in the thought that one is thereby situated outside power (which is impossible) can often be the best means of *leaving the field open for statism*: in short, it often involves a retreat in the face of the enemy precisely on this strategically crucial terrain.
The crucial point here is that there is no ‘outside’ of the state to which movements can escape—positions can be assumed against the state by movements, but these need to be matched by actions within the field of the state by actors from the left.

In conceptualising how this might be possible Poulantzas (ibid, p. 256, emphasis in original) sought to pose the question of democratic socialism anew:

How is it possible to radically transform the state in such a manner that the extension and deepening of political freedoms and the institutions of representative democracy (which were all a conquest of the popular masses) are combined with the unfurling of forms of direct democracy and the mushrooming of self-management bodies?

In seeking an answer to this question it is important, he cautions, to not follow the ‘old illusion of anarchism’ (or, as considered above, Hardt and Negri) that the strategic field of the state can be abandoned. Political strategy must be grounded in the ‘autonomy of the organisations of the popular masses,’ but their autonomy is not founded in some ‘outside’ space. The popular masses, he argues, can deploy networks and centres of struggle at a distance from state apparatuses, but never from outside the state (ibid, p. 153). There can be no simple opposition between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ struggle; rather, both must be simultaneously pursued (ibid, p. 260). Successful strategy, in his analysis, must involve this element of maintaining a distance from the state (without imagining an outside), combined with taking action within the state to transform the state (Thomas, 2002, p. 76).

Here lies the value of recovering Poulantzas’ analysis as a means of assessing Occupy. (I) The movement paid insufficient attention to the question of class and of how to foster class-consciousness; the diffuse notion of the ‘99%’ offered little strategic value when it came to analysing the positions held by different factions of the bourgeoisie. Rather, everyone—including a tiny hyper-rich section of the capitalist elite—were considered to be ‘in it together’; no distinction was made between the lower-upper classes, the middle classes and the most precarious and exploited parts of the populace. Poulantzas emphasised the need to consider processes of class formation (within exploitative capitalist relations of production) and of shifting class alliances (both within and across classes). (II) Through rejecting outright any engagement with the state, Occupy left this ‘crucial terrain’ in the hands of those whose interests aligned with capital. Individuals and groups positioned within the field of the state
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may have been sympathetic to the movement’s aims, but they were denied the popular support needed to manoeuvre effectively within the state. Poulantzas emphasised the need to analyse the state—to find the positions class blocs held within its apparatuses to bolster their power—to find the strategic lines of engagement through which to challenge entrenched power.

Through rejecting the state, Occupy hewed closely to the approach advocated by Hardt and Negri (and by anarchism more generally) as explored in Chapter Four, an approach which has proved time and again inadequate to enact substantive enduring change. Effective action takes place both within and against the state. To turn to the other theorists considered earlier, the approach advocated by Badiou and Rancière—to make ‘impossible’ demands against the state—complements Laclau and Mouffe’s calls to form a popular movement capable of radicalising representative democracy. When viewed from a slight remove, a field of tensions can be seen in which the left is active. The extra-parliamentary left radicalises the parliamentary left—movements need parties to secure victories, and parties need movements if they are to follow a radical line and deepen democracy. The distinction between reform and revolution sloughs away. Assuming such a position requires, however, an acknowledgment that the state cannot be abandoned, and that capital must be opposed—such is the corrective that Poulantzas provides for contemporary left-theory.

Movements & Parties—contesting the state from two sides

Much has happened since Poulantzas’ death. As shown in Part I of this thesis, the organised working class has been defeated, unions are weak, social democratic parties have completely capitulated to capital, and any remaining communist parties have low memberships or else have morphed into social democratic parties in all but name. The doctrines of neoliberalism dominate the political, economic and social spheres, fostering an ethos of individualism that serves as a barrier to collective action. The difficulties faced by Occupy, as traced in Part II of this thesis, are symptomatic of the wider issues faced by the left today, namely: a lack of coherent strategy, the absence of a strong collective identity, and an inability to secure substantive victories. The left is weak. A politics without the state, party, class or overarching ‘grand historical narrative’ to guide action has been tried and failed—Occupy presents the latest and most vivid example of this failure. The turn taken by the new left and new social movements in the late 1960s was important, insofar as it overcame the chauvinism of the old
left, but it has reached a dead-end. To return to Poulantzas is to retrace the left’s steps to a unique historical conjuncture—the crucial question he posed, and to which an answer still needs to be found, is that of how to combine the vitality and autonomy of new social movements with a left politics that is anti-capitalist, cognisant of class, and engages with the state so as to transform the state. The question of how the correct balance of movement action and state engagement will guide what follows. Poulantzas’ thoughts on movements and parties will be considered; attention will then turn to contemporary examples from Latin American and Southern Europe to gain a sense of how these issues can play out on the ground.

Poulantzas’ discussion of new social movements was not particularly well developed—going little further than the assertion that these movements should not to be subordinated to working-class movements. He argued the left had to take up ‘new popular demands on fronts that used to be wrongly called “secondary” (women’s struggles, the ecological movement, and so on)’ (Poulantzas, 1980, pp. 263-64). These views are broadly compatible with those of Laclau and Mouffe, who share Poulantzas’ conviction that the mechanisms of representative democracy must be engaged—a position starkly at odds with the approach that unfolded in Occupy under the hegemony of anarchism.114

Conceptualising ways in which social movements’ activities might be balanced against engagement with the state leads, inevitably, to questions of the role the party might play in all of this—here, again, Poulantzas’ thought was not developed in any great depth. He offers a critique of the ‘dominant mass party’ that seeks to be the party of the left. The dominant mass party—be it the Communist Party of Russia during the period of the USSR, or social democratic parties in the core—is charged with leading, ineluctably, toward ‘authoritarian statism’: the masses are excluded from the centres of decision making; and politics is ‘professionalised’, handed over to the ‘techno-bureaucratic statism of the experts’ (ibid, p.

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114 A rejection of electoral politics is also a theoretically common position on the left today. As explored in Chapter Three, the politics of exodus advocated by Hardt and Negri leads in the opposite direction to the ballot box. Badiou (2010, pp. 16-19), in his own take on the ‘crisis of democracy,’ is scathing of the manner in which the swing-voter determines the outcome of elections. The electorate can, crudely, be divided into three parts: those whose convictions place them on the left, the opposing bloc on the right, and those who lack political conviction and hover in the middle. The swing voter will (most likely) vote for the party who offers them the best personal incentives to vote, they care only for themselves and lack political conviction. Yet it is the swing voter who is courted by politicians, as their vote decides the outcome of most elections. Electoral politics are, for Badiou, a ‘politics of the hesitant.’
Systems of direct democracy must be developed to avoid this, but representative democracy should not be abandoned in the process (ibid, p. 261). To abandon representative democracy, and the state more generally as a domain of contention, contributes to an intensification of centralised statism and a widening of the gap between rulers and ruled—with political life under neoliberalism conforming to this general trend (as noted by Mair, 2013). A vibrant sphere of social movement activity, especially when grounded in the production and maintenance of autonomous spaces, exerts a countervailing pressure to those that would lead to centralised statism—but only when balanced with an effective engagement of the state. Parties are needed to facilitate this engagement, yet they should not, Poulantzas (2008, pp. 401-402) contends, seek to organise social movements nor amalgamate with them. Conceptualising how this might be implemented in the present brings us to the limits of Poulantzas’ capacity to serve as guide. At the time he wrote the left was still strong—even though it was entering a period of disintegration. While communism had, in its authoritarian statist form, been long discredited, it still existed as a geopolitical ‘threat’, and communist parties within the core could still boast significant memberships. Even though social democratic parties were generally conciliatory in their attitude toward capital, they were still capital-critical, supported state ownership of crucial social infrastructure, and generally believed in the universal welfare state. Features of the political landscape that could be taken for granted in the late 1970s no longer exist for those of us who have come of age since then. Measures that would have been dismissed as reformist, weak, or unimaginative by the radical left in the 1970s are unimaginable today—for example, the idea of a tertiary education sector free of high fees and crippling student loans appears impossibly utopian. What a return to Poulantzas does offer, however, is a means of thinking past the dichotomy of reform and revolution. Parliamentary parties of the left can secure immediate victories within the state while supporting the creation of autonomous spaces by social movements. Social movements can pursue a more radical vision of politics and, as a consequence, pull parliamentary politics further to the left, while also serving as a check against the rise of authoritarianism.

Elements of the approach outlined by Poulantzas have been historically present, although the balance has yet to be effectively struck between social movement activity and effective engagement with the state. The Paris Commune (as explored in Chapter One) provides, arguably, one of the richest examples of direct democracy in action—an experiment which
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was to serve as the basis for a new state form—but the adversarial relation of the Commune to the French State, combined with a lack of popular support across France as whole, resulted in its bloody dismemberment. The Russian Revolution was possible because of a strong workers’ movement grounded within soviets, and the mobilisation of the wider populace behind demands for ‘Peace, Land, Bread’; the Revolution was able to endure, but eventually succumbed to authoritarian statism, with a gulf opening between the party and the people. The flowering of new social movements in the late 1960s, and the novel forms of contestation this involved, provides an example of the left’s continuing vitality and imagination; but there has been a fundamental disconnect between movements and parties from this point onwards—as seen with the global justice movement and more recently Occupy. The pressing issue, if the left is to effectively challenge the crisis of democracy, concerns how to balance actions taken against the state apparatus with those within.

Contemporary examples of this are seen in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. As argued by Emir Sader (2011, p. ix), a powerful bloc has been formed by these countries that has proven capable of challenging neoliberalism, and that may even serve as the crucible of twenty-first century socialism (ibid, p. 126). Venezuela, arguably, presents one of ‘the most far-reaching processes of social transformation of the twenty-first century so far’ (Sitrin and Azzellini, 2014, p. 212). The country has developed a ‘participatory and protagonist democracy’ that spans social, economic and cultural demands, and encourages ongoing, deep, political engagement from the people. Councilist structures, which now span all levels of society, are considered the means of furthering these aims and form the basis of Venezuelan socialism. Eventually, it is hoped, the communal state will completely replace the bourgeois one (ibid, p. 213) through the democratisation of the ownership and administration of the means of production (ibid, p. 222). The important point to emphasise is that strong social movement mobilisation has provided the basis for a radical-left party to attain state power within the framework of representative democracy.

Change in Venezuela comes from ‘two sides.’ Flourishing popular movements remain autonomous from the state, whilst simultaneously being supported by the state. Movements are encouraged to develop self-administrating structures as a means of decentralising state decision making. While democracies within the core are plagued by the deepening gulf between politicians and the people, widespread public engagement in decision making has
been encouraged in Venezuela through transferring as many of the functions and resources of the state to self-organising communities as possible (ibid, p. 217). The spread of communal councils has constructed a non-representative structure of direct participatory democracy to parallel elected representative bodies. As of 2013 there were 40,035 communal councils and 1,401 communes (or efforts towards their construction) that had, for the most part, been financed by the state and now exercise autonomous power (ibid, p. 219).

Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador have succeeded in combining the logics of reform and revolution (Sader, 2011, p. 80). Governments in these countries have ‘brought together a platform of reforms with modes of struggle that permitted the conquest of power’; they have formed ‘transitional’ states that point ‘to the passage from capitalism to post-capitalism’. Rapid programmes of reform are blended with a ‘refounding of the state and the public sphere, so as to allow the emergence of a new bloc of forces in power’ (ibid, p. 111). Bolivia’s vice-president Álvaro García Linera, reflecting on current developments in Latin America, asserts that the ‘general horizon of our era is communist’ (cited in Bosteels, 2011, p. 227). Communism in this century, he holds, will emerge from society’s self-organising capacities. If the state is subjected to a new constituent power from below it may be possible to realise a ‘non-capitalist’ state that can ‘potentialise’ or ‘empower’ the communist horizon from within through supporting ‘the unfolding of society’s autonomous organisational capacities’ (ibid, pp. 246-247).

Effective radical politics involves action both within and against the state. Positive social change depends on social movements operating at a distance from the state, and upon those within the state drawing upon this energy to enact radical change with ongoing popular support. The challenge is to maintain a distance between social movements and the state—attempts to foster and reinforce communal structures along councilist lines, as pursued in Venezuela, indicate how this autonomy might be achieved. Rather than falling into the trap of reifying the state as a monolithic bloc that exists eternally out of reach of popular demands, Latin American examples show what can happen when the state is seen as a terrain that can be strategically occupied and reconstructed along more egalitarian lines.

These insights appear to be slowly migrating to the core. At the time of writing much is made of the potential for Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain to reinvigorate left-wing politics
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(Balibar and Mezzadra, 2015, np.). Syriza’s 2015 electoral victory has even been celebrated by some as a ‘historic watershed’ signalling the biggest challenge yet to the neoliberal orthodoxy of the current age (Jones, 2015, np.). It may be too soon to make such grand claims, Podemos and Syriza are currently fragile political experiments, but they do indicate the possibility of carrying the energy of popular mass protests like Occupy into the state. Their experiences to date highlight the importance of any move into the state being accompanied by vigorous and ongoing social movement mobilisations.

Linera’s claims regarding the communist horizon find echoes in Syriza (an acronym for Coalition of the Radical Left), which is firmly grounded in the Greek communist tradition. As a coalition party it has shown itself ‘at ease among feminist movements, youth mobilisations, alter-globalisation, and antiracist movements and LGBT currents, while also [having]... a considerable intervention in the trade union movement’—all the while retaining a strong commitment to class-based struggles grounded within the nation state (Kouvelakis and Budgen, 2015, np.). Its successes can be attributed, in part, to its dynamic relations with social movements, and also to the informal solidarity networks rooted within everyday life (centred around such things as social health centres and mutual aid networks) that have created pools of activists that enliven the party (Kouvelakis and Aeschimann, 2015, np.). Importantly, the party was able to harness the energy of the Syntagma Square protests of 2011 (the radical Greek corollary of Occupy) and offer a way forward politically (ibid, np.). In considering this background, the party can be seen to have a “‘movementist” sensibility’, with it able to effectively commit itself to social movements and respect their autonomy (Kouvelakis and Budgen, 2015, np.). Stathis Kouvelakis (ibid, np.), a member of Syriza’s central committee, characterises it as ‘a hybrid party, a synthesis party, with one foot in the radical Greek Communist movement and its other foot in the novel forms of radicalism that have emerged in this new period.’ Syriza, importantly, signals that the radical progress of the Latin American left might be possible within core states.

Syriza is not without its critics on the left. Some aver that the party is already losing its radical edge and drifting rightwards (Vgontzas, 2015, np.). Its struggles with the Troika (the EU, ECB, and IMF) over repayment of the national debt, and the austerity measures imposed on the country in consequence, limit the party’s options, but the biggest threat it could face is of waning popular mobilisation within Greece (Kouvelakis, 2015, np.). Without counter-power
in the streets Syriza will lose the impetus needed to maintain and extend a radical programme (Vgontzas, 2015, np. see also, Kouvelakis and Budgen, 2015, Budgen and Lapavitsas, 2015). Syriza’s situation highlights the importance of striking the right balance between social movements and parties.

Podemos, like Syriza, is constructively engaged with contemporary popular protest movements—in this case Indignados and 15M (Alexandre, 2014, np.)—and seeks to foster an engaged ‘citizen politics’ (Kassam, 2014, np.). The lessons of Latin American popular movements are taken as guides to what is possible (Seguin, 2015, np.). The party is also developing a participatory approach, whereby individual members are encouraged to put forward proposals for debate within local citizen assemblies (Beaven, 2014, np.), and supporters can register with the party and vote on proposals online (Mulgan, 2014, np.). Podemos illustrates an interesting development in the role new media might play for politics. Rather than a situation in which new media is imagined to magically enable the realisation of a more democratic society, radical protest and the formation of the party has preceded a novel use of new media.115

As characterised by the party’s leader, Pablo Iglesias (2015, np.), Podemos is an experiment in reconstructing democracy against the ‘totalitarianism of the market’. It is a means of channelling the anger and discontent expressed in the popular protests of 2011 into a new form of politics, one that recognises the importance of attaining state power.

Podemos and Syriza both illustrate a fruitful confluence of left theory and practice. Podemos’ strategist Íñigo Errejón favourably cites Laclau and Mouffe, and notes the following features of their work as being particularly important for Podemos: the importance of forging a chain of equivalence between popular demands; of insisting on a clear division between the ‘people’ and its adversaries; and of the need to pursue radical democracy within existing political institutions (Hancox, 2015, np.). As long argued by Mouffe, and visible in the struggles of Syriza and Podemos, it is possible to combine the struggles of new social movements with workers and unions to pursue ‘radical reformism’ (Tull, 2015, np.). Poulantzas’ work is also having a direct influence over contemporary political engagement. Kouvelakis (Kouvelakis and

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115 As discussed above, in the intermission, Podemos uses Loomio for some of its internal decision making processes.
Budgen, 2015, np.) notes that Syriza has heeded Poulantzas’ idea that ‘the state has to be seized from the inside and from the outside, from above and below.’ Actions within the state must be matched by vigorous social movement activity.

The importance of engaging the state, with parties and social movements working in conjunction, as theorised by Poulantzas, can be seen in Latin America and southern Europe today. Communism has also shown itself to be making a comeback as the horizon under which struggles are waged. Admittedly, the examples considered here are often fragile; even so, concrete results have been achieved. The same cannot be said in the wake of Occupy (except, perhaps, for isolated pockets of action, such as those undertaken by Occupy Sandy).

**Moving beyond Our ‘1848 Moment’—communism and the communist party**

The parallels between the contemporary moment and that faced by the left in the wake of 1848 are striking. Now, as then, a wave of popular spontaneous protests has surged across the world, only to be met, in most instances, with violent state reaction. Similar conclusions to those reached by nineteenth century radicals apply today: new enduring organisational forms must be developed; a shared project with universalisable outcomes formed; a collective consciousness fostered; international solidarity forged; and the state wrested from the hands of the elite. Now, as then, this latter point is the most contentious. As illustrated throughout this thesis, anarchists and Marxists have long clashed over whether to engage with the state. The experience of the radical left over the past forty years should serve, however, to illustrate the futility of a politics that refuses to contest state power. The crucial issue is that of how to effectively engage the state. Following Poulantzas, it has been argued that actions need to be taken both within and against the state. Historical examples have been called upon to back this argument, along with contemporary examples from Latin America and southern Europe. Much rests upon the ability to balance social movement actions against those taking place within the state; such balancing requires consideration of the role communism can play and, more particularly, what the role of communist parties might be.

To entertain the possibility of communism is to gain a horizon (as argued above by García Linera), to which those struggling for equality and social justice can lift their eyes. As Joseph G. Ramsey (2013, p. 3) argues, ‘keeping one eye on the [communist] horizon... is to keep from
losing our bearings, to keep from becoming totally consumed by, and mired in, our immediate surroundings, institutions, or struggles, as important and demanding as these often are.’ To recover communism as a regulative political idea is to move beyond resistance. It took the regulative power of the communist idea to knit together millions of people, across hundreds of countries, in order that they could pose a serious challenge to capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the collapse of the ‘second sequence of communism’ in the 1970s (as argued by Badiou in Chapter One) the left has been weak and forced into a reactive position within the core.

Occupy signalled an attempt to initiate a prefigurative politics within core states; in this sense the movement sought to do more than merely react to capital. But situating the push for ‘real democracy’ within temporary encampments where a pell-mell of spontaneous organisation was taking place, whilst simultaneously resisting the violence of the state, restricted the scope of what was possible. The sites in which direct democracy has been able to endure and deepen are those where autonomy can be maintained for a considerable period of time. The Zapatistas may offer an example of this for those advocating horizontalist organisational structures and consensus decision making, but their success was made possible due to the Mexican state’s tenuous hold on power in rural Chiapas and pre-existing, deep, communal ties among the indigenous population. This model carries over poorly to large-scale temporary protests staged by atomised crowds of the disaffected.

The difficulty faced in the current conjuncture in most core states is that anarchist forms of organisation are most in step with the zeitgeist, as they do not threaten the subjectivity fostered within neoliberal societies. Yet while anarchists may be anti-capitalist, their politics are compatible with those who are merely capital-critical. The protests they initiate are short-lived for the vast majority of participants due to the low cost of entry being matched with an ease of departure. In one sense, paradoxically, they stabilise the status quo. Occupy, for instance, can be seen as a release valve for pent-up discontent, but the inability of the movement to endure signalled that there was no serious challenge on the horizon for capital within the core, which is why capital has been able to continue with ‘business as usual’ in recent years. The outcry the movement gave voice to may have prompted some changes within the state, but the disconnect between the movement and those acting within the state meant any such changes were superficial. What Occupy did achieve, however, was to signal
the desire for a radical politics within the core as well as the need for a different approach through which to achieve such a politics.

The approach needed is one that can argue for alternatives to the status quo, and that can show another society is possible—which is why situating action under the communist horizon is important. Discussions of communism are now taking place with increasing frequency for the radical left in the core (see, for instance, Badiou, 2010a, Douzinas and Žižek, 2010, Bosteels, 2011, Dean, 2012a, Žižek, 2013, Badiou and Engelmann, 2015)—but these discussions tend to be conducted on an abstract level, with communism approached primarily as a philosophical issue requiring complicated theoretical exegesis. Such exercises are important, but even more important is the question of how to move these discussions from their academic setting to a more immediate political setting. Without communism the radical left lacks a unifying theme, a common project, a means of offering a politics of plenty in a landscape of paucity. Communism can serve as a regulative ideal, situating diverse political projects under a shared horizon.

To bring communism to the fore of radical politics involves countering the individualist ethos that prevails in the contemporary age—an ethos which currently limits the capacity of an egalitarian counter-politics to prevail. To do so requires explicating both the positive and negative poles of communism.

The negative concerns the exploitation experienced by the vast majority of the world’s populace within capitalist relations of production. As argued in Chapter One, capital is carried forward by the continual dynamics of dispossession, alienation and class antagonism. The perpetual growth on which capitalism relies is incompatible with the planet’s finite resources and is leading us to the brink of total ecological collapse. The financialisation of the contemporary economy has resulted in people’s lives being given over to the power of debt, their future signed over to the creditor. Class divisions need to be named and politicised. To downplay the nature of these divisions with slogans like ‘we are the 99%’ is to minimise the antagonistic dimension necessary for an effective counter-politics. The negative basis of communism, as a political principle, is its calling to account the destructive tendencies of capital and the consequent class divisions. No matter how class might be rebranded (for example, as ‘the multitude’, or ‘the precariat’), the foundation of a class-based politics is the
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acknowledgement that capitalism is, by its nature, an exploitative system. To move from the negative objective situation—‘there is capitalism, therefore there are exploitative class relations’—to the positive pole of communism involves promoting class as the basis for a collective identity.

The dynamics of capital form the negative basis of communism—they point to the need for a complete reformulation of democracy: if the crisis of democracy is to be overcome, then democracy must have an economic basis.

The positive basis of communism requires recognising that the individual is always a social being—latent power already exists on the side of workers due to their productive capacity. As argued by Hardt and Negri in Chapter Four, ‘constituent power’—that which can serve as the basis for communist society—is already present within the circuits of production. Capital is an agent of capture that parasitically feeds upon this power; it has no productive capacity of its own. Individually, each is subject to alienation and disempowerment under capital; emancipation requires overcoming isolated individualism so as to collectively challenge capital. There must be recognition of the collective strength grounded within our shared productive capacities. The path to individual betterment lies within the improvement of all. The lessons of post-68 movements, and of the left today more generally, is that an identity politics that is not simultaneously linked to shared class identities is all too compatible with capital; the lesson for those advocating a class-based politics is that the failure to include difference and recognise identity (and the importance of the cultural sphere more generally) leads all too easily to authoritarianism.

Democracy is the watchword of the neoliberal capital order—even as democratic institutions are hollowed out from within by the ruling class. Democracy is also the guiding principle of the communist project, but here it is a democracy with a substantive material underpinning. The project of the radical left needs to be, as it was in the past, the realisation of economic democracy. Economic democracy is direct democracy.

Historically, the project for direct democracy was grounded within the workplace (the soviets being a notable example), but it must extend further than this. Finance, for instance, must be democratised. The public needs to be able to democratically decide the areas where investment should take place (see Malleson, 2013, for a discussion of this point, and of
'economic democracy' more generally). Public banks, funded through tax revenues, offer a means of democratising finance. Accountable to the electorate rather than shareholders, such banks would be able to pursue criteria other than profit maximisation; for example, to extend credit to poorer communities or to finance green initiatives. This entails the democratisation of investment. Investment is currently dominated by private entities able to wield the threat of ‘capital strike’ against any government whose actions might disrupt the pursuit of profit (this being one of the threats Syriza currently faces). Private capital is able to influence government in ways that shortcut democratic processes. Democratising investment would ensure the wider population has a direct say as to what types of investment are desirable.

The weakness of communism in the twentieth century was the notion that a centralised state could oversee the economy; twenty-first century communism must recognise the need to decentralise the economy as much as possible. Participatory budgeting, as practised, for example, by communal councils in Venezuela, offers an example of this principle in action: the state allocates funds to neighbourhoods and municipalities where active community deliberation can decide how they are best invested. To be effective, however, there must be sufficient funds to drawn upon, which requires adequate levels of taxation or other forms of state revenue, so there is still some need for centralised state oversight of aspects of the economy. Control of the state is needed for economic democracy to take root and thrive, as this affords, for instance, the ability to nationalise key parts of industry and natural resources—revenue from which can serve to fund initiatives for direct economic democracy. Examples of this process in action can be found today in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia (as discussed above). Democracy is only meaningful when it has an underpinning of material equality—for the left to overcome the crisis of democracy this must be realised. Communism needs to serve as the overarching principle under which action takes place.

Through recognising the collective economic strength of workers, the left has historically been able to mobilise vast numbers of people, affording it the capacity to enact substantial change for the purpose of increasing the material well-being of all. Within fifty years of coming into existence, for instance, the Soviet Union was able to transform one of the most backward countries on the planet—one that had barely emerged from feudalism—into a global super-power whose technology was on the cutting edge of the space-race.
To call upon the Soviet Union as an example is to also draw attention to the great obstacles faced by those hoping to rejuvenate communism today: the association of communism with authoritarian statism. As the arc of history traced in Chapter One has shown, the rise of authoritarian communist states was directly correlated to the external aggression of capitalist states—the state was needed to protect fragile communist experiments; however, those administering the state became separated from the people. Communism, properly conceived, speaks to a situation in which direct democracy is enacted so that people can determine the conditions of their own existence, free from the exploitative dynamics of capital. The communist state should, ultimately, be even more minimal than that advocated by the likes of neoliberal theorists such as Nozick (1974)—indeed, the goal of communism has always been the withering away of the state. As has been shown, the state remains a major presence in people’s lives under neoliberalism, but since it acts in the interests of capital rather than the people, its presence is generally a negative one in the lives of many. The state currently offers formal equality, but such equality is meaningless without substantive material equality. Substantive material equality is incompatible with capitalism as a system of economic organisation.

The current conjuncture is one that requires the left to take questions of state engagement seriously. The pressing issue is that of balancing social movement actions with those which seek to contest power within the state. Communism provides the conceptual frame in which to situate both sets of action, it is able to bring the negative dimension of current economic relations to the fore whilst simultaneously emphasising the positive content underlying these relations—namely, that the economy is an expression of our collective productive power. Through pursuing economic democracy—this being, essentially, what communism is—the left can unite diverse sites of struggle within a common project. To work under the communist horizon is move beyond resistance toward a productive common project for the betterment of all. It is already apparent that there is a desire for change: Occupy illustrated this, as well as signalling the impasse of anarchism (when operating in isolation on the radical left) and the need for constructive engagement with the state.

Recall Marx’s quip, quoted in Chapter One, about the Paris Commune being able to achieve the ‘catchword of bourgeoisie revolutions, cheap government’ through getting rid of the standing army and ‘state functionarism’.
Constructive engagement with the state depends, to a large degree, upon the actions of political parties. Yet considerations of the party tend to receive little to no attention in left theory (the subject is barely being mentioned by Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe), and when it does receive attention, the party tends to be treated negatively. Badiou (2010a, p. 240), for instance, considers the party to be ineluctably bound with the authoritarian state and should therefore be discarded by radical politics.\footnote{Badiou (Badiou and Hallward, 2001, pp. 95-102) opts instead for discussions of ‘political organisation’; it is argued here that there is no benefit in replacing this term for that of ‘party.’ It is possible to follow Badiou in his critique of the monolithic, top-down, bureaucratic parties of the twentieth century while recognising what is vital and important in a renewed conception of the party.} Hardt and Negri (2012, p. 68) condemn the party on the grounds that it ‘destroys’ movements; it is charged with disempowering the collective decision making capacity of those on the streets so as to bolster the party’s position within the state. The analysis of Occupy undertaken in these pages, when combined with a reconsideration of Poulantzas’ work, highlights how mistaken such a static, one-dimensional view of the party is. A balance must be struck between movements and those seeking to act within the state. As argued above, communism serves as the horizon under which such a balance can be struck. Multiple strategies should be pursued on the left, but without an overarching shared vision the left is ineffective—it ends up confined, for the most part, in a reactive position from which it desperately clings to the fraying traces of the victories won by past struggles. The rejection of the party as a vehicle for emancipation (when operating in conjunction with social movements) has weakened the radical left.

Fortunately, constructive discussions of the party are beginning to take place. Against the rigidity associated with communist parties of the twentieth century, emphasis is now placed upon flexibility. As argued by Bruno Bosteels (2011, p. 243), in his discussion of García Linera and the Bolivian situation, through adopting a different vantage point: ‘The Party... would no longer be [seen as] the incarnation of the iron laws of historical necessity running things behind our backs while we applaud in unison with the apparatchiks. Instead, it would simply name the flexible organisation of a fidelity to events in the midst of unforeseeable circumstances.’ Indeed, this flexible party form is commensurate with that advocated by Lenin (and celebrated by Lukács) as discussed in Chapter Two (see also, Dean, 2012a, pp. 242-243). It is not a case of abandoning the party, but of recovering it. To avoid the mistakes of
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the twentieth century it is important to ensure the party remains flexible and able to respond to its social base—a dialectical interplay between the two must be fostered and sustained.

Much depends on the relationship between the party and the movement(s). Cox and Nilsen (2014, p. 203) hold contemporary Marxism ‘is not the position that in all times and all places the political party is the best way to organise.... Rather, we would argue that its defining feature in a much deeper sense is a commitment to a popular structured agency, to represent [quoting Marx and Engels] “the interests of the movement as a whole”. ’ Viewed from this perspective, Marxism’s tasks include ‘alliance building between movements, of identifying the most radical common potential, and [paying] close attention to the interests underlying different tendencies within movements, not as a means of dismissal but as a means of understanding and preventing movement capture by elites’—a position commensurate with that of Poulantzas discussed above. In terms of priority, however, Cox and Nilsen (ibid, p 204) argue for placing movements first, parties second. Dean (Dean et al., 2012, np.), in her discussion the party, advocates a more balanced position: a party may, in some instances, be able to take a steering role in relation to the movement, but it should never get ahead of the movement.

In calling for a flexible party, one that is open to movements without seeking to co-opt them, it is important to emphasise that what is being advocated is not another horizontalist consensus-based organisation unable to make difficult strategic decisions. Rather, the value of the party lies in the fact that it has some degree of verticality, but this can be exercised in a democratically accountable way. As discussed in Chapter Five, the problem with horizontalist structures is that they tend to give rise to informal leaders. If leaders are inevitable, then it is better they are clearly identified. As the experiments of Podemos show, it is possible to develop structural openness within parties through the use of new media, whilst retaining strong leadership and clearly defined roles for party members. While there is a need to be wary of those who would claim the Internet and social media provide panaceas for the difficulties besetting the left (as explored in Chapter Seven), when used judiciously
new technologies may be able to create an effective interface between parties and their constituency.\textsuperscript{118}

The success of radical parties depends, first, on massive ongoing social movement mobilisations and, second, upon the party’s capacity (if it is able to attain a position of power) to successfully support the creation of autonomous spaces in which movements can persist. Achieving this involves the recognition that permanent resistance and mobilisation are not possible—the goals of movements need to be realised within the realm of everyday life if they are to endure. Recall Wallerstein’s assessment of the ‘Old Left’s’ two-step plan (as discussed in Chapter One): capture state power; undertake a total transformation of society. The problem was that attempts to realise step two took place through impositions from above, directed by parties that had become disconnected from their base (and even sought to actively suppress social movement mobilisation, violently in some instances). A two-step programme for today’s left also involves taking state power as a first step—but this is only viable if it happens in conjunction with the continuing mobilisation of the people. Step two would involve the steady entrenchment of the autonomous capacities of movements, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and other councilist forms that could persist outside state control. The failure of the Russian Revolution stemmed from its inability to undertake this step, and the success of the Venezuelan experiment will lie in whether or not this approach can take root.

On the one hand, calling for a renewal of the communist project, asserting the need for economic democracy, sketching out a possible course of action for a rejuvenated party, and charting the form of the ‘society to come’, sounds like the wistful construction of a utopian wish-list. On the other hand, this thesis has shown that all of the elements discussed here have historical antecedents, and that contemporary examples can also be called upon. There are alternatives to life under neoliberalism. The fight to come will, however, need to be rooted within a common project—struggle finds meaning when conducted under the communist horizon.

\textsuperscript{118} The rather dismal electoral showing of the Pirate Party—in its various national manifestations—does not discredit this possibility. These parties began in an online context, and then sought to develop a wider movement. Podemos, on the other hand, grew out of the context of mass-mobilisations within Spain, and then sought to develop aspects of an online component inside a more traditional party structure.
Summary—toward twenty-first century communism
A consistent premise throughout this thesis has been that the various historic manifestations of capital, changes to the state form, and the claims-making of social movements are interlinked. The changing focus of social movement contestation—from class-based issues to those of identity politics—has been concomitant with the rise of neoliberalism. Resistance to neoliberalism has arisen, but is dispersed through fluctuating networks. The horizontalist ethos of anarchist forms of contestation are hegemonic today, consequently engagement with the state is rejected by most of today’s radical left. While the state focussed ‘old left’ had fallen short of its goals, the pendulum has since swung too far the other way. Occupy is indicative of the difficulties the contemporary left within the core faces—discontent with capital and concern over the crisis of democracy may now be popular sentiments, but there is an inability to move beyond resistance. The left needs to rethink questions of strategy if it is win any substantial victories in the twenty-first century.

Recovering the work of Poulantzas from the relative obscurity it has been subject to in the wake of post-structuralism and post-Marxism offers a means of thinking through the shortcomings of contemporary left theory and action. Poulantzas offers a more accurate description of the relations between capital, class and the state—therefore he is better able to conceptualise the direction effective political contestation should take than most contemporary theorists. His approach emphasises the need for action both against and within the state—indicating that reform and revolution need not be seen as incompatible. Extra-parliamentary politics can develop a more radical vision than that of parties, but parties provide a means of realising some of these goals in concrete ways. As the current moment within core states is clearly not a revolutionary one, it is important to think through the ways that the actions of movements and parties can be constructively balanced.

To come together, once again, under the communist horizon offers the possibility of shared vision for the disparate arms of the left. Historic and contemporary examples point toward the concrete outcomes that can be achieved through constructive relationships between movements and parties when they work toward common goals. State apparatuses can be used to develop a society’s self-organising capacities. Insofar as communism stands for direct democracy and the notion that equality must have a material underpinning, it is only under this horizon that the current crisis of democracy can be effectively overcome.
Conclusion: The Promise of Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Overcoming the crisis of democracy

Overcoming the crisis of democracy requires that the effects of capitalism should be directly addressed. This involves more than protest, reaction and critique. An alternative economic vision must be offered. We live in cities and towns produced by cooperative labour. Yet the vast majority of us are subject to gross exploitation, divided, forced to fight one another, to fear constantly what the future may bring, to eye one another with suspicion. None of this is inevitable; communism is possible. The society to come is inherent within the shell of the old—all the resources and knowledge needed to realise a plentiful common life exist in the here and now. A complete reconceptualization of what is possible in terms of political organisation and action is needed to realise this potential, however. Such is the conclusion reached at the close of the last chapter.
The writing of this thesis began in late 2011 at a time of great hope. There was, at long last, a vigorous protest movement fighting the iniquities of capitalism and calling for ‘real democracy.’ Protest was global in its scope—spanning different states, cultures, and religions. The optimistic expansion of encampments in city squares, the rejection of ‘outmoded’ vertical forms of organisation in favour of horizontalism, a romantic belief in the spontaneous capacity of the crowd, the spurning of any state engagement, expressions of international solidarity; revolution was around the corner... but then came brutal reaction. The Arab Spring was followed by a harsh winter of hatred, division, and oppression; Occupy encampments were forcibly dispersed by the state and most participants melded, once again, into the atomised crowd of the neoliberal city.

This thesis formed around questions of how the twenty-first century might be claimed by those fighting for a deepening of democracy and the achievement of substantive equality. The demise of Occupy signalled the limits of today’s radical left. Finding a means of moving beyond these limits was a difficult intellectual journey to undertake. My research set out from a position that was sympathetic towards autonomism. I had considered myself Marxist, broadly speaking, but on a critical rather than an explicitly political level. I agreed with those who scorned the state. That struggle needs to take place within and against the state, using the mechanisms of representative democracy in conjunction with vigorous social movement activity, was not, therefore, a foregone conclusion. (I even set out with some optimism as to the Internet’s revolutionary potential.)

Before re-emphasising the conclusion reached, the steps taken to reach this point will be retraced.

Part I of this thesis set about contextualising the study of social movements today. To move beyond the limits reached by Occupy it was important to situate the movement historically so as to learn lessons from past movements. It was seen that the conclusions drawn by nineteenth century Marxists were relevant today: enduring organisational forms must be developed; a collective consciousness capable of sustaining ongoing action formed; international solidarity forged; and the state effectively engaged. Over time, however, this ‘old left’ had become separated from its social base; capital, the state form, and the complexities of international relations worked, over time, to undermine attempts to
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‘transform society.’ New social movements rejected the old left; fights for recognition eclipsed those for redistribution and political economy fell to the way-side. Resistance to neoliberalism in the late 1990s signalled the resurgence of capital-critical protest; although this time anarchist principles of collective action prevailed, as expressed by networked horizontalism and a rejection of political parties and the state.

Most social movement studies fail to account satisfactorily for the dynamics of capital, and tend to be narrow in their focus. This thesis developed a broader approach. It situated social movements historically and showed how capital, contestation and the state are dialectically intertwined. The changing nature of contemporary social movements was considered in conjunction with the rise of neoliberalism. The financial crisis of 2008 stemmed, in part, from capital’s victory over the working class in the 1980s and by binding sections of the working class to financial markets through indebtedness or pension funds. Crisis led capital to face, once again, widespread resistance. This resistance was weak and ineffectual, however. Consequently capital has been able to continue with ‘business as usual.’ If capital continues its current trajectory under the hegemony of the rentier class then inequalities will deepen for as long as the planet can support predatory capitalism—which may not be very long at all.

Social movement contestation has changed significantly over the last fifty years. Contemporary left theory reflects this shift. While the ‘old left’ needed to be challenged over its complacency, patriarchal chauvinism, moribund statism, disregard for the environment and hollow rhetoric, no substantial new politics has followed from this challenge. The legacy of post-structuralism has not been particularly productive for the left. Grand narratives of change (such as that offered by communism) were discredited, class disregarded (despite the persistent dynamics of capital), and the state and party rejected. In short, the categories underpinning most Marxist approaches to politics were jettisoned. New social movements were positioned as the principal actors in a post-class politics; theories of difference and multiplicity formed to account for this. Consequently three divergent political strategies have been offered by today’s left theorists: (I) those excluded from social life can be linked together in a popular movement whose aim is to form a counter-hegemonic block capable of radicalising existing democratic institutions (Laclau and Mouffe); (II) actions can be taken against the state from the standpoint of the excluded, whose condition may improve as a result (Badiou and Rancière); (III) or the state can be completely rejected as a site of
contestation, as effective action involves an exodus from power (Hardt and Negri). Occupy presented an opportunity to assess the usefulness and validity of these theories in a concrete political situation.

Part II of this thesis undertook an in-depth analysis of Occupy. Most studies of the movement offer only general observations, focus on particular issues and encampments, or overemphasise the role of social media. Having first contextualised the movement in Part I, this thesis already addressed the shortcomings of many studies of Occupy by taking account of the dialectical entwinement of political economy, the state, and contestation. Through analysing all online material produced by four Occupy encampments (Wall Street, Oakland, Melbourne and London), and supplementing this with the voluminous body of literature produced on the movement, an analysis of the movement was developed that was unique in its breadth. Three broad questions guided this analysis: What constitutes effective political action today? What would a contemporary subject capable of challenging capital look like? And on what spatial terrain is action to be situated?

In an almost complete reversal of the conclusions drawn by Marxists in the nineteenth century, Occupy was seen to have favoured horizontalist, spontaneous organisation and a complete rejection of the state. While other tendencies were present within the movement, they were marginalised. Anarchism was hegemonic in Occupy. A number of problems followed from this: consensus decision-making was fetishized; blocks were used against those seeking to engage with the state or issue demands; opaque interpersonal networks formed in which informal leadership developed free of democratic accountability; a gulf opened between the radicalised core inside Occupy encampments and the wider movement. While the movement was capital-critical and sought to overcome the crisis of democracy, there was no shared vision guiding action. The movement was short-lived; while the violent reaction of the state was a factor in this, the dominant anarchist ethos was perhaps more so. The problem of endurance is now, as in the nineteenth century, one of the most pressing questions that the left faces.

The anarchist style politics that dominated Occupy were successful in creating an inclusive space capable of incorporating large numbers of people—in large part because it is compatible with the individualist mindset fostered under neoliberalism—but it was unable to
foster a collective subject capable of effectively challenging capital. Occupy reflected the current ambiguity surrounding the notion of class. While Marxism has historically emphasised the conflictive underpinning of capitalism and the class relations this gives rise to—with attention paid to how these relations can be politicised—Occupy downplayed this antagonistic dimension. The conception of the movement as being that of the ‘99% versus the 1%’, named a division, but did so in a limited way—the ‘99%’ was too broad a category; it contained too many divergent class positions to effectively serve as a basis for an enduring collective identity. The movement sought to exercise radical inclusivity, yet was unable to contain the consequent tensions. The question of how to foster a collective identity capable of carrying concerted contestation forward is, as it was for nineteenth century radicals, a pressing one for the left in the early twenty-first century.

Against those who attribute the Internet with the capacity to overcome the limitations faced by the contemporary left, this thesis argued that there is no ‘technical fix’ for the crisis of democracy. While many studies have emphasised Occupy’s digital dimension, the research undertaken here found it was more of an offline than an online movement. It was primarily orientated toward the cityscape, not cyberspace. While the Internet was an important tool, protest was orientated toward classic forms of contestation. Importantly, the movement signalled the need to reimagine everyday life in the city—to reclaim space and the rhythm of daily life from capital. The autonomist thrust of such an approach, however, is limited when pursued in isolation. The temporary nature of encampments meant the experiences offered by Occupy were fleeting.

Part III was concerned with questions of strategy and of how radical politics in the twenty-first century can endure. The lessons of past movements had to be recovered, political economy accounted for, and questions of the state and party brought to the fore. In short, the left has to effectively respond to the challenges raised by new social movements and post-structuralism, something it has as yet been incapable of. Anarchism (broadly speaking) has become a default position for much of the radical left, with little to show as a result. The work of Nicos Poulantzas—who, until his death in 1979, fought to maintain a Marxian approach to politics against the rising tide of post-structuralism—needs to be recovered.
To return to Poulantzas is to retrace the left’s steps to an unique historical conjuncture—the crucial question he posed, and to which an answer still needs to be found, asks how the vitality and autonomy of new social movements can be combined with the actions of parties. The two need to be drawn together for an anti-capitalist politics—one cognisant of class and sensitive to diversity—that engages the state so as to transform the state. Examples from Latin America and southern Europe illustrate attempts to realise such a project today. Importantly, many of these struggles are being conducted under the ‘communist horizon’ once again. To recover such a horizon is to find a means of situating diverse groups and actions on a common terrain—it gives the left the opportunity to show there are viable alternatives to capitalism.

A communism for the twenty-first century would balance social movement actions against the state with the activities of a renewed party form within the state. If power can be achieved within the state—on the back of popular and ongoing mobilisations—the party will be able to assist social movements in the creation and entrenchment of autonomous spaces. Through fighting for direct economic democracy movements and parties can take power through the exercise of collective power. The contemporary crisis of democracy—with its disconnect between rulers and ruled—can be overcome, but only if capital is opposed and an alternative project pursued. The twenty-first century needs to be the historical epoch in which a worldwide and politically durable communism is realised.
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