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ENGAGED WITHDRAWAL
OCCUPYING POLITICS BEYOND POLITICS

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Theoretically informed and systematic accounts of the Occupy movements of 2011 are yet to be developed, although some attempts in that direction have been made. What these events in any case might allow is a mapping of possible forms of protest and sites of struggles to come. Such a mapping will have to extrapolate the main structural tendencies present in these events, by means of a critique of the ways in which they themselves failed to meet their own standards, as well as the way contradictory tendencies cancelled each other out in the process of their articulation. For there is always something in such events that cannot be grasped and must remain unresolved – as a promise, or as an *aporia* – for the simple reason that it cannot simultaneously process the larger internal and external transformations it itself produces. This seems to confirm the Hegelian truism that the event and its understanding are asynchronous and in need of a third perspective that grasps their difference as a unity. However, contrary to this dialectical picture, the event itself is fragmented and partial, split between its ‘being something’ on the one hand, and the processes of self-recognition and self-misrecognition by the actors involved on the other (‘being x, y, z’).

As such the process of (mis)understanding (as x, y, z) always expresses more than the event is able to bear, while at the same time this understanding cannot but fail to be adequate to what the being of the event signifies. On the one hand, this means that the various ideas and ideals attributed to Occupy cannot be falsified by simply pointing to the ways in which they fail to match the ‘empirical’ reality of Occupy. On the other hand, neither can these ideals disregard this reality altogether. Going beyond these two ‘false’ approaches constitutes the moment of critique. By critique I mean the type of philosophical analysis that attempts to disentangle the contradictory tendencies of an event that only ‘really’ appear on the empirical plane as always-already resolved into a non-contradictory complex, but that can be discerned in the ways the events are represented by the actors whom it concerns (irrespective of whether they actually participated in the protests).

The first part of this essay reviews what I propose to call, with the previous paragraph in mind, various ‘self-(mis)understandings’ of Occupy. These focus on Occupy in terms of the phenomenology of being-there, the public debates and policies it did or did not transform, the collective awareness and sense of momentum it triggered, the organizational and social logic of its camp sites, and the socio-economic and historical context in which it took place. The second part abstracts from these analyses and attempts to understand Occupy more conceptually, as a ‘protest form’ by relating it to a discussion in political ontology that is particularly lively today: between advocates of a new model for radical politics that proposes the cumulative exit from existing political and economic institutions, and advocates of a model that proposes new forms of radical-democratic engagement with existing institutions. The first model is developed in the writings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, the second in the work of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière. The latter formulate a critique of the former’s model of radical politics as ‘exodus’. In her latest work, for example, Mouffe (2013) opposes her own proposal for radical politics (‘engagement with’) to that of Hardt and Negri (‘withdrawal from’). Instead of arguing that Occupy incorporates either one or the other exclusively, I show that it unites within itself aspects of both, developing a protest form I propose to call ‘engaged withdrawal’: the outward and engaged performance of an inner-directed withdrawal, where the de-

velopment of the social-communicative, economic and political potentialities it already possesses become the very 'substance' and icon of its protest against an unjust order while at the same time celebrating the latter's increasing irrelevance.

Modest beginnings: what just happened?

Was the Occupy movement as significant as the events known as May 68 (Wallerstein 2011)? Was it the 'rebirth of the political (and the social) as such' (Mitchell et al. 2013: x)? Did the year 2011 mark the end of the end of history (Roos 2011)? Given the quantity of academic work on Occupy, a cynic could easily point to a certain over-eagerness in critical leftist theorists, who, after years of apparent societal consensus and stability, find in Occupy the long awaited bedrock in which to anchor their critical perspectives. Such a condition of scarcity is bound to lead to over-interpretations and exaggerations of Occupy's overall significance. However, one could reply that these exaggerated responses are themselves the clearest sign that something important did indeed happen, if not in 'reality', then at least in the experience and imagination of many people whose obscure feelings of dissatisfaction acquired a concrete form, as David Graeber (2013) points out.

I too am among those people. In the fall of 2011 I visited New York City. Like many European tourists, I watched seagulls circle the Brooklyn Bridge, strolled around Manhattan, took the ferry to Staten Island and visited several of the city's finest museums. On the 15th of October however, while riding a local bus, dozens and dozens of police vans passed by. Curious, I got off at the next stop. Just on my right, a band of men wearing Guy Fawkes masks were put against a wall and then thrown into a van by an equally anonymous band of police. Behind them a large crowd of protesters marching in the direction of Times Square emerged. Recognizing the signs and slogans of Occupy Wall Street, I decided to join in. And despite my inclination to a form of detached, aristocratic individuality, I too became just a little enchanted. Besides Graeber, the authors of the books I review in the following paragraphs all attempt to preserve such a

feeling of enchantment, a sense of the aesthetic and vital aspects of Occupy, the being-there, the 'real-time' of the movement, without succumbing to an empty utopianism: writing from personal experiences on site, of the singularity of the events, of occupying the place where it counts (the financial district), and of coming to terms with the phenomenological power of the alternative assemblages of which some of the authors became an integral part. It is on the basis of these experiences that they develop the more 'theorized' reflections on the socio-economic context and political significance of these protests.

In a bundle of three essays, Mitchell, Harcourt and Tausig (2013) connect a sense of commitment and solidarity with the spirit of Occupy to a more detached critical analysis (viii). Tausig's contribution offers a 'thick description' of the lived experience of Zuccotti Park. Almost in the margins of quotations from Occupy protest signs, he sketches a poetic portrait of the magical, atmospheric, energetic, almost divine qualities of being-here-now, among strange fellow-travellers – the repetitive, ritual force of the people's microphone and the drum circles, the metaphoric quality of being squeezed in and surrounded by the architectural emanations of Corporate Glory, where the mundane meets the extraordinary, the flash of the now, the renewed presence of things past, the drama of a personal story – immersed in a 'sea of hope'. But also insecurity, despair of the centrifugal tendencies inherent to open constellations, slowly falling apart, making way for what has always been and can return at any moment. Taking its cue from Walter Benjamin's notion of capitalism as religion, anti-capitalist or capital-critical uprisings are proposing mantras different from those of the prevailing doxa implemented by financial sects, erecting different shamans: 'We use our magic to thwart their magic' (Mitchell et al. 2013: 30). Somewhat similarly, Mitchell's contribution analyzes Occupy at the level of the imaginary, the iconographic and the spectacular – the frantic circulation of images: banners, slogans, videos, exchanged locally and dispersed globally. Occupy may not be a true revolutionary event, but it certainly presented an image or an echo of one (Mitchell et al. 2013: 98) and can be studied as such. Mitchell too shows that if Occupy did not accomplish any 'tangible' change, it certainly opened up new ways for our political imagination, and transformed the way we talk about our world.

Taking a less atavistic approach, Harcourt claims that Occupy fashioned ‘a new kind of politics’ (Mitchell et al. 2013: 46). The argument revolves around the distinction between *civil* and *political* disobedience. Whereas civil disobedience accepts the principal legitimacy of political institutions, political disobedience ‘rejects the ideological landscape that has dominated our collective imagination’ and ‘resists the very way in which we are governed’ (Mitchell et al. 2013: 47). Political disobedience turns away from conventional political strategies, as organized around specific issues and policy debates, the party system, labor unions, lobbies, to the point where ‘it even resists attempts to be categorized politically’ (Mitchell et al. 2013: 47). The main progression of the Occupy movement lies in its overcoming of the false oppositions between Government and Free Markets that traditionally structure the oppositions between Democrats and Republicans in the United States. The financial crisis of 2008 revealed that, if necessary, banks and even whole industries operating on the ‘free market’ could be instantly nationalized to preserve the system as a whole – something secretly anticipated by the financial sector itself. The collective insight that emerged from this crisis – that Government and Free Markets are structurally woven together – implies turning away from those political institutions in order to find other solutions. For Harcourt Occupy signifies this novel awareness, that it always takes two to tango, i.e. that neither the conjunction of government and market-society, nor the expansion or intensification of one to the detriment of the other, can provide a viable solution to today’s problems. However, the current political system is largely premised on the very idea that, *yes it can* provide those solutions.

On the basis of a recent collection of interviews it seems that Chomsky (2012) would surely agree. He interprets the new protest movements as the late effect of a major and dramatic systemic transformation that began in the 1970s. Whereas the immediate post-war era seemed to move into the direction of a relatively more egalitarian and just society based on social-democratic ideals, the seventies and eighties saw the rise of the financial sectors, supported by neoliberal institutions as well as governments, which themselves became increasingly dependent on the very sectors they were supposed to regulate. As the 1% became exorbitantly wealthy, the gap between public policy and public will grew exorbitantly, creating a ‘plutonomy’ and a ‘precariat’. For Chomsky, the legitimacy and success of

Occupy mainly depends on the continued existence of broad popular support – this is its fundamental challenge. Surveys do in fact show that large parts of the American population agree with the idea that the financial sector must be regulated, those responsible for the crisis prosecuted, tax breaks for the 1% removed, and the influence of money over politics limited. The perception of class conflict and economic inequality has significantly increased as well. A lesser part however identifies directly with Occupy’s practical methodology. But the openness of the movement, in terms of its (lack of) demands, its (lack of) aims, and its (lack of) ideological commitments, offers it up to diverse linkages amongst different groups and social strata, and thus potentially to such broad popular support.

In *Occupy Nation* (2012) Gitlin too claims that, unlike other recent social movements, Occupy began with a majority base of support. But, despite the evidence of surveys about *public opinion*, it can still be asked, ‘Why, if the protesters represent the feelings of ‘99% of Americans’ have so very, very few of those represented bothered to support the initiative in any way at all?’ (Smucker 2011: online). The great merit of the book is that it doesn’t shy away from these difficult questions, while also discussing the very concrete problems that arose within the camp sites, ‘the splendors and miseries of structurelessness’: from the progressive inefficiency of the General Assembly (the miserable prospect that ‘freedom is an endless meeting’), the internal strife and factionalism, the influence of demographic differences, and the presence of psychiatric patients, drug dealers and vagrants. Despite these difficulties Gitlin sympathizes with Occupy as ‘a sort of new tribe’, characterized by a collective hostility to all forms of authority, elitism and leadership, fueled by an amateuristic DIY-ethos, and based on horizontal consensual decision-making procedures. He warns not to repeat mistakes made in the past by the progressive movements of the sixties and seventies, which, by taking a radical turn, became increasingly disconnected from society-wide support, and were thus prevented from forming an extended left-of-center majority that could have launched them into the center of political power (Gitlin 2012: 172). Like Chomsky, Gitlin would like to see Occupy and future movements go in that moderate but effective direction.

Beyond Representation

In stark contrast to these ‘modest’ proposals, Occupy has also been made to fit the description of an emerging revolutionary agency: the Multitude (Hardt and Negri 2012). In this radical interpretation Occupy signals both the crisis of democratic representation and the latest expression of an emerging ‘exodus’ of the multitude from the economic and political structures of power, especially the representative mechanisms of the state and the conventional public spheres set up for the articulation of dissent (Lorey 2012). According to Hardt and Negri, Occupy shows that the Multitude is able to ‘throw off systems of political representation and assert their own powers of democratic action’ (Lorey 2012: online). Occupy is a stage in the self-education of the Multitude in which it ‘must discover the passage from declaration to constitution’ and from resistance to exodus. Already the sole source of the production of social wealth, it must learn to appropriate and defend this common excess from the parasitic apparatuses of imperial command (Hardt and Negri 2001).

Several criticisms of this way of interpreting Occupy as radically anti-representational have been raised. As Hardt and Negri argue that ‘representation is not a vehicle of democracy but an obstacle to its realisation’ and that it ‘separates the population from power’ (Hardt and Negri 2012: 17), Dean and Jason object to the way *any* mechanism of representation is here equated with current institutionalized forms of indirect representation: ‘Rather than recognizing representation as an unavoidable feature of language, process for forming and aggregating preferences (always open to contestation and revision), or means of producing and expressing a common will, these tendencies construe representation as unavoidably hierarchical, distancing, and repressive’ (Dean and Jason 2012: online). Similarly, Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière criticize Hardt and Negri’s notion of Multitude as a purely constituent power that – freed of Empire – would inaugurate a spontaneous community beyond all representational mediation and division. Instead, they emphasize the necessarily hegemonic (partial, heterogeneous and exclusionary) nature of any social order. This means that radical politics cannot be grounded in the given identity of a part of the social (not even the 99%), since the genuine moment of politics is what precedes and conditions this identity. As the latter is pre-

cisely what is at stake in politics it can never function as its ground. Representation is a necessary part of the collective contestation of a given hegemonic order (itself a set of representations that distributes the identities of the parts of the social in a specific manner) and essential for rearticulating and redistributing these parts *differently*. Instead, by attempting ‘to found politics on the essence of a mode of life’ (Rancière 1999: 92) the theorists of the Multitude believe that ‘its oppositional consciousness does not require political articulation’ (Mouffe 2008: online).

Laclau (2005) describes the process in which any collective capable of political action is necessarily constructed and constituted by means of representation: ‘the represented depends on the representative for the constitution of his or her own identity’ (Laclau 2005: 158). The representative and represented determine each other, the identity and unity of the latter is not a given on the basis of which a more or less ‘adequate’ representative can be erected (Laclau 2005: 161). He rejects the idea that something like ‘the will of the People’ or ‘the desire of the Multitude’ precedes or escapes the representational dynamic. The figure of a ‘people’ or ‘Multitude’ is itself always already the effect of a representation, the construction of an empty signifier that corroborates an equivalential chain of particular issues and demands. Representation is not merely a political, super-structural, phenomenon but ‘the primary terrain of constitution of social objectivity’ (Laclau 2005: 163). This means that it is illegitimate to think of the destruction of representation as the liberation of the true communal essence, the proper identity of the multitude (Žižek: online).

Hardt and Negri however deny that the construction of a people out of a heterogeneous multiplicity by means of representation is the *only* way of envisioning a political subject capable of collective action. In a (rather under-developed) response, Negri (2008) criticizes the hegemonic approach for perpetuating mechanisms of transcendence by ontologizing a ‘sovereign’ difference that necessarily separates society from its own social power, the institution from its social base, the representatives from the represented. The notion of Multitude contains in itself the rejection of the category of the people Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière attempt to uphold in the face of its liberal alter-ego. The Multitude is anti-people in as much as it is anti-state: whereas the people is inherently tied up with the oppressive

logic of the state, the Multitude exists beyond the ‘representational nexus’ of sovereignty. It is its own representation, or rather, the dissolution of that transcendence intrinsic to any representation.

Together, these differences lead to very different models of radical politics, and to different interpretations of the overall significance of Occupy. Mouffe (2013) refers to Occupy as employing an anti-institutional strategy ‘inspired by the exodus model’ (Mouffe 2013: 71). The rejection of political representation and the articulation of demands seem to validate this assessment. Furthermore, the communal and self-organizing spirit of the camp sites, like the advocates of exodus, would envisage politics un-antagonistically as ‘acting in concert’ (Mouffe 2013: 79). According to Mouffe, post-workerism promotes the wholesale turning away from representative democracy, focusing on the construction of alternative, non-representational forms of collective life under the influence of neither state nor market. What she calls ‘withdrawal-from’ consists of impeding the *transfer* of the accumulated excess of intellectual, communicative and cooperative capacities of the Multitude into the power of state administration, as well as impeding ‘its configuration as productive resource of the capitalistic enterprise’ (Virno 2004: 71). Similarly, with Negri it consists of *subtracting* already autonomously existing productive capacities from its capitalist mode of organization and regulation, and thus of destroying the specific limits currently imposed on those capabilities (Hardt and Negri 2009: 152). In this respect Mouffe’s criticism of Occupy resembles that of Dean concerning the various *interpretations* of Occupy as anti-or unrepresentational, as ‘a fantasy of multiplicity without antagonism, of difference without division’, but not of her analysis of the *actual* movement: ‘The rejection of representation [...] comes up against Occupy Wall Street’s powerful slogan, “We Are the 99 Percent.” The slogan represents the people and the political message of the movement by asserting division’ (Dean and Jason 2012: online). *This* aspect of Occupy seems to fit the model for radical politics Laclau and Mouffe develop quite well, as constituting an ‘Us against Them’, rediscovering the antagonistic basis of society and identifying itself as having a stake in this struggle.

In *Agonistics* (2013) Mouffe defends a hegemonic model for radical politics based on engagement-with. She sets out to show that engaging with the

hegemonic make-up of society is a necessary condition for genuine social change, which can only succeed through the construction of a common will and set of demands that transcends the immediate play of differences immanent to the social field. She traces the various differences between the post-workerist and post-foundationalist models for radical politics to differences between their respective political ontologies. Whereas Negri and Virno develop an ontology of immanence, both Laclau and Mouffe develop an ontology of radical negativity. The latter argues that antagonism is irreducible, from which they derive the necessity of political articulation and mediation. This means that the type of immanent community beyond antagonism Hardt and Negri (and possibly Occupy) envision is permanently unavailable. Any radical politics must aim at transforming the existing institutions, towards a *different* hegemony, and not beyond it. So through a series of intermediate steps, the necessity of engagement-with and the impossibility of withdrawal-from are derived from the ontological irreducibility of antagonistic difference, and the necessarily hegemonic mediation of this difference. This prevents making ‘a redemptive leap into a society beyond politics and sovereignty where the Multitude can immediately rule itself and act in concert without the need of law or the State’ (Mouffe 2013: 78).¹

Beyond politics

Whereas in Laclau and Mouffe (2001) what separates every social order from itself is the difference between ‘the political’ and ‘politics’, in Rancière it is the difference between ‘politics’ and ‘police’ (Marchart 2007). Police refers to ‘the organization of bodies as a community and the management of places, powers, and functions’ (Rancière 1999: 99) from which the ‘part of those who have no part’ is excluded. Politics refers to a singular mechanism of subjectivation of this part that interrupts the smooth workings of the police order. Genuine politics and social change therefore emerge from ‘the confrontation between the police logic of the distribution of parts and the political logic of the part of those who have no part’ (Rancière 1999: 73). For both Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière this discrepancy is inscribed in the ambiguous and self-subversive notion of the people, as

designating both the constituent power of the body politic *and* what nevertheless fails to be expressed by this body. Yet compared to Laclau and Mouffe, Rancière takes a more skeptical stance towards representative democracy and the function of parliamentary politics, describing these mechanisms as essentially ‘oligarchic’ (Rancière 2006: 297). However, unlike Hardt and Negri he refuses to idealize direct democracy vis-à-vis representative democracy, rejecting the very conception of democracy as a *form of government*, i.e. as a particular ordering of the social (Rancière 2006: 298). Instead, for Rancière democracy refers to the aforementioned singular and unidentifiable act of interruption of the police order.

In *Disagreement* (1999) Rancière develops his model for radical-democratic politics on the basis of this difference, as only the latter enables the contestation and modification of a given social order. What blocks this democratic, an-archic rupture is precisely what disables the opening of this difference, by a totalitarian equation of politics and police. In the tradition of political philosophy, the totalitarian suppression of this difference becomes the hallmark of an ideal community, which takes three forms: archipolitics, parapolitics and metapolitics. What these forms have in common is that each tries ‘to achieve the essence of politics by eliminating this difference from itself that politics consists of, to achieve politics by eliminating politics’ (Rancière 1999: 63). In ‘The People or the Multitudes?’ (2010a) and ‘Communists without Communism?’ (2010b) Rancière criticizes Hardt and Negri’s idealization of the biopolitical autonomy in a way that partly fits his critique of Plato’s archipolitics and Marx’s metapolitics. Although it is not made explicit, Rancière interprets the theory of the Multitude as an extension of this tradition of thought.

In *The Republic* Plato provides the blueprint for such a post-political community beyond hegemony, as ‘the complete realization of the *arkhê* of community [...] replacing without any leftover the democratic configuration of politics’ (Rancière 1999: 65). Plato proceeds from the distinction between an ideal *politeia* (an organic community in which each part has his part) and the *politeiai*, ‘the sundry varieties of bad regimes bound up with the conflict between parts of the city and with the domination of one part over the others’ (Rancière 1999: 63). Consequently, ‘In place of the disturbing elements of political subjectivization, the *politeia* puts the

roles, aptitudes, and feelings of the community conceived as a body animated by the one soul of the whole’ (cited in Bosteels 2010: 85). Like Plato’s archipolitics, Marx’s metapolitics ‘summons the precarious artifices of the political scene before the truth of the immanent power which places beings in community’ (Rancière 1999: 86). The essential difference is that for Marx ‘the truth of politics is no longer located above politics as its essence or idea. It is located beneath or behind it, in what it conceals and exists only to conceal’ (Rancière 1999: 82).-What lies beneath, the real material development of society, is ‘the true movement that should, through its achievement, dispel the appearances of political citizenship in favor of the reality of productive man’ (Rancière 1999: 83).

Similarly, the exodus of the Multitude signals the becoming-immanent of the law of the social, towards an ideal community where ‘the law (*nomos*) exists as living *logos*: as the ethos (morality, ways of being, character) of the community and of each of its members; as the occupation of the workers; as the tune playing in everyone’s heads and the movement spontaneously animating their bodies; as the spiritual nourishment (*trophê*) that automatically turns their minds toward a certain cast (*tropos*) of behavior and thought’ (Rancière 1999: 67). Liberated from the violent disjunctions of Empire, the Multitude becomes a purely constituent power, and as such harbors a wisdom that ‘would not consist in scrupulous attention to the institutions ensuring the power of the people through representatives so much as in the appropriateness of political practices to a society’s ways of being, to the forces that move it’ (Rancière 1999: 97). The singularities that make up the Multitude, like the men of Plato’s ideal Republic, are what they are and do what they do, not because of some transcendent law or mechanism of representation, but by following that common law intrinsic to its own forms of life (the virtue Plato referred to as *sôphrosunê*).

By implication, Rancière’s criticisms of Hardt and Negri’s republic of the Multitude can be applied to Occupy participants and commentators that applaud its supposedly anti-representational or post-political design. The self-reflexive obsession with (the rejection of) demands and conventional politics, like the concept of the Multitude would manifest ‘a phobia [...] of any politics that defines itself “against”’ (Rancière 2010a: 86). It is in this

context that the very definition of politics is increasingly at stake. What does it mean to act politically? Rancière's analysis of modern metapolitics shows that the term 'political' is subjected to a series of ideomorphological reversals and semantic alterations that radically double its meaning. At the moment one attempts to delimit or to define the scope of 'the political', it diverts and reverses it. As such it leads to the absurd situation in which, supposedly, genuine political action can take place not because of but *despite* 'politics', and in which 'the "end of politics" is exactly the same as what the menders of "political philosophy" call "the return of politics"' (Rancière 1999: 92). In several analyses of Occupy too there is a sense that to designate it as *political* fails to grasp its full significance – the label 'political' seems somewhat of a misnomer (Mitchell et al. 2013: 47). Similarly, Gitlin recalls a left-wing activist friend from Paris commenting on Occupy that perfectly captures the apparent paradox: 'I have never seen a political movement that is so apolitical' (Gitlin 2012: 24). The name Occupy remains inconclusive in this respect as well. It can be applied to several 'apolitical' activities: one can occupy a place in line for a concert, a parking spot, and so on. What phenomena, actions or sentiments could be dubbed a-, supra- or anti-political, and what is the explanatory value or (I wanted to say 'political') significance of such negative terms?

Politics in love

Like many protest movements before it, Occupy started from a shared outrage, in this case over the corruption of the political system and the financial sector. This part of its motivation was essentially negative: in representing the 99% it determined itself as being-against another, the 1%. Were this negative element lacking, it would perhaps become difficult to conceive of Occupy as a *political* protest, or even as a protest at all. For what is a protest other than its being-against, (as almost any being-for can be re-described as a being-against)? What is left of it *qua* political protest when it would be completely indifferent not only to existing political or economic institutions, but to being-against as such, and instead exclusively focuses on designing and managing the conditions of its own develop-

ment? It seems that an alternative, *positive* designation or vocabulary seems to be lacking, which leads to negative descriptions of Occupy as a-, non- or anti-political. The more fashionable term 'social movement' in that sense already carries a more positive connotation.²

Of Occupy it is indeed often said that it rejects the prospect of the recognition of its demands or the representational inclusion of its interests by the existing political institutions. When the question was asked if Occupy should stay out of politics, most of the occupants answered in the affirmative (Gitlin 2012: 112). Instead, Hardt and Negri argue, it commences from the self-sufficiency of its own collective powers, the potentialities inherent to it as a constituent force. This actually makes for a point of continuity with the social movements of 1968 and the various ideas of the Situationists such as the *autogestion généralisée*. According to Pearce, these revolts were both cause and effect of an already growing disenchantment with representational politics that led to 'a fall in political party activism and cynicism towards the organised form of politics' but also to a new type of social movement (Pearce 2005: 3). What Occupy has in common with this type is a 'sense of "autonomy" from politics defined as the activity of the State and political parties' (Pearce 2005: 4) and the insight that 'the conflicts and contradictions of advanced industrial society can no longer be resolved in meaningful and promising ways through étatism, political regulation, and the proliferating inclusion of ever more claims and issues on the agenda of bureaucratic authorities' (Offe 1985: 819). However, although based on the same insight, in contradistinction to the retreat into private life of the majority of populations, or the private wars of far-left groups like *Brigade Rosse* with the authorities, these new social movements 'do make a claim to be recognized as political actors by the wider community – although their forms of action do not enjoy the legitimacy conferred by established political institutions – and who aim at objectives, the achievement of which would have binding effects for society as a whole rather than just for the group itself' (Offe 1985: 828).

One of the central ideas of May '68 is that the personal is the political, that in fact *everything is political*. The idea that everything is political is dependent on the idea that power relations aren't limited to the sphere of politics but that they are everywhere, that they are immanent to the so-

cial fabric. This means that *resistance* to power must be exercised everywhere as well. This is its normative implication: the necessity of doing politics, always and everywhere. However, one of the other central messages of May '68 was *Make love, not war*. It seems to me that these two ideas are not easily reconciled. In the notion that everything is political, 'political' refers to the reality of antagonism. But the classical figure of antagonism is that of war, the struggle between enemies. So if love is the opposite of war, and we must make love instead of war, it is in a sense also opposed to the realm of the political, as the realm of antagonism and struggle. So on the one hand, we shall do politics, but also, we shall make love.

Is the latter simply the ideologically naïve, American-utopian variety of the countercultural movements that denies the reality of antagonism and thus the necessity of struggle? I think this explanation is too simple, and has secretly already decided what 'really matters' in each case. Perhaps we should take the incommensurability of these two ideas more seriously, for example by relating it to Hannah Arendt's contrasting of politics and love in *The Human Condition*. In this work she refers to love as the greatest of *anti-political* forces, for the reason that love is an inner-directed, altogether private matter, and as such is indifferent to the public spaces of genuine politics, in which decisions concerning the order of 'the world' are to be made. Instead, for Arendt love is essentially 'worldless'. Whereas politics designates a collective, outward engagement with public affairs that transcends private and individual concerns, love relationships are blind to the inevitable distances inherent to the inter-subjective reality of conflict, the irreducible differences amongst men in need of public-political mediation. Placed on a spectrum between the two extremes of politics and love, Mouffe, Laclau and Rancière are closer to the former, as Hardt and Negri would be closer to the latter. Love is indeed a persistent theme of their work. As the sequel to *Empire* reminds us: 'Today time is split between a present that is already dead and a future that is already living ... In time, an event will thrust us like an arrow into that living future. This will be the real political act of love' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 358). The uneasy contradiction hidden in the notion of a 'politics of love' Occupy inherited from May '68, and it is up to future protest movements to continue the search for a key to this riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma: a politics beyond politics.

Final remarks

By understanding the political design of Occupy on the basis of a comparison between the model for radical politics developed by Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière and that of Hardt and Negri, I want to show that the 'protest form' of Occupy articulates withdrawal *as* engagement and *vice versa*, dissolving the apparent contradiction between these two models of radical politics. On the one hand, it clearly addresses and engages antagonistically with the existing institutions and society as a whole, by rejecting politics as it is and by drawing a dividing line between itself (the 99%) and the other (the 1%). In this it is outer-directed, and although not explicated, it contains a demand: Things must change! On the other hand, it continuously defers and undermines its own being-against, by emphasizing its own capacities as an autonomous, DIY form of community. It starts from its own qualities and potentials, instead of demanding an external agency to compensate for what it perceives to be its own lack, as if something were owed to it (e.g. a right). This implies that by engaging in the construction of new forms of being-together indifferent to, and withdrawing from, the political rationality of the existing institutions, it presupposes not scarcity, but plenitude. Yet these activities are still performed *as* alternatives to the prevailing order, and as such addressed to it. In order to affirm its self-sufficiency, it must *demonstrate* – by the occupation of a symbolic space essential to the whole of society – that it is *in fact* self-sufficient. It must address those who deny this self-sufficiency, to show that it no longer needs to address nor *be* addressed. In order to defy representation, it must be able to *show* and thus re-present this process of refraining, developing a living contrast with politics as usual. In a similar vein, Mitchell describes the paradoxical logic of occupation as entailing 'a refusal to say something while at the same time saying it' and as 'it speaks by refusing (for now) to speak; it declares by refusing to declare' (2013: 103). The question remains whether the coherence and unity (the We) of Occupy is still fundamentally dependent on its being-against, as Laclau and Mouffe would suggest, or if this unity can be grounded immanently, in its social powers, as Hardt and Negri suggest.

The symbolism of the original Adbusters poster captures the complexity of these arrangements. The ballerina is *opposed* to the bull, but only indi-

rectly: not as an equal opponent engaged in a struggle for hegemony and intend on destroying it, but as the positive affirmation of its own self-sufficiency. It aims not at the negation of the bull, but uses its back as a stage on which to develop its own potentials, in *juxtaposition* to the bull, but in that very gesture preserving and affirming its own autonomy. On the other hand, in the background, surrounded by what appears to be a cloud of teargas, come the real protesters, sticks in hand and gasmasks on, prepared for the fight that can begin at any moment. What the interpretation of Occupy as engaged withdrawal enables is that, as the outward performance of withdrawal, Occupy points beyond itself, to what it cannot be, *in the form of a protest*. As the site where the exit from political and economic institutions is theatrically staged as an opportunity, it carries within itself the seeds of a coming non-movement, the formation of forms of community that, unlike earlier social movements, no longer aim at maximum political visibility and participation, maximum ‘voice’, and maximum recognition by its institutional surroundings. From this perspective, what is generally perceived as the failure of Occupy (its dissolution and lack of real political effects) might become a sign of its success, in terms of withdrawal. So that, if Occupy no longer exists today, as a *protest* movement, perhaps this is only true insofar Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement does not exist (Khasnabish 2008: 135). And an opponent that does not exist is perhaps the most eerie and difficult to deal with, just as the Terrorist is always missing yet everywhere, triggering a surveillance apparatus spanning the globe but unable to digest the terror it itself simulates. But the problem of an enemy that does not exist applies to Occupy as well: financial power is splintered into a thousand data centers and anonymous suits just ‘doing their job’. Bereft of the bull’s back, will the ballerina hang in mid-air, serenely, only to look down and, like Wile E. Coyote, start falling? At which point the activists and riot police would either emerge from the mist, or everything recedes again into the petty everyday life of the 99%.

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¹ The distinction between 'engagement with' and 'withdrawal from' is structurally similar to Hirschman's distinction between two types of consumer responses to the deterioration of products or the performance of institutions used to trigger them to transform or adapt themselves: 'exit' and 'voice' (1970). Whereas exit refers to the abandoning of the product or service towards available alternatives, voice refers to the process of 'expressing ones concern', of engaging interactively with institutions. This distinction can be used for a categorization of social movements, where some predominantly act according to the logic of 'voice' and others to the logic of 'exit'. However, exit differs from exodus as the former too, as a strategy, is aimed at, and a function of, the adaptation of companies or institutions. So whereas 'exit' is still a strategy aimed at forcing the company or institution to transform itself for the better, 'exodus' emphasizes the cumulative irrelevance of institutions as such. It seems that Occupy is closer to exit than exodus, although there will also be elements propagating a strategy closer to the latter.

² Perhaps the difficulty in finding such a positive term corroborates a particular difficulty in representing the phenomena under consideration. And maybe this difficulty isn't simply accidental, merely a failure of discourse, but essential to these very phenomena, and as such cannot be separated from the refusal of political representation by the occupants.