Occupy*:* 'struggles for the common' or an 'anti-politics of dignity'?

Reflections on Hardt and Negri and John Holloway.

Abstract

This article provides a critical examination of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's and John Holloway's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and does so by applying their theories to the Occupy movement of 2011. Its central argument is that one should avoid collapsing 'autonomist' and 'open' Marxism, for whilst both approaches share Tronti's (1979) insistence on the constituent role of class struggle, and also share an emphasis on a prefigurative politics which engages a non-hierarchical and highly participatory politics, there nevertheless remain some significant differences between their approaches. Ultimately, when applied to *Occupy* Movement whilst their theory isn't entirely unproblematic, I will argue that Hardt and Negri's 'autonomist' approach offers the stronger interpretation, due mainly to their revised historical materialism.

Introduction

Some years ago, writing in this journal Martin Spence (2010) argued that, because of its specific Italian heritage, the body of thought labelled 'autonomism' had become 'misleading. The reason for this lay in the diversity of its authors, ranging from Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri, to Harry Cleaver and John Holloway. We might add here the inclusion of others, such as Werner Bonefeld and Simon Clarke, and Massimo De Angelis and Nick Dyer-Witheford. For his own purposes, Spence (2010) replaced the category of 'autonomism' with that of 'open Marxism', arguing its usefulness as an 'appropriate tag for the field as a whole' (Spence 2010, p.99). In some ways this was an unusual move. After all as indeed Spence also noted, the more familiar tendency has been to subsume open Marxism under the category of autonomism. Alex Callinicos

(2005) for example, argued that John Holloway's *Change the World Without taking Power* (2002) was, alongside Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000), 'one of the key texts of contemporary autonomist Marxism' (Callinicos 2005, p. 17). Despite this, Callinicos did not see their respective approaches as 'identical'.

It remains odd that, on the one hand we accept the differences between these respective positions and yet, on the other, proceed to subsume them under one or another generic label. Whilst sympathetic to De Angelis' (2005, p.248) claim that this debate is 'fallacious and divisive', I will nevertheless mirror the argument of Bonefeld (2003), arguing that the temptation to conflate autonomist with open Marxism should be avoided. To substantiate this argument, here I will critically reflect on the theory of revolutionary subjectivity in Hardt and Negri and John Holloway, and do so by applying their theory to the Occupy Movement[1] of 2011. For many commentators both of these theories can be charged with either vagueness, abstraction or excessive theoreticism, and this problematizes their more practical and concrete implementations (Harvey 2010, p.212;; Bieler and Morton 2003, p. 475; Callinicos 2005, p.18; Susen 2012, p.292, 302). Yet, as I will show, in the case of *Occupy* there is a clear opportunity to placate such critics, and as such also demonstrate that whilst each theory shares some underlying commonalities, there remain important differences as to how useful their theories are for understanding this movement. Given the proliferation of oppositional struggles in the last few years, alongside their popularity amongst the current generation of actors involved an appreciation of what Hardt and Negri's and Holloway's theory has to offer in this respect is particularly timely.

In the first part of this article I contextualise each theory in relation to earlier works, and then outline the nature to each theory. Here it should become clear that, whilst both theories argue that revolutionary

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[1] From here on in, *Occupy.*

subjectivity is one that both refuses and transcends capitalist social relations, in theoretical terms there are clear differences of emphasis on how they articulate such a practice. In the second part of the article I show how such theoretical differences translated into the more practical task of interpreting *Occupy's* struggle, both in tactical and strategic matters. In short, whilst I will argue that Holloway's emphasis on the diversity and banality of *Occupy's* scream was important, and so too was his more dialectical approach apt for providing a more measured understanding of both the nature of *Occupy's* 'crack' and indeed the subjectivity that opened it, it is his approach that falls short in a number of ways. *Occupy's* innovative use of the assembly corresponded closely to how both Hardt and Negri and Holloway envisage the construction of revolutionary subjectivity, but the latter's explicit emphasis on situating this struggle in relation to transformations in forms of production adds further substance to this claim, particularly with respect to its use of new social technologies and wider possibilities of institutionalising its struggle.

Operaismo and form-analysis

Hardt and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity must be understood in the context of Negri's earlier work on the issue, particularly via his involvement in the *Operaismo* current of Italian Marxist theory in the 1960s, and his later development of his theory throughout the 1970s. Following Tronti's (1979, p.1) insistence that labour insubordination drives capitalist development one of the most important conceptual developments during this period was that of 'class composition' – the idea that specific forms of worker subjectivity must be informed by an analysis of both its technical and political characteristics. Whereas in technical or objective terms this subjectivity is structured by the form of its labour, in political terms its subjectivity is characterised by its needs, consciousness, and the organisational form of its struggle (Negri 2005; Cleaver 1992). Negri developed the theory of 'self-valorization' as a means of concretising this dynamic, theorising revolutionary subjectivity not only as

the refusal of capitalist command but also its inventive capacity for furthering this struggle in new and innovative ways. Thus, whereas its 'negative' measure was based on the 'spaces' opened via the refusal of work, its 'positive' measure was determined by the extent to which such spaces were 'filled, occupied', [and] attached' (Negri 2005, p.260). For Negri, self-valorization constitutes a completely different form of social wealth: the valorisation of human needs premised on advancements in the composition of social labour (ibid, p.184; cf. Harrison 2011, p.35).

Holloway's theory of revolutionary subjectivity would also emerge through earlier works, particularly his engagement with debates concerning the nature of the capitalist state (Holloway and Picciotto 1978). Holloway emphasised the importance of understanding the form and content of the capitalist state in direct relation to the form and content of class struggle (ibid, p. 30; Clarke 1991, pp. 9-18). Here as Bonefeld et al (1992) explain, the concept of 'form' assumes a specific character in the sense that an object's mode of existence 'exists only in and through the form(s) it takes (Bonefeld, Gunn and Psychopedis 1992, p.xv; Holloway 1995a, p.166). Understanding the notion of form in this way is crucial, not simply for unearthing an object's hidden content but more importantly its very constitution. In terms of the relationship between capital and labour, capital can thus only exist in and through the form of alienated labour; a process which, crucially, cannot be isolated from class struggle – understood as a social relation, capital *is* class struggle (Holloway 1991a).From this perspective all of Marx's major categories – including value, labour, class, etc. - must be opened, understood as 'aids to understanding historical processes', articulating 'an open world' based on 'categories which conceptualise the openness of society' (Holloway 1991b, p. 233; Holloway 1993, p. 76, 82; Holloway 1991c, p.71; Holloway and Susen 2013, p. 31).

Multitude, exodus and the common

In Negri's co-authored work (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009) his theory of self-valorization remains central, although reconfigured on the basis of changes in class composition. In technical terms Hardt and Negri argue that capitalist production is predominantly 'biopolitical' because it involves not just the production of the 'means of life' but 'social life itself' (ibid, p. 146; Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 299). More specifically, much labour today is 'immaterial' in the sense that it encompasses 'ideas, symbols, images, languages or codes, to its more 'affective' dimensions such as the generation of ease, well-being, satisfaction or excitement (ibid, p. 108; Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 382). The new social subject of biopolitical production is the multitude, understood in at least two senses. Firstly, in sociological and political terms the multitude is defined by the form of its productive activity, and whilst it remains a class concept due to the depth of capitalist subsumption it is much more inclusive than the working class (Hardt and Negri 2004, p.106). In a second, more philosophical sense the multitude refers to a continual disruptive presence, one which has always 'refused authority and command, expressed the irreducible difference of singularity, and sought freedom in innumerable revolts and revolutions' (Ibid, p. 221).

For Hardt and Negri the technical changes in class composition offer possibilities for the multitude's future political re-composition, and once again here the theory of self-valorization returns to the fore, particularly for rethinking the nature of social (or common)wealth. Whilst Hardt and Negri accept that immaterial labour remains as exploited as its industrial predecessor, they claim that the former has the potential for a radical autonomy; one which can dispense with the need for centralised oversight and, more importantly, continually '*exceeds* the bounds set in its employment by capital' (Hardt and Negri 2004, p.147; Hardt and Negri 2009, p.140). Hence, for Hardt and Negri immaterial labour is characterised by a productive excess beyond what capital can successfully subsume, and the reason for this is because its capacities 'exceed work

and spill over into life', and simply, capital 'can never capture' all of it (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 151, 152; Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 146).

In the technical sense the excessive nature of immaterial labour is pooled into what Hardt and Negri call 'the common', defined in both natural and cultural terms: 'not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, [and] the modes of sociality that define our relationships' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 139). From the common a new immanently revolutionary subjectivity can thus emerge, yet as established earlier, objective conditions alone do not ensure this process. In other words, whilst in this context the 'negative' measure of self-valorization refers to 'resisting capitalist command and attacking the bases of capitalist power', its 'positive' measure is developed through the multitude's capacity for 'exodus': throwing off capital's 'corruptive' influence, exploring the multitude's singular differences and, ultimately, creating institutions adequate to political and economic self-rule (ibid, p.153; Hardt and Negri 2004, p.341; Hardt and Negri 200, p.212).

Scream, power, dignity

The starting point to Holloway's theory is what he calls 'the scream': a multi-faceted 'No!' to the many forms of injustice characteristic of the capital relation. Whilst initially a scream of rage (or perhaps indignation) there is also an element of 'hope': a hope of a better world, thus articulating a 'tension between that which exists and that which might conceivably exist' (Holloway 2002a, p. 6). Ultimately it this tension which the scream seeks to break, and in so doing create a 'crack' in capitalist social relations. Here, as Tischler (2012, p.268) correctly emphasises the most important aspect of Holloway's scream is its ordinary and, in most cases quite unspectacular nature. The importance of this aspect of Holloway's theory is crucial for differentiating his approach from Hardt and Negri's, but I will discuss this in more detail below.

According to Holloway (2002a) the reason why we scream is because capitalism negates our capacity for 'doing' – the 'capacity-to-do'. Here Holloway opens the concept of 'power', in the sense that whilst 'doing' implies 'power-to' the reason why we scream is because capitalism negates this capacity and transforms it into its opposite – 'power-over': involving not the assertion of, but destruction of subjectivity (Holloway 2002a, p.28-29). Here the sociality of human doing is broken, subordinated to one particular private and individualised form: labour. Adopting the form analysis discussed earlier, for Holloway the relationship between power-to and power-over must be considered an internal one: power-to exists in the form of power-over, but this existence is a contested one. Here Holloway opens the concept of 'fetishism' to remind us that the apparent ubiquity of capitalist command is undermined by its underlying constitution – class struggle. Due to the ordinary nature of the scream, however, this struggle is by no means confined to either class-conscious activists or indeed enlightened intellectuals: 'fetishisation' emphasises the subjectivity of the 'we, as ordinary people' (ibid, p.89) [2].

For Holloway the material basis for 'hope' lies in the underlying dependence of power-over on power-to; the fact that, whilst capital's domination is real there always remains a 'residue' of subjectivity that cannot be completely subsumed (ibid, p.36,40, 76). From the Zapatistas (Subcommandante Marcuse 2001, p.41) here Holloway (1998) extracts the concept of 'dignity', which he uses to denote such a residue's substance. More specifically, the concept of dignity refers to the fact that human beings have the inherent capacity not only to reproduce reality but also to negate it (Holloway 2002a, p.25).[3] For Holloway 'dignity' refers not only to human subjectivity in general but also revolutionary subjectivity in

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[2]For an interesting disagreement within 'open Marxism' on this point, see Clarke (2002), and Holloway (2002b).

[3] By emphasising 'doing' as opposed to 'being', Holloway claims not to ontologise this struggle: whilst it is only on the basis of being human that humans can scream, we scream not simply because we are human but because we find ourseves in particular situations which deny our humanity (ibid; Holloway 2010, p. 43). Some have claimed that open Marxism nevertheless does operate with a form of ontological determinism (see Roberts 2002; Bruff 2009; Susen 2009).

particular: the greater the dignity behind the scream the greater the potential crack in capitalism (Holloway 2010, p.17). As with Hardt and Negri's theory, however, the crack opened by a dignified scream must develop itself into something positive, an alternative form of 'doing' which, however banal, directly negates the transformation of doing into labour. Revolutionary subjectivity thus combines the 'refuse-and-create', forming the basis to what Holloway calls an 'anti-politics of dignity' (ibid, p.39).

What this 'anti-politics' entails I will discuss below. Whilst not aiming to provide a comprehensive case study, here I will use *Occupy* as a means of discussing both the commonalities and differences between both Hardt and Negri and Holloway's approaches, and ultimatley in this particular instance the relative strengths of the former over the latter.

Occupy

Despite having its precedents in movements such as the 'Arab Spring' and the Spanish 'Indignados', *Occupy* is credited by most as starting in New York City, with the occupation of Zuccotti park in September 2011 regarded as its symbolic starting point (Constanza-Chock 2012, p.376; Kavada 2015, p.1)). In the space of just a few weeks similar forms of this struggle emerged worldwide, and whilst all of such encampments were gradually dispersed, there can be no doubt that, in recent times, this movement represented a key moment in anti-capitalist struggle. *Occupy* was composed of a range of actors and concerns, yet its most significant shared characteristics were the occupation of contested 'spaces', an emphasis on non-hierarchical forms of organisation and with that a highly engaged form of deliberative democracy. Contextually, since the 2008 Financial Crisis much attention had been drawn to the vast inequalities generated by neo-liberalism, and also the responses by many governments to that crisis – the bailout of the banks and the ensuing austerity measures in particular. For Pinkerill and Krinsky (2012, p.279)

Occupy thus 'triggered a moment of clarity of the absurdity of the current economic and political system', and more broadly for Connolly (2011) a 'delayed reaction to the political economy of inequality, crisis, military adventurism, and corporate authoritarianism of the last 30 years'.

There are many reasons why *Occupy* can be said to have been significant, both in terms of the movement's successes and failures (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012; Ostroy 2012). In their respective reflections on *Occupy,* both Hardt and Negri (2012) and Holloway (2012) claimed that this movement reflected something of their own theories, for according to them this struggle represented not only a refusal of capitalist forms but an attempt to prefigure social relations beyond them. Here I will concentrate on a range of issues that relate most closely to each of their respective theories: its composition, organisational form and use of new forms of communicative media, and finally the question of institutionalisation.

Composition

According to Gitlin (2013) the composition of *Occupy* (specifically, in the case here Occupy Wall Street) consisted of both 'inner' and 'outer' layers, the former of which included a 'radical core, roughly anarchist, veterans of left-wing campaigns running back to the anti-globalization movement of 1999, or even earlier…', and the latter '…middle class people, union members, progressives of various stripes – not so photogenic, not outré, though far more numerous' (Gitlin 2013, p.9, 21). Others such as Min (2015, p.78) added additional layers, such as 'college students, men and women in suits, grandmas and grandpas, veterans, homeless people, tourists and shoppers, all of whom were diverse in terms of ethnic backgrounds and political attitudes'. Such diversity in terms of the sheer range of *Occupy's* 'Nos!' is something that resonates strongly with Holloway's theory, and links closely to his emphasis on rethinking what constitutes class struggle and social antagonism. As discussed earlier,

class struggle must be conceptualised not merely in terms of the struggle of 'labour against capital', but also in terms of a more generic 'doing against labour' (Holloway 2002a, p.144). In this sense, Holloway's 'critical revolutionary subject' (what he calls 'we') corresponds closely with the banality and diversity of *Occupy's* scream, the 'scream of all, with different degrees of intensity' (ibid, p.150; Holloway 2010, p.219).

For Hardt and Negri the composition of *Occupy* is broadened to include the wider struggles which, according to them should be constitutive of its wider 'cycle'. In their *Declaration* (2012) for example, Hardt and Negri draw attention to four subjective figures, all of which must be considered in the context of both the successes and failures of neoliberalism and wider modifications in capitalist production in general (Hardt and Negri 2012, p.9). Here Hardt and Negri discuss 'the new figure of the poor', comprising both waged and unwaged precarious workers all shackled by the 'chains of debt' ('the indebted'); immaterial labours whose use of communication and social media both liberates yet ensnares them ('the mediatized'); those whose existence is constituted by the perception of both internal and external threats ('the securitized'); and finally, bringing all of such figures together, 'the represented': those which by virtue of the increasingly defunct nature of representative politics 'have no access to effective political action' (ibid, p.29). So typical of Hardt and Negri's theory, however, is their belief that such relative powerlessness is entirely reversible, and this was precisely what *Occupy* and its precedents sought to do.

In both Holloway's and Hardt and Negri's theory, then, there is a strong link to *Occupy* with respect to their shared emphases on the diversity of its composition. Yet there is an important difference between their approaches to this issue, and this lies principally in the way Hardt and Negri situate this composition. For them, such diversity is a key characteristic of contemporary forms of capitalist production, and because of this their emphasis on understanding *Occupy's* struggle is framed

repeatedly in terms of it being, ultimately, a workers' struggle 'grounded in the new nature of labour power' (ibid, p.60). In the final passages of *Declaration*, furthermore, mirroring their previous emphasis on the 'militant' in *Empire* (2000, p. 412), Hardt and Negri interpret this struggle in terms of what they call the figure of 'the commoner' (ibid, p.104). Reiterating my point above, for Hardt and Negri the commoner is distinctive in terms of how it works and what it produces. As they explain, 'Just as a baker bakes, a weaver weaves, and a miller mills, so, too, a commoner 'commons', that is, makes the common' (ibid, p. 105). To be clear, like Marx, Hardt and Negri continue to define revolutionary subjectivity through the prism of productive labour (Hardt and Negri 2004, p.350), and the specificity of its struggle is one characterised by its attempt to rid itself of capital's parasitic and corruptive influence that continually acts to 'fetter' the productivity of its labour (Hardt and Negri 2000, p.361; Hardt and Negri 2009, p.148).

There are both benefits and drawbacks to theorising *Occupy* in this manner, and I will return to the former below. The main drawback lies in the relative exclusivity it accords to *Occupy's* struggle, emphasising in Holloway's terms not so much 'doing against labour' but rather 'labour against capital'. No doubt, this emphasis might indeed be important, but it misses the many quite ordinary people that took part – those, for example, who might have joined an occupation just for a day, or perhaps even just an hour; those who despite displaying only a limited degree of solidarity were never quite the same since. My claim here is that the open Marxist approach in this instance is more responsive to this phenomena, and this proves important especially given that it was the participation and support of this strata that allowed the initial spark generated by the core 'inner' activists to gain momentum (Gitlin 2013, p.6). In theoretical terms, alongside its 'clumsy and obscure nature' this is precisely how Holloway critiques Negri's earlier notion of 'self-valorization: 'it becomes

something special, rather than the routine experience of everyday doing-in-against-and-beyond labour' (Holloway 2010, p.190).

Organisational form

Echoing the open Marxism of Holloway, *Occupy's* composition included not only the self-valorizing struggles of its inner militant core, but included also its more confused and self-contradictory outer counterparts. Put differently, whilst *Occupy* was driven by a generalised sense of indignation, this indignation was as much one of the 'indignities…suffered in daily life' as it was relating to issues more specifically orientated to more conventional (workers') concerns (Calhoun 2013, p. 28). From this lay the necessity of linking such indignities together, and indeed the extent to which *Occupy* managed to do this. In contrast to the party models of the past which emphasised the necessity of leaders, representation and programmatic strategy, one of the most distinctive aspects of *Occupy* was its emphasis on the opposite: a 'leaderless' movement that emphasised direct and highly participatory forms of engagement which, perhaps most distinctively, refused to formulate a set of specific demands. Debates within the Left concerning centralisation and decentralisation are nothing new, (Bailey 2012, p.139), yet distinctive of *Occupy* was the techniques it used as a means of affirming their emphasis on the latter. Here as Gitlin (2012, p. 11) puts it nicely, *Occupy* combined an 'eighteenth century constitutional principle enshrining the value of public assembly with twenty-first century methods (social media, text messages, and the like) for summoning such assembly'.

The use of the assembly was premised primarily on the occupation of particular spaces; symbolic by the fact that, in many cases, the spaces occupied were deemed 'private' (Calhoun 2012, p.29; Pinkerill and Krinsky 2012, p. 280). This in itself chimes well in both Hardt and Negri's and Holloway's theory (i.e. the fight of 'the commoner' for access to the common; occupying a crack within capital and 'pushing back the rule of

money'), yet so too in a more significant sense does the functioning of the assembly itself for the construction of revolutionary subjectivity, something which, for different reasons, both theories accept must use different methods from the past (Hardt and Negri 2000, p.413; Hardt and Negri 2004, p.222; Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 352; Holloway 2002, pp. 129-131; Bonefeld 2002).

According to Hardt and Negri the constitution of the multitude must involve what they call a 'singularity politics', one that whilst initially begins as a politics of 'identity' nevertheless dissolves itself as a means of forging a wider 'common' subjectivity. In other words, whilst composed of a series of 'irreducible multiplicities', with each of its singularities relatively particularistic to each other, a singularity politics is one that seeks to find some form of commonality – but not 'unity' – amongst them. This is what Hardt and Negri call 'revolutionary parallelisms': a process which they compare to a kind of conductor-less orchestra, affirming the multitude's constituent power without transforming it into a form of constituted power (Hardt and Negri 2009, p.173, 343). Although couched in 'identiarian' terms, through Min's (2015) insights it appears that such a singularity politics corresponded closely to *Occupy's* use of the assembly, albeit with a form of moderation which could be considered a kind of 'conductor'. For example, through the human microphone - whereby due to authorities banning the use of electronic speakers or microphones any speech (etc.) to large audiences had to be relayed through crowds – there emerged a 'viable way to construct and negotiate multiple identities'. Indeed, as Min (2012, p.78) continues, in some ways the most interesting aspect was the dialectic within this process: even if you disagreed with what was being relayed, you had yourself to relay it, thus making both yourself and others 'more reflexive' through forcing not only an assessment of your own identity but also the identities of others. The same process emerged through the concurrent use of hand gestures, although arguably in this case they served an additional purpose for the

moderators to judge the extent to which consensus over particular proposals (etc.) was emerging (ibid, p.79).

In Holloway's (2010, p.40) theory the use of the assembly through the examples above also corresponded closely for whilst he accepts the absolute necessity of organisation for giving oppositional cracks coherence, mirroring Hardt and Negri he insists that its form must be as 'open and receptive as possible', one based not so much on 'consciousness' but 'sensitivity', a 'politics not of talking but of listening…of dialogue rather than monologue (Holloway 2010, p.77). In addition to this Holloway also rejects a specifically identity politics, adding that particular cracks will not become universal if the subjectivities creating them simply assume the 'character mask' (i.e. identity) that capital accords them. Revolutionary subjectivity, by contrast, involves a shedding of the mask, affirming the gap between the latter and the (dis)figured face behind it (ibid, p.213). Yet this latter point, I think, reveals an important difference between Holloway's and Hardt and Negri's accounts, and this relates back to a more theoretical disagreement between open and autonomist Marxism; namely, the relationship between structure and struggle.

In one of his earliest reviews of Negri's translated work, Holloway (1989, p.189) celebrated the Trontian re-reading of Marx arguing that, whilst at times it led to 'oversimplifications and to unrealistic optimism', the centrality it accorded class struggle was in principle correct – a view which, albeit with some qualifications, he continues to maintain today (Holloway 2002a, p. 163; Holloway 2009, p.95). To some extent, then, because of their shared emphasis on the dependence of capital on labour (or in Holloway's work 'labour on doing'), and also their shared willingness to theorise the latter's potential for revolutionary autonomy, this is precisely why it makes sense labelling both approaches as 'autonomist'. Yet there is an important difference of emphasis here, one that emerged within the CSE in the early '90s and reveals the fundamental point of

contention between the 'autonomist' perspective epitomised by Negri, and the 'open Marxism' characteristic of Holloway, although in this instance advanced by Werner Bonefeld (2003) [4]. For Bonefeld, whilst autonomism rightly put class struggle at the heart of its understanding of capitalist development, it did this whilst losing sight of the internal relationship between labour and capital. The main problem here – epitomised by Negri's theory of self-valorization – was the idea that, within capitalist society, there are (un-alienated) 'spaces' whereby revolutionary subjectivity can emerge. 'In sum,' Bonefeld argued, 'the internal relation between capital and labour is transformed into a relation of mere opposition, thus reducing the internal relation between form and materiality to a simple juxtaposition of opposition' (Bonefeld 2003, p. 79) [5]. Holloway (2002a) mirrors Bonefeld's point closely, characterising Hardt and Negri's approach as a 'weak' affirmation of the 'autonomist impulse' – i.e. seeing the working class as positively autonomous, as opposed to a 'strong' affirmation – i.e. seeing the working class as potentially autonomous (Holloway 2002a, p. 165, 174; Holloway 2009)[6].

In theoretical terms this quarrel over the (continued) relevance of dialectical thinking lies at the heart of the Marxism/post-Marxism debates of the 1970s and beyond (Harrison 2014), and both Hardt and Negri and Holloway have made clear their respective allegiances (see Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 46, 122, 167; Holloway 2009). My focus here is more practical, however, for one could argue that this has as a significant influence on the interpretation of what *Occupy* represented. There are two

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[4] This essay was originally published in Issue 13 of *Common Sense,* 1994.

[5] In his unpublished response, Harry Cleaver (1993) – author of *Reading Capital Politically* and another prominent autonomist Marxist – argued that Bonefeld's reading of this theory was misplaced. More specifically, Cleaver argued that the theory of self-valorization articulates both 'momentary ruptures and…how they can develop into more decisive and definitive ruptures' (p. 8). In contrast, he continues, the problem with Bonefeld's own approach to the issue lies in his retention of the dialectic. This 'presupposition <u>of his </u>is precisely what forecloses any theory of alterneity, of transcendence' (ibid, <u>original emphasis</u>). Reiterating Negri's own thoughts on the issue, Cleaver concludes the dialectic is really only functional to capital in that it 'denotes the dynamics of class struggle within capitalism', and not, as in the case of the theory of self-valorization theorise a way of breaking it (p.11; see also Cleaver 1984).

[6] Despite the validity of this point, some have claimed that even Holloway's more dialectical understanding of power – or doing - remains overly simplistic (De Angelis 2005; Young and Schwartz 2012, p.226; McNaughton 2009, p. 16).

issues here, both of which relate to Hardt and Negri's retention of a more typically inspired Marxian historical narrative. Whilst rejecting the idea that history is pre-ordained, secured by a pending synthetic closure of the political (Negri 2008, p.41; Hardt and Negri 2009, p.378), Hardt and Negri's project tends to posit a rather unmediated relation between the respective social forces driving it (labour and capital/constituent and constituted power, etc.). In other words, *Occupy's* struggle was more one that sought to guard against the corruption of the common rather than one that sought to un-corrupt the common itself. In addition to this, however, in their account there remains a sense that even if *Occupy's* struggles fizzled out, it would inevitably recompose itself at a later date (Hardt and Negri 2012, p.69, p.102). Thus, for them perhaps the best way of situating *Occupy* was not so much what it represented then, but what it might represent for the future: whilst prefigurative politics is important, it ultimately depends on an 'event' that remains relatively unforeseen (ibid, p.102).

To some extent, any position that emphasises the dependence of the powerful on the powerless is optimistic – Holloway's included (Thompson 2005; Aufheben 2003). Yet, with his retention of dialectics – albeit a 'negative' form which also denies the more deterministic aspects associated with Marx's – Holloway's approach is arguably more able to avoid the excesses outlined above. Although Hardt and Negri might concur with the idea that any 'crack' is inherently experimental, there is an added emphasis in Holloway's theory that undermines the optimism with which they might be charged, and in many senses at this point we are redirected to the theoretical debate within the CSE discussed above: the extent to which any oppositional 'space' can be said to be truly autonomous. For Holloway, then, *Occupy's* crack was always already infected by the sort of society which it brought into question: '…our cracks are not pure cracks' (Holloway 2010, p.64). Through this account not only is the crack itself problematized, but yet to too is the subjectivity that

opened it. In direct contrast the more prophetic and messianistic tendencies of Hardt and Negri's 'multitude', for Holloway there is no pure revolutionary subject either in terms of abstract notions of 'humanity', revolutionary activists or even intellectuals. In other words, the 'character masks' assumed in capitalist society do not conceal an untainted subjectivity, but rather one that is 'disfigured' by the mask itself (ibid, p.216, 222). On top of this, finally, is Holloway's outright rejection of Hardt and Negri's appeals to the future, an emphasis that chimed particularly well with *Occupy's* 'inner' core's resistance to formulating a representative politics of 'demands' (Gitlin 2013, p.8). As Holloway put it in *Crack Capitalism,* 'The validity of a rupture does not depend on the future…We ask no permission of anyone and we do not wait for the future, but simply break time and assert now another type of doing, another form of social relations' (Holloway 2010, p.73, 241).

On this score Holloway's theory is more attune to the barriers to *Occupy's* struggle, and whilst certainly praiseworthy of it he ultimately offered a more guarded and realistic account of its open and uncertain nature. Yet from another point of view, whilst one might accept both the diversity and banality of its many 'Nos!', and at times also their contradictory and confused nature, perhaps the absence of the more conventional Marxian narrative found in Hardt and Negri's theory adds a layer to understanding *Occupy* that Holloway's theory could not. Here I refer to the fact that missing in Holloway's theory – perhaps because of his emphasis on 'doing' instead of 'labour' – is what changing forms of productive activity offered in terms of the tools for adding substance to *Occupy's* struggle. Put differently, in sharp contrast to the autonomist Marxism of Hardt and Negri here we can reiterate the practical implications of a more theoretical point made previously by others, namely, open Marxism's reluctance to theorise forms of labour (c.f. De Angelis 1995; Neary 2004).

Linking back to *Occupy* a useful example here was its use of social media, particularly its 'instrumental role in the quick diffusion of the movement

and the mobilization of participants' (Kavanda 2015, p.2). In terms of getting initial publicity, Constanza-Chock (2012, p.376) points out how excessive policing was circulated first through social media, and whilst its use isn't something specific to *Occupy* there can be no doubt that it formed a major aspect of the movement on a whole.   As Pickerill and Krinsky (2012, p.284) explain, *Occupy* employed 'a range of online forums, social networks and open-source software and practices. Facebook, Blogs and Twitter were extensively used and many Occupy camps were extremely media savvy'. Such use of new forms of communications was not lost on Hardt and Negri, for as I indicated above, their theory accounts for it well.   For them its use must be linked directly to the growing hegemony of immaterial labour, particularly the ever-growing importance of knowledge and communication. Linking back to the discussion of organisational form above, the 'horizontal' and network-based nature of such technology corresponded directly with the needs of a singularity politics (Hardt and Negri 2012, p.38), and in a sense, what *Occupy* did was simply use the tools of its labour to challenge the system to which it puts them to use. Put slightly differently, the technical basis to the multitude's composition offers insights as to the possibility and nature of its emergent political composition.

There is no inherent reason why Holloway's theory wouldn't also emphasise the promise of new forms of communication, although because of his overarching emphasis on 'doing against labour', in sharp contrast to Hardt and Negri this emphasis is lacking. Despite this there are important limitations to the potentials of such technology, two of which are worth raising. Firstly, there is the issue of precisely what sort of solidarity *Occupy's* use of social media permitted, particularly its highly individualized and somewhat fleeting nature. In other words, it is one thing using new technologies to help mobilise social movements, and this can be particularly useful for bypassing 'official' media outlets which are either outright hostile or unwilling to report them. It is another, however,

to assume that 'liking' a Facebook page will lead to any lasting and/or coherent form of collective solidarity. In this sense *Occupy's* use of social media created a distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' forms of solidarity, and whilst the support of the latter was useful for those on the ground, it nevertheless 'relegated the people participating online to spectators' (Kavanda 2012, p.9). A second problematic aspect of *Occupy's* use of social media concerns the extent to which it overcame existing inequalities amongst those that used them. Here there remained issues relating to both access and knowledge that reproduced existing inequalities relating to race, class and gender (Harigittai 2008). These issues certainly weren't overcome by *Occupy,* perhaps because of its more exclusive emphasis on inequalities pertaining to wealth (Pinkerill and Krinsky 2012, p. 282; Calhoun 2013, p.34). Also, given *Occupy's* 'extreme openness' and its leaderless pretences the organisation and management of social media didn't always chime with such values. Here, not only was the necessity (and usefulness) of previous activist experience important, but the structure of social media platforms themselves 'meant that the administrators…had a significant role in shaping the collective voice' (Kavanda 2015, p.11; Constanza-Chock 2012, p.380).

Institutionalisation

One final aspect of both Hardt and Negri's and Holloway's theories in relation to *Occupy* concerns the extent to which revolutionary subjectivity should engage with the state, for as stated earlier one of *Occupy's* most distinctive themes was its rejection of conventional representative politics. For Gitlin (2013) this emphasis chimed more with its 'inner' as opposed to 'outer' elements, yet here we find an additional divergence between our two respective theories. For example, despite accepting that revolutionary (anti-state) movements usually 'intertwine' with their counterpart, as a moment in the separation of subject and object Holloway argues that a specifically anti-politics of dignity must avoid it, for whilst this might

indeed lead to progressive reforms it nevertheless 'involves a demobilisation and de-radicalisation of the original movement' (Holloway 2010, p.60, 61). From this perspective *Occupy* was right not to make specific demands of the state, for in theoretical terms not only is an anti-politics of dignity one that rejects the idea of offering an alternative 'totality', but even capitalism's 'most attractive versions…constitutes an attack against humanity and the conditions of human existence' (Holloway 2010, p.144; Holloway 2012).

By contrast, in Hardt and Negri's theory there is greater scope for linking more long-term (revolutionary) strategic goals with more short-term (reformist) and tactical ones. Mirroring Holloway's arguments above whilst they accept that 'political engagement with the state…is no doubt useful, and yet the multitude 'has no interest in taking control of state apparatuses' the key difference between open and autonomist Marxism on this issue lies in the latter developing a theory of how, using Gitlin's (2013) terminology, *Occupy* might have made the transition from being a mere 'moment' to a more organisationally coherent 'movement'. There are two issues that warrant discussion here. Firstly, in terms of short-term tactical matters Hardt and Negri concede that making demands on both states and global institutions is indeed warranted, and this includes three in particular: the provision of the 'basic means of life', a form of 'global citizenship' and 'open access to the common' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p.380, 381). For more long-term and strategic matters Hardt and Negri emphasise the potential of a revised form of federalism, which again, emphasises the necessity of understanding its future potential in relation to what already exists, accepting that the existing order does at least register 'the overflowing and unmeasurable forms of value produced by the multitude, and the ever greater power of the common' (ibid, p.372; Hardt and Negri 2012, p.88-99). Here, then, Hardt and Negri's approach goes well beyond Holloway's in the sense that their emphasis on institutionalising *Occupy's* struggle sought to theorise how its struggle

could be protected and consolidated. What follows is both a more concrete and pragmatic approach, one that overcomes the fact that, so problematic to Holloway's theory, once the state is reduced in theoretical terms to a mere form of capital its historical specificity is lost and thus so too are the insights of how one should engage with it (McNaughton 2009, p.7; Bruff 2009; Foran 2012).

Conclusion

Through the application of Hardt and Negri's and Holloway's theories to *Occupy* it is clear that in some senses their emphases are very similar, governed as they are by a shared acceptance of Tronti's (1979) insistence on the revolutionary potential of the autonomy of labour – or in Holloway's revised account, 'doing' – from capital. For both autonomist and open Marxism *Occupy* represented a key instance of revolutionary subjectivity: a struggle that sought not only to reject capitalist society but also attempted to prefigure alternative social relations that might offer the basis for a form of society beyond it. In this sense, the temptation here is to collapse both theories under one heading, and this seems justified considering that - referring specifically to Negri's theory of self-valorization – Holloway (2010, p.189) accepts that 'we are speaking of, and trying to understand, more or less the same processes of revolt'. Despite this, we have seen that there are some important differences between their approaches, many of which stem from Hardt and Negri's revised historical materialism. Given their explicit rejection of dialectics some might claim that categorising their thought in this manner is problematic, yet it seems clear that their approach retains much of Marx's, particularly with respect to situating *Occupy's* struggle within a wider historical and contextual framework. For Hardt and Negri *Occupy* wasn't simply an abstract struggle to 'crack' capitalism, but took place on a specific terrain conditioned by new forms of capitalist production, and the subjective force behind its contestation were more than simply a generalised 'we'. Despite this, Holloway's emphasis on the banality and

everyday nature of the scream was reflected in *Occupy's* composition, and thus too the sheer diversity of the 'Nos' that constituted it.

The most pressing issue remains the question of organisational form: given that *Occupy* lasted only a few short weeks to what extent is 'horizontalism' adequate for sustaining oppositional cracks? A real problem here is also the strategy of occupation itself, for as Calhoun (2013, p.30) points out, 'it made displacement a nearly fatal disruption'. The extent to which this passes judgement on Hardt and Negri's and Holloway's theories really depends on what measure you use, for in both theories the aim wasn't the capture of state power but rather an attempt to occupy a space within capitalist society as a means of developing and exploring social relations that might offer a future beyond it. From this perspective one could argue that *Occupy* did what it set out to do, yet again, beyond Holloway's insistence that we simply do not know what lies beyond this Hardt and Negri's theory was able to provide more detail with respect to what might, depended as it is on a relatively unforeseen 'event'. Here in other words one could argue strongly that whilst Holloway's anti-politics of dignity was more limited to theorising the 'moment' of *Occupy,* through their emphasis on institutionalising its struggle Hardt and Negri's singularity politics was able to go one step further, theorising at least, the movement from being 'a moment' to a 'movement'. Their prescriptions on this matter might indeed be speculative, adventurous and at times tainted with an excessive optimism, yet their emphasis on theorising the future in terms of the specificities of the present seems to me the more promising approach.

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