Space and Polity

Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: Fabricating politics

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The revolutions and protests that have spread across the globe since 2008 have been seen as a watershed moment. In this article we examine the relationships between urban space and politics that have emerged across these events. We draw upon the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière to provide a framework to understand some events of this period as political moments and, in addition, attempt to build upon Rancière's work to trace out the geographical dimensions of politics. The paper concludes with a consideration of the counter-revolutionary projects enacted by current social orders.

Keywords: politics; Rancière; urban; space; policing

Introduction

As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, city streets and squares have once again emerged as crucial stages upon which people have constituted themselves as political subjects in order to insist that other, more just, worlds are possible. Since 2008, a series of mass urban occupations, at once physical and virtual, have had varying degrees of success in confronting authoritarian state regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria; "austerity" measures in Iceland, England, Spain, Greece and Wisconsin; state-sponsored developments and their associated impacts in Turkey and Brazil, and; Wall St greed and "*aidez-faire*" capitalism in the United States. Across their diverse geographies and influences, these occupations have been significant because they have introduced *dissensus* into existing orders, making space to pose hitherto unasked questions by introducing new subjects into the political field.

In this article, we offer an account of the relationship between urban space and politics drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière. While Rancière's work on politics is beginning to find a receptive audience in political and urban geography, sometimes this has been in the service of analyses that seek to establish the "post-political" character of capitalist urbanisation (for example Swyngedouw, 2009). And yet for us, Rancière's work is useful precisely because it helps us to think about the possibilities and practice of democratic politics. His attempt to grapple with the question of how democratic politics actually work has an implicit socio-spatial dimension that we want to develop here, in order to understand how an occupation of urban space might indeed be political. We approach this task by drawing our reading of Rancière into dialogue with recent political events around the world – especially, but not exclusively, the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. Our intent is to use Rancière's understanding of politics

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to illustrate the nature and significance of recent events *and* develop the geographical dimensions of this analysis.

We are mindful of the fact that Rancière insists he is not a "theorist of the event", and that his approach to politics certainly does not imply that "real politics" is only to be found in revolutionary events involving the masses confronting authority (Rancière, 2011, pp. 79–80). Indeed, his approach to politics is deeply informed by engagements with the archives of the French workers movement, in which he sought to develop an account of emancipation and democracy by extracting the "little narratives" of social history often overlooked by historians of the working class (Rancière, 1991; see also Rancière, 2009b). Nevertheless, he also insists that democratic politics is not simply "everyday" or "everywhere", something that exists by virtue of the existing of power relationships or contestation (Rancière, 1999, 2007). The characteristic of these contemporary events that resonates with Rancière's work, and which we seek to explore here, is their significance in introducing new political subjectivities and dissensus into existing social orders.

The paper begins with a brief outline of Rancière's understanding of politics, placing emphasis on the manner in which he distinguishes politics from contestation *per se*. Following this largely theoretical discussion, we consider how the type of social action Rancière describes as political occurs within and via its geographical dimensions, drawing out three inter-linked spatial components: occupations; mediations and subjectifications. Finally, we conclude by briefly considering the policing of politics as an attempt to disrupt these geographical political processes.

The problem of politics

Within Western European and North American contexts there is much talk of the absence of politics. Here we find descriptions of a technocratic system that bars political conflict. This comes with concomitant descriptions of redundant party politics, where the different choices on your ballot paper are indecipherable; all parties have gravitated to status-quo ensuring centrist-ground (Crouch, 2004). Elsewhere we have descriptions of political eruption (Brown, 2011; Dean, 2011). Recently the "Arab Spring" presented numerous manifestations of politics (e.g. protests, riots, repressions). Here politics are often described as being in excess, overflowing the institutional regimes that are intended to contain social conflict. These outbursts of emancipatory politics have led to an inevitable questioning of the prospective directions of these movements, of what will emerge post-regime change when the excessive dimension of politics becomes (re)contained.

Whilst these contrasting identifications of politics signal to some consistent dimension of social struggle, it remains difficult to pinpoint what is actually being referred to as politics. Rancière's theory of politics offers an invaluable resource to refine our understanding of politics so that it becomes more than a term to identify contestation. Rancière rejects the idea that politics is simply about contestations between individuals and/or groups: "[T]he political begins precisely when one stops balancing profits and losses and worries instead about distributing *common* lots and evening out communal shares … " (Rancière, 1999, p. 5). He frames politics as something quite specific. Drawing heavily on Plato's critical accounts of the Athenian polis, Rancière (1999, p. 11) argues "Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part". To explain, he understands the "natural order of domination" as an aesthetic regime that takes the form of a "partition of the perceptible", in which people are allocated functions to perform and then identified by the particular parts they play in society. "A place for everything, and everything in its place", as the saying goes. Rancière uses the term "police" to refer to this process of allocating

and enforcing parts within the existing social order – a process that is not restricted to the oper-
ations of "the police" in uniform (Iveson, 2014). "Politics", for Rancière, occurs when the
police order of society is confronted by a "part of those with no part", a group of people
who insist that they be taken into account not as subordinates with a limited (or no) part to
play in society but *as equals.* As he puts it:

> Politics lodges one world into another: the world in which we are all equal into the existing order
> which allocates parts based on some other principle (rule of the best, the strongest, the wealthiest,
> the cleverest, and so on). (Rancière, 2001, p. 24)

Importantly, it is not so much that a pre-existing group is excluded and then contests this exclu-
sion. Rather politics are those actions that reject existing identifications through a process of pol-
itical subjectification, by a "part of those who have no part" who demand the reinvention of the
existing aesthetic regime. Politics is the meeting of logics; the existing social order meeting
another: "For politics to occur, there must be a meeting point between police logic and egalitarian
logic" (Rancière, 1999, p. 34).

    Politics therefore turns on disagreement. This should be distinguished from contestation or
struggle per se:

> We should take disagreement to mean a determined kind of speech situation: one in which one of the
> interlocutors at once understands and does not understand what the other is saying. Disagreement is
> not the conflict between one who says white and another who also says black. It is the conflict between
> one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same things by it … .
> (Rancière, 1999, p. x)

Disagreement is the meeting of incompatible logics. This is why Rancière (1999, p. 25) argues
that an equality claim necessarily involves the staging of a "non-existent right". In an existing
society that is premised on equality (i.e. a society that legitimates itself with reference to the
idea of democracy), an emergent equality claim must necessarily be disruptive since equality is
already presumed.

    Rancière uses the following example to illustrate the distinction between struggle within the
existing social roles (i.e. the police) and that beyond (i.e. politics):

> Workers were supposed to work and be dissatisfied with their wages, their working conditions and
> possibly still work again, struggle again and again. But when workers attempt to write verses and
> try to become writers, philosophers, it means a displacement from their identity as workers. The
> important thing is this dis-placement or dis-identification. What I was trying to show was that there
> was no real opposition. I don't mean that all workers who are attempting to write verses had
> entered the revolution or anything, but it was a kind of a general movement of people getting out
> of their condition. (Rancière, 2009a, np)

Politics therefore involves the inscription of equality into the existing order, and the assertion of
an identity that generates disagreement and confronts existing allocations within a society. Both of
these elements, equality demands and disagreement, are dependent on context. By this we mean
that equality demands are not some abstract concept, but rather are always emplaced:

> Equality is actually the condition required for being able to think politics. However, equality is not, to
> begin with, political in itself. It takes effect in lots of circumstances that have nothing political about
> them … equality only generates politics when it is implemented in the specific form of a particular
> case of dissensus. (Rancière, 2004, p. 53)

Disagreement must be thought of as contingent, emerging out of a clash between the in-situ (i.e. policed) and transgressive (i.e. political) logics.

Indeed, Rancière suggests that policing and politics are inherently spatial. The "partition of the perceptible" is fundamentally a matter of how "parts" in society are allocated and distributed through the production of places in which particular people are assigned particular roles. "In the end," says Rancière:

> everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? For me, political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done in it. (Rancière, 2003, p. 201)

In political action, space "becomes an integral element of the interruption of the 'natural' (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order" (Dikeç, 2005, p. 172). This reading of the significance of space in Rancière's work may not sit comfortably for some. Indeed, Kristin Ross (2009) has recently argued that Rancière's work offers a corrective to the work of thinkers such as Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, on the grounds that the latter take space as the departure point for their analysis:

> if you begin with space, whether it be the space of the region, ghetto, island, factory, or banlieue, then peoples' voices, their subjectivities, can be nothing more than the naturalized, homogenized expressions of those spaces. (Ross, 2009, p. 21)

Instead, she argues, because Rancière is concerned primarily with emancipation, he pays attention to the ways in which voices can rupture those spaces. Surely, we would argue, the problem here is not whether or not one "begins with space", but how one conceptualises space? Like Dikeç, we take from Rancière a need to pay close attention to the ways in which equality declarations and political subjectifications must disrupt existing spatial identities and produce their own spaces in particular contexts. The questions Rancière poses in the above quotation give us a particular way to begin if we are interested in how politics relates to the production of space.

In this regard, the geographical dimensions of Rancière's approach to politics should not be over-simplified to the notion that "all politics are contextual". While he claims politics are contextual, he also maintains the notion of a universal within the political. Here his argument parallels other critical theorists, such as Alain Badiou, Judith Butler and Slavoj Zizek, in that particular equality demands are seen as necessarily operating as universal demands:

> Politics occurs by reason of a single universal that takes the specific shape of wrong. Wrong institutes a single universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society. (Rancière, 1999, p. 39)

The universal of equality can therefore only exist within the singular, emplaced equality claim. It is not possible to identify the (abstract) universal before the particular claim is manifest since the " … parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong" (Rancière, 1999, p. 39). Only when "a part of those who have no part" achieves its subjectification can the existing police order be challenged and potentially re-inscribed. Rancière often captures this process of universalisation in the phrase "the people", whereby the claim to be "the people" both articulates exclusion (we are "the people" and you deny us this) and signify the universal demand (i.e. transformation of the current social order) (see especially Rancière, 2001). So, Rancière's political geography is one that simultaneously implements "a principle of contextualisation and a principle of de-contexualization"

(Rancière, 2009b, p. 282), seeking out the differences and the commonalities across instances of politics in different places and times.

We would argue that a recent and incredibly powerful example of politics, as understood by Rancière, can be found in the events related to the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the 26 year old Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010 (Fahim, 2011). As a street vendor he was subject to continued police harassment and bribery, since his occupation left him unprotected from such abuses of power (Fahim, 2011). On 17 December 2010, he was yet again subject to harassment for selling vegetables from his cart (Noueihed, 2011). A policewoman confiscated his goods, fined him one-day's earnings and allegedly slapped him, spat in his face and insulted his deceased father (Noueihed, 2011; also see Abouzeid, 2011). Once again humiliated, Bouazizi walked to the Sidi Bouzid municipal offices to complain about his treatment. Local officials refused to see him (Noueihed, 2011). This was perhaps no surprise given the consistent harassment of men like Bouazizi. Shortly afterwards Mohamed Bouazizi, the main provider for eight family members, doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire in front of the offices (Noueihed, 2011). He died due to his injuries on 4 January 2011 (Noueihed, 2011). Bouazizi's actions quickly transcended the immediacy of his circumstance (Mason, 2013, pp. 10–11). His complaint against harassment quite suddenly began to signify much more. Ten days after his death, the 23 year military dictatorship of Ben Ali was all but over.

Protests began in Sid Bouzid only hours after Bouazizi set himself on fire (Mason, 2013). The protests spread across Sidi Bouzid and eventually to the capital, Tunis. Bouazizi became a symbol of these protests, but his fate was not the singular concern. Rather his particular act stimulated a wholesale rejection of the Ben Ali regime, with its high unemployment, corruption, lack of civil rights, inflating food prices and stalled economic development. Bouazizi *was* them, and they could relate to his act of defiance (Mason, 2013). The protests quickly transcended the particular demands of street vendors and/or Sid Bouzid's corrupt police force. The protestors had claims that came from "the people". Working class protestors were joined by many from the middle classes as the regime sought to retain power through the growing use of police and military brutality (Mason, 2013). In the months that followed, the protests continued as the regime was removed and the process of building another social order (and related institutions) began (on the Tunisian revolution, see Castells 2010, pp. 22–31).

Here we find the particular act of Bouazizi quickly transformed into a wider protest. The key question therefore becomes: how was it that a singular and seemingly unformulated act of resistance became something that incited political change? In Rancière's understanding of politics, political changes emerge out of particular contexts and, consequently, are hard to foresee. Rancière's approach rejects the idea that any particular claim or subject is pre-destined to be a/the political actor. However his approach does give us a guide as to how politics proceeds (e.g. the meeting of logics and disagreement). In the sections that follow, we want to suggest that there is a crucial geographical dimension to the emergence of politics. We will show how politics, in the Rancière sense, are fabricated through space.

Fabricating politics

Having outlined our reading of Rancière's approach to politics, in this section we expand on the geographical dimensions of political action by drawing Rancière's work into dialogue with contemporary political events. We think this dialogue is productive because Rancière's concepts can help us better understand politics in the present, and because careful attention to the spatialities of political action can further enrich Rancière's conceptualisation. In what follows, we draw attention to three essential and related geographical dimensions of contemporary political action: occupations, mediations and subjectifications.

Occupations and the staging of politics

Bouazizi's own act of protest – his decision to burn himself on the step of the municipal offices – had an obvious geographical dimension. But the events that followed also help us to identify the spatial dimensions of politics as understood by Rancière. As protests have spread from Tunisia to Egypt and beyond, there have been numerous moments where a politics of the *demos*, in Rancière's sense, might well be identified. In most of these cases, *occupations* of urban spaces have proven a pivotal component of political action.[1]

To begin, if we embrace Rancière's approach to politics, our analysis of these events must start from the notion that the occupation of public space is not, in itself, political. Indeed, "occupation" – as the name given to the part one plays in society – has a significant role in Rancière's account of the *police*:

> Policing is not so much the "disciplining" of bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of *occupations* and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed. (Rancière, 1999, p. 29, original emphasis)

Political activity, by contrast, "is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination" (Rancière, 1999, p. 30).

The question to ask of occupations, then, is what makes them political? For Rancière, an occupation is neither political because of its location in a pre-designated "political" or "public" space, or because it involves the gathering of demand-making people in a given space. Rather, the politics of an occupation is a question of subjectification and reinscription – that is, occupations become *political* to the extent that they involve the subjectification of a "part of those with no part", a group that challenges the part supposed to be played by the bodies in that particular place in the process of declaring their equality.

Consider two recent occupations of note: the 2011 occupations of Tahrir (Liberation) Square in Cairo and Zuccotti (Liberty) Park in New York City. In both cases, the occupation of a certain space acted to formulate and cement a political protest and to facilitate political subjectification. These occupations, each with their own spatialities and temporalities, have proven central to creating a moment whereby particular struggles become more universalised – "the people's" struggle. However, it remains crucial to keep in mind the very different character of the two sites in terms of understanding how the symbolic occupation of spaces relates to politics.

Tahrir Square has long served as Cairo's central public space, being built at part of Khedive Ismail's mid-nineteenth century attempt to remake Paris along the Nile. The site was renamed Tahrir Square in 1952 to commemorate Egypt's shift from a constitutional monarchy to a republic. Since its inception, the space has functioned as a traditional public space, serving, at times, as a site of political speech, free association and collective gathering (Rashed & El Azzazi, 2011); at other times it has served more as a ceremonial public space in which leaders could parade themselves before staged mass gatherings of the people (Rabbat, 2012). Akin to similar public spaces in other cities, Tahrir Square would therefore be a natural choice for those wishing to hold a demonstration or protest, given its history of important protests and its simultaneous association with the nation in its role as a ceremonial space. Thus, on 25 January 2011, when 50,000 Egyptians occupied the square to protest the abuses of the Mubarak regime it seemed like a most legitimate and obvious choice. Indeed, the most notable part of the protest was not the choice of site, but that it was initiated in the first place given the repressive regime (Rabbat, 2012). It was what followed that best exemplifies how the symbolic occupation of space serves politics.

In the course of the Egyptian revolution, the occupation of Tahrir Square itself became a key point of struggle. As Mubarak ordered his henchmen to clear the space, as well as offering "democratic" concessions to the protestors, the protestors held steadfast against being evicted from the

space. On 11 February 2011 Mubarak officially resigned and Egypt moved into a regime transition that is still unfolding to this day. The occupation of Tahrir Square has continued as "the people" have demanded their emancipation through a series of political events which "bespeak an extraordinary velocity produced … by the determined and expansive movements of bodies in the street" (Abourahme, 2013, p. 426). When the transition military government stalled on reforms and elections, the Square witnessed renewed and enhanced occupations. Likewise, protests against the Government of Islamic Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi also filled the Square in 2013. It is as if the occupation of the site is a place-holder for politics – and here, occupations exist in a fraught and uneasy relationship with the ballot box as a source of democratic legitimacy (Abourahme, 2013, p. 427). The protestors' presence in the Square serves to maintain the political demand: the emancipation of "the people".

Occupation took a different form in New York. Whereas Tahrir Square was a highly significant public space before the 2011 occupations, the corporate lunch-break venue of Zuccotti Park in New York has quite different origins. The site originally built for US Steel as part of zoning concessions, is privately owned, and has never held any political significance. Yet, as a privately-owned public space it became a suitable site for the literal grounding of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. Long in planning, but inspired by the "Arab Spring", OWS protestors began occupying Zuccotti Park on 17 September 2011. Protestors could occupy the site because, unlike publically-owned parks, privately-owned public spaces cannot be subject to curfew orders. In the weeks that followed, the OWS movement made Zuccotti Park world renowned. In their protest of an economic system symbolised by nearby Wall Street's economic and political power, the occupation of Zuccotti Park became a stake in the struggle, in a similar fashion to Tahrir Square. The Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, played a back-and-forth game, since he wanted to remove the protestors but, at same time, did not want to appear to deny the protestors their political rights.

Whereas Tahrir Square already held the status of a public space that could readily be mobilised as a space to "speak" to and (potentially) for "the people", Zuccotti Park did not. In this instance, it was the OWS movement that made the point of speaking for "the people". The protest's "we are the 99%" became very effective in transforming the particular claims of the movement's various participants into a more universal statement from a "part of those with no part". It was the very content of the OWS claims that helped make Zuccotti Park a symbolic space; a space which amplified demands; a space which other OWS occupations looked to for lessons and camaraderie. The transformation of Zuccotti Park from a privately-owned plaza to a symbolic site became evident when the City cleared the park. Immediately questions arose as to what would happen to the OWS without the occupation of the site. It was as if the site itself served to maintain the demand; occupation assured the presentation of the equality claim (for an extended account, see Writers for the 99%, 2012).

Therefore, while it might be tempting on the basis of these two examples to simply assert that politics needs a public space, instead the different characteristics and identities of these spaces indicates that politics does not require a pre-defined and pre-determined form of public space. While Tahrir Square is indeed an example of a classic "people's space" which had already been invested with some political significance by previous protests and state action, Zuccotti Park primarily emerged as an occupation site after a consideration of the contingent public space legislation in New York City. It was not some pre-ordained site of national/global significance, but rather a space that was more conventionally occupied by lunching workers and shoppers in need of a quick rest.

Indeed, politics as understood by Rancière can potentially occur in any space. It is not the inherent qualities of a given space that makes it political or not, but rather the way in which it is mobilised. No particular kind of place is proper to politics. Nor is it the existence of public

spaces, as such, that enables politics. A school classroom or public swimming pool might become an arena for claims about civil rights. A particular house or street might emerge as a space whereby the structural problems of a capitalist property system are brought into contestation. The protection of a certain section of woodland might come to represent claims about the destructive nature of modernist development and its abuse of environmental resources.

An understanding of the spatial component of politics cannot therefore serve to identify and/or construct some model of politics' proper place – be that the Parliament, the streets, or anywhere else. Rather the space for politics, just as politics itself, remains contingent: "politics exists wherever the count of parts and parties of society is disturbed by the inscription of a part of those who have no part" (Rancière, 1999, p. 123). Political activity:

> might be the activity of those nineteenth-century workers who established a collective basis for work relations that were solely the product of an infinite number of relationships between private individuals. Or again, the activity of demonstrators and those manning the barricades that literally turned urban communications paths into "public space." Spectacular or otherwise, political activity is always a mode of expression that undoes the perceptible divisions of the police order by implementing a basically heterogenous assumption, that of a part of those who have no part, an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being. Politics occurs when there is a place and a way for two heterogenous processes to meet. The first is the police process in the sense we have tried to define. The second is the process of equality. (Rancière, 1999, p. 30)

Rancière's performative approach to politics therefore places emphasis on the ways in which people mobilise particular spaces for the staging of political claims, in which they constitute themselves as parties to a disagreement. As he puts it: "Politics is primarily conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it" (Rancière, 1999, p. 26). This staging of disagreement, at its heart, involves a kind of performative contradiction. There is no pre-given stage that is proper to politics. And yet, political action involves behaving "as though such a stage existed, as though there were a common world of argument – which is eminently reasonable and eminently unreasonable, eminently wise and resolutely subversive, since such a world does not exist" (Rancière, 1999, p. 52).

Mediations: Amplification, diffusion and translation

It is important not to reduce the "staging" of political action to occupations of the physical public spaces of the city, which are commonly conceptualised as the "stages" for public life and politics. "The people" or "the 99%" can never be co-present in a single time and place. Political action, as with all forms of public action, necessarily has an imaginary dimension, in which participants imagine (and indeed assert) themselves to be part of something which exceeds any given gathering or occupation in a particular place (Iveson, 2007, p. 31).

In the contemporary period, the amplification of events and claims through their *mediation*, along with related processes of diffusion and translation, has been absolutely critical to the fabrication of politics. The 2011 protests in Tahrir Square came to have metropolitan, national and global significance through their mediation and re-mediation. This mediation took a number of forms – from professional journalists reporting on events via mainstream media outlets, to the participants themselves capturing events on digital cameras and posting them on internet video sites such as *YouTube* or blogging and tweeting updates – much of which was subsequently re-mediated through mainstream media outlets. Such mediation enabled participants to dramatically extend the horizon of their discourse to fellow Egyptians and others around the world, amplifying the significance of their actions beyond the confines of the Square itself (Gerbauodo, 2012).

Mubarak was not only forced to consider how to police the Square, he was also forced to justify his actions in the Square and the nature of his regime to the people of Egypt and the world through the same media channels that carried images of the protestors. In other words, various media were used as "stages" through which the protestors could establish their identity as "the people" in disagreement with Mubarak's regime, rather than a small, noisy rabble without purpose or a capacity for political speech.

Of course, the mediation of these claims was not confined to Egypt itself. As people around the world watched events unfold, both the claims *and the strategies* of the protestors in Tahrir Square circulated to powerful effect. Given the increasing inter-connectivity of places and times through the intensification of flows of information, the mediation of equality claims has also stimulated the *diffusion* of repertoires of political action. The interactions between the events in Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park reveal this dimension of mediation. With the success of the occupation of Tahrir Square we have seen the diffusion and translation of that form of political action into different political contexts; as actors in other places seek to establish both their solidarity and commonality with the Egyptian people, while at the same time articulating their own particular demands. The Occupy Wall St website makes explicit reference to the inspiration taken from the "Arab Spring", describing the movement as a:

> … leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions. The one thing we all have in common is that We Are The 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%. We are using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants. (occupywallst.org, accessed 4 March 2012)

Taking inspiration is an act of translation, as repertoires are experimented with and refined to take account of their different context. Scalmer's (2011) recent account of the diffusion and translation of the Ghandian political repertoire to the United States and United Kingdom provides another powerful example of this process in action.

As Occupy Wall St gathered momentum, protestors developed their own strategies of amplification through the media. For instance, the website http://wearethe99percent.tumbler.com allowed individuals from across the United States (and beyond) to post pictures of themselves holding up a short message about their personal circumstances and why they identified with and supported "the 99%" and the occupation of Wall St. The many thousands of pictures and messages posted here gave some credence to the claims of the relatively small number of people who physically occupied Zuccotti Park and that they did indeed represent the excluded "99%". Furthermore, the mediation of events taking place in the Park and other protest sites in New York extended participation in the movement beyond those who could be present in person. Speeches delivered by participants and visitors were filmed and posted on *YouTube*. The Minutes of daily General Assemblies were recorded and archived on the internet at a web address which also accepted financial donations. Real-time information about protest strategy and the movements of police were shared via Twitter. And all this material was available for re-mediation through other media such as commercial mass media or activist and scholarly networks.

Clearly, the utilisation of so-called "new media" for the amplification of political claims in Egypt and New York attests to the historical novelty of these instances of political action (Castells, 2010; Gerbaudo, 2012). But an important part of Rancière's approach to politics is to draw out the common dimensions of political action across time and space, while insisting on the particularity of every instance of politics. He insists that a "method of equality" must implement:

at the same time, a principle of historicization and a principle of untimeliness, a principle of contextualization and a principle of de-contexualization. You must make words resound in their concrete place and time of enunciation, instead of the generalizations of historical discourse. But you must also draw the line of escape, the line of universalization on which the poor romantic floor-layer meets the aristocratic philosopher of antiquity and verifies that they have something in common, that they speak about the same thing … . (Rancière, 2009b, p. 282)

As such, the newness of the media should not blind us to the continuities that are present in contemporary instances of politics. While the particular media that are mobilised for the amplification of politics in a given situation might be "new", the necessity of amplification for politics is not, as the Rancière's (1999) discussion of the succession of the plebians from Ancient Rome demonstrates. In this instance, the plebians ensured that their particular fate was equated with the fate of the city at large by staging a mass walk-out to Aventine Hill in advance of a threatened attack on the city. This walk-out had the effect of amplifying their particular claims to be political, by establishing them as speaking beings with whom the patricians were forced to negotiate as equals. By demonstrating that the fate of the city's security was intimately connected to their complaints about inequality, the plebians' actions transcended their factional concerns and, consequently, became related to the broader polity. In other words, politics necessarily involves some mechanism through which a particular act or claim can be made to speak for something more universal, to address the polity at large.

Paying attention to such continuities and commonalities helps to demonstrate that while politics in any particular context might involve the physical occupation of urban space and/or the mobilisation of various media, neither the occupation of space nor the mediation of events in that space define the nature of politics *per se*. The occupation of space and the mediation of demands become *political* to the extent that such occupations and mediations are able to transform particular demands into something more universal – a demand from "the people". Occupation and mediation, in other words, are political when they are connected to the formation of new political subjects. We now consider this process and its geographies.

Subjectifications

A process of subjectification, in which the parts allocated to people in an existing polity are refused and re-inscribed, is central to Rancière's concept of political action. While the claims of political movements may differ, Rancière argues that political actions share a common logic – an attempt to fundamentally alter the "partition of the sensible" through the inscription of the "part of those who have no part". From this perspective, *it is the performance of this inscription* that lends the physical occupation of an urban space and/or the mediation of claims their political dimension. This is why Rancière insists that "politics is equality":

Politics occurs by reason of a single universal that takes the specific shape of wrong. Wrong institutes a singular universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society. (Rancière, 1999, p. 39)

In political occupations of space, the people gather together as equals, in order to insist that their equality has not been recognised in the existing order. They have been wronged.

Therefore, looking across the movements that have emerged around the world in recent times, we can see that the particular "wrong" identified by protestors differs. In Tunisia and Egypt, diverse groups came together to contest that fact that they had no part in their own government under the autocratic regimes of Ali and Mubarak, and/or that those governments were oppressing their populations both materially and politically; in Tunis, protesters frequently chanted "the

people want to bring down the regime" (Ertuna, 2011); in Tahrir, it was "bread, freedom and justice" (Bush, 2012). Here, we see the subjectification of a *demos*, underpinned by the notion that "the people" should determine how they are governed, that they do have a part to play. As Nasser Abourahme (2011) has argued, this process of political re-subjectification in Arab countries (Tunisia and Egypt in particular) also has a global dimension, helping to disrupt the colonialist framing of Arab people as being incapable of democratic action without military assistance from the United States and its Allies.

In Greece and the United States, where governments are already elected through ballots which are (in theory) free and fair, the failure of elected governments to act in the interests of "the people" (rather than the markets or their own self-interest) has been identified as a primary wrong. Indeed, the very grammar of the Occupy movement asserts that the existing order is premised on a miscount – their central claim is that the interests of the elite 1% of the population have come to represent for the interests of the whole, and that the remaining 99% have therefore been wronged. Across these important differences, there are common underpinnings in the assertion of equality through the inscription of a "part of those with no part".

The fact that equality is not (only) a demand of these movements, but an assumption that is their very foundation, has been reflected in the form that their occupations have taken. In the on-going occupation of Syntagma Square Athens, and in the daily General Assemblies of many of the Occupy groups, protestors have sought to avoid hierarchical forms or organisation. In Athens, access to the stage for making speeches is allocated by lot, in a manner reminiscent of the assemblies of citizens that took place in Ancient Athens thousands of years before. Similarly, decision-making at General Assemblies of the Occupy movement can last for hours, as anyone with a view on the issue is given a chance to speak until a consensus is reached. Here, we see a calculated performative critique of the mechanics of "politics" in the existing order – parties, parliamentary debating rules, media-friendly sound-bites and other characteristics of representative democracy are rejected in favour of a more "messy" and participatory form of political action. Such attempts to re-order place are to us examples of Rancière's notion that politics involves emancipatory articulations of alternative worlds within the world as it is, "locating another time in that time, another space in that space" (Rancière, 2009b, p. 282).

In making the claim that occupations in Tunis, Cairo, Athens, New York and other cities have been a means by which both the staging of disagreement and the subjectification of the people have *taken place*, we do not claim either that these movements were unified, or that they represented *everyone*. As Rancière (2006, p. 49) puts it, the power of the people "is not the power of the population or of the majority, but the power anyone at all, the equality of capabilities to occupy the positions of governors and of the governed".

If this process of subjectification has a geography through its inherent connection to the physical and mediated spaces of enunciation we have described above, it also raises geographical questions about the scope of the "universal" and its connections to an imagined polity. Rancière defines the process of subjectification involved in politics as:

> … the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience. (Rancière, 1999, p. 35)

But what exactly is the field of experience? As a shorthand, Rancière himself occasionally describes the existing field of experience or police order as a "city" – it is a polity comprised of parts allocated to their proper functions and places, disrupted by political action which "inscribes a subject name as being different from any identified part of the community" (Rancière,

1999, p. 37; see also Rancière, 2004a). Part of the challenge of acting politically in a globalised, inter-connected world is that no police order – be it at the scale of the neighbourhood, the city, the nation, the region, etc. – exists in isolation. Political action in such circumstances necessarily involves choices and debates about the extent of the polity in which new political subjects assert their claims to universality. Do those occupying Tahrir Square stand for "the people" of Egypt, or of the Arab world more broadly? Does the "99%" refer only to the exploited and alienated people of the United States, or to the exploited peoples of the world? We think these questions can themselves become matters of politics, as exemplified by debates initiated by these recent political subjectifications. For instance, while we can see the articulation of claims on behalf of "the 99%" at Occupy Wall St as political, there are also those who have argued that the movement itself has been parochial to the United States, failing to take account of America's privileged place in the global division of labour (Dean, 2011). Here, Rancière's understanding of a political subject as "an operator that connects and disconnects different areas, regions, identities, functions and capacities existing in the configuration of a given experience" (Rancière, 1999, p. 40), is at least suggestive of this dislocative dimension to political action; not simply as a reconfiguration of places within a pre-defined polity, but potentially as a reconfiguration of how we understand political space and the "field of experience", its relations and connections. Here, we think a sensitivity to these political geographies could add considerably to Rancière's account of politics and its relevance for the present.

Anti-politics and recuperation

As we have argued, the constitution of certain modes of subjectivity is crucial for politics. It is imperative for an existing police order to have its roles and occupations reconfigured. Yet the formulation of political subjectivity is not the end point of politics for Rancière. He is keenly aware that politics always exist in relation to the police. Indeed Rancière does not see policing being removed. Rather that any democratic society must always hold its (necessary) policed orders up to the presumption of equality, and thus be able to transform given the formation and subjectification of an equality demand. Undemocratic police orders will, of course, respond to politics with the aim of closing down the possibility of democratic change. Often this will involve reformulating the equality claim into some depoliticised contestation, what Rancière (1999) calls "para-politics". Here the attempt is to remove the antagonistic disagreement, making contestation into negotiation and/or placation.

In the context of the political events discussed here, we can identify the geographical dimensions of the police responses. In Bahrain we have witness the literal erasure of the political stage in order to prevent the subjectification of "the people". Following the protests across the Arab world in early 2011, various groups started to congregate in Bahrain's Pearl Square, a public space located within the Manana financial district. Located within the square was the symbolically significant Pearl Monument, an installation intended to signify national unity and the state's history of pearl cultivation. When protestors began to articulate the similar complaints and demands as seen in Egypt and Tunisia, the state response was a dramatic act of anti-political erasure. On 17 February 2011, Bahraini police entered the square intent on dispersing the protestors (Farmer, 2011). With indiscriminate violence, the police killed six protestors and cleared the protestor's camps. The army then moved in with bulldozers to flatten the square and destroy its monuments. This political stage was then swiftly transformed into a traffic intersection (Farmer, 2011).

Whilst politics was therefore emerging in the Bahrain context, the processes of occupation, mediation and subjectification were brutally halted. In this case, it was repression and the erasure of a symbolic public space that served to counter the politics of the protestors. We find

the same types of anti-political erasure taking place across the urban landscape. In New York, Sydney, London, Melbourne, to name just a few examples, "occupy" camps located in central business districts have been met with violent police responses and legal action. Although located in public spaces, many of the camps have been designated as outwith "proper" usage. For example, in Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle justified the violent police closure of the city's Occupy camp after one week by saying:

> There comes a point when you say that's enough. It's time to return the City Square to the people of Melbourne, to the events that take place there. The traders and the retailers who are around City Square have been terribly affected by a week of occupation. And you know there comes a time when you say "okay you've made your point, time's up". (ABC Radio, World Today 21 October 2011)

Put differently, the use of such spaces as a stage for politics is not part of their current police order; their use as a political stage is not deemed proper or sensible.

Indeed, like political action, police action is by no means guaranteed to succeed. Bulldozers, batons and tear gas may indeed block access to spaces and overpower (and even injure or kill) those who seek to create a stage for political action. And yet, repressive measures by authorities seeking to protect the existing police order can sometimes lend legitimacy to the very demands of protestors for the transformation of that order, on the grounds that it can only survive through the repression of the people. Anti-political violence serves only to demonstrate the illegitimacy and impotence of the regime. In Tahrir Square, protestors had to courageously endure several attempts by the Mubarak regime to clear the square of protestors, as well as attacks from supporters of the existing regime. Indeed, with each subsequent attempt to repress the protests, the Mubarak regime became less and less viable. Violence only eroded its power.

For this reason, erasure is not only a matter of (re-)asserting control over a given place, it is also a matter of establishing that those who occupy that place are no more than a disgruntled minority or noisy rabble who should be ignored because they have nothing to say. In other words, erasure is also a matter of denying those who (seek to) occupy a given place the ability to act politically. This serves to stop anyone being party to a disagreement about the order of things. As Rancière puts it polemically in *Disagreement*:

> … the party of the rich embodies nothing other than the antipolitical. From Athens in the fifth century BC up until our own governments, the party of the rich has only ever said one thing, which is most precisely the negation of politics: there is no part of those who have no part. (Rancière, 1999, p. 14)

In this sense, the existing police order therefore acts to refute the formation of those subject positions that are required in politics; those positions that transgress established order. Rancière claims that in the contemporary context this form of anti-politics is often found in the consensus system of government:

> What indeed is consensus if not the presupposition of inclusion of all parties and their problems that prohibits the political subjectification of a part of those who have no part, of a count of the uncounted? Everyone is included in advance … . (Rancière, 1999, p. 116)

A governmental system based around consensus is seen as one that presumes inclusion and, therefore, denies the possibility of an unequal participant in the democratic process.

This denial of subjectification as "a part of those with no part" is related to another, less repressive, but no less anti-political response to political action: *recuperation*. Here, the presence of protesting bodies is acknowledged, welcomed even, as evidence of a functioning police order which

does indeed take account of the interests of the whole of society. Demands are recognised as a *particular* demand by one part of society among many others, to be adjudicated upon via the existing mechanisms of authority and rule (i.e. consultation and community building exercises). Kristin Ross (2002) provides an extended account of such processes of recuperation in response to the events of May/June 1968 in Paris. In the immediate situation, a generalised revolt involving strikes, occupations and self-organised collectives in the city was interpreted by authorities (principally the French government and the trade union leadership) as an occasion for a general wage rise; an outbreak of politics was recuperated as a particular demand that could be accommodated within the existing order. Over the longer term, the events were gradually re-interpreted as a rebellion of youth against the restrictive norms of post-war French society. Here, the "policing" of the events involved a repudiation of the notion that they expressed anything *universal* beyond the *particular* demands of young people for mixed-gender university dorms, long hair and blue jeans. The capacity of French society to gradually accommodate these particular demands was thereby actively asserted as proof of the absence of any fundamental miscount or wrong.

Such concession-making and recuperation has been in evidence during the "Arab Spring". In Egypt, Mubarak's regime attempted to make a series of "democratic reforms" in order to quell protests. The same maneuvers were made more successfully, at least at the time of writing, in Saudi Arabia (Dickerson, 2013). After the self-immolation of a 65 year old man in Jizan in late January 2011, protests spread across the Gulf state. As protestors demanded political prisoners be released, government be opened up and labour rights introduced, the state responded with a combination of repressive violence (e.g. the shooting of protestors) and recuperation. In terms of the latter, this involved an initial $10.7 billion social welfare package to raise wages, create new jobs and forgive loans (Dickerson, 2013). By the end of March, this spending had increased to $93 billion as the state sunk its vast surpluses into a nation-wide recuperation program (Dickerson, 2013). This has seemingly had the effect of stopping contestations becoming political, in that what at first seemed like universal demands (i.e. the whole social order must be replaced) became particular demands (i.e. we want better wages) that were met by the existing state authorities.

In self-identifying democratic regimes, we therefore see protests granted their "place".In western countries dealing with anti-austerity and "Occupy" movements, groups of demonstrators, temporarily occupying a public space, are allowed (and even encouraged) to "have their say". The state tolerates this form of dissent – at least temporarily – as part of its strategy to maintain legitimacy. To immediately repress such actions would undermine the democratic state's legitimate wielding of power. The strategy we have commonly witnessed in places such as Madrid, Athens and New York has been to denounce those gathered as "illegitimate protestors" who have no particular demands (i.e. they just want to make trouble), propose no specific solutions (i.e. are a bunch of mis-guided and unrealistic souls) and have no collective identity (i.e. do not represent a discrete group whose demands can be discussed and incorporated). Furthermore the temporality of the movements has confounded existing policing discourse. Many of the occupations and revolutions have not "fit" with existing media cycles, where short agenda statements and easily digestible sound-bites are typical. Instead many of the protestors have resisted this recuperation forcing the state's "tolerance" to reach its limits. A refusal to engage within the existing police order that already presumes inclusion and equality – although it clearly knows this is a lie – has resulted in the clearance of parks, police brutality and, for some, imprisonment.

Conclusion: Rancière and the spaces of politics

Rancière's political philosophy opens up a way to theorise a democracy that keeps open the possibility of societal change. It allows us to think a society that does not narcissistically presume its achievement of equality and inclusion. Within certain geography and urban studies debates this

realization has been used extensively to critique contemporary western democracy and point towards certain lines of escape (see for example MacLeod, 2011). Indeed, as we have tried to demonstrate in this paper, Rancière's work is incredibly productive for thinking about what constitutes a political change and what is required to make these changes possible. However, in this paper we have also tried to demonstrate that Rancière's understanding of politics highlights the importance of seeing politics as a spatial process, something that requires staging, mediating and subjectifying. Politics therefore do not only emerge from the margins (contra Swyngedouw, 2009; Holston, 2009), as if a structurally determined and excluded "part with no part" gains conscious and enunciates a demand that changes the society around it. Rather its constituent elements are the stakes of battle themselves. Furthermore, and as we have finally argued, this battle continues once the political claim emerges. As we have seen throughout the past years, counter-revolutions always have the potential to arise in order to re-assert the pre-existing police order. Politics is not assured by the simple enunciation of the equality claim. It is here where we should place the emphasis of a Rancièrian view of politics. Whilst politics emerge from within a context that precludes the ability to foresee them, where they do emerge they have to be fought for and cherished.

Note

1. A recent book collecting essays by activists involved in a number of radical political movements appeared under the title *Occupy Everything!* (Lunghi & Wheeler, 2012).

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