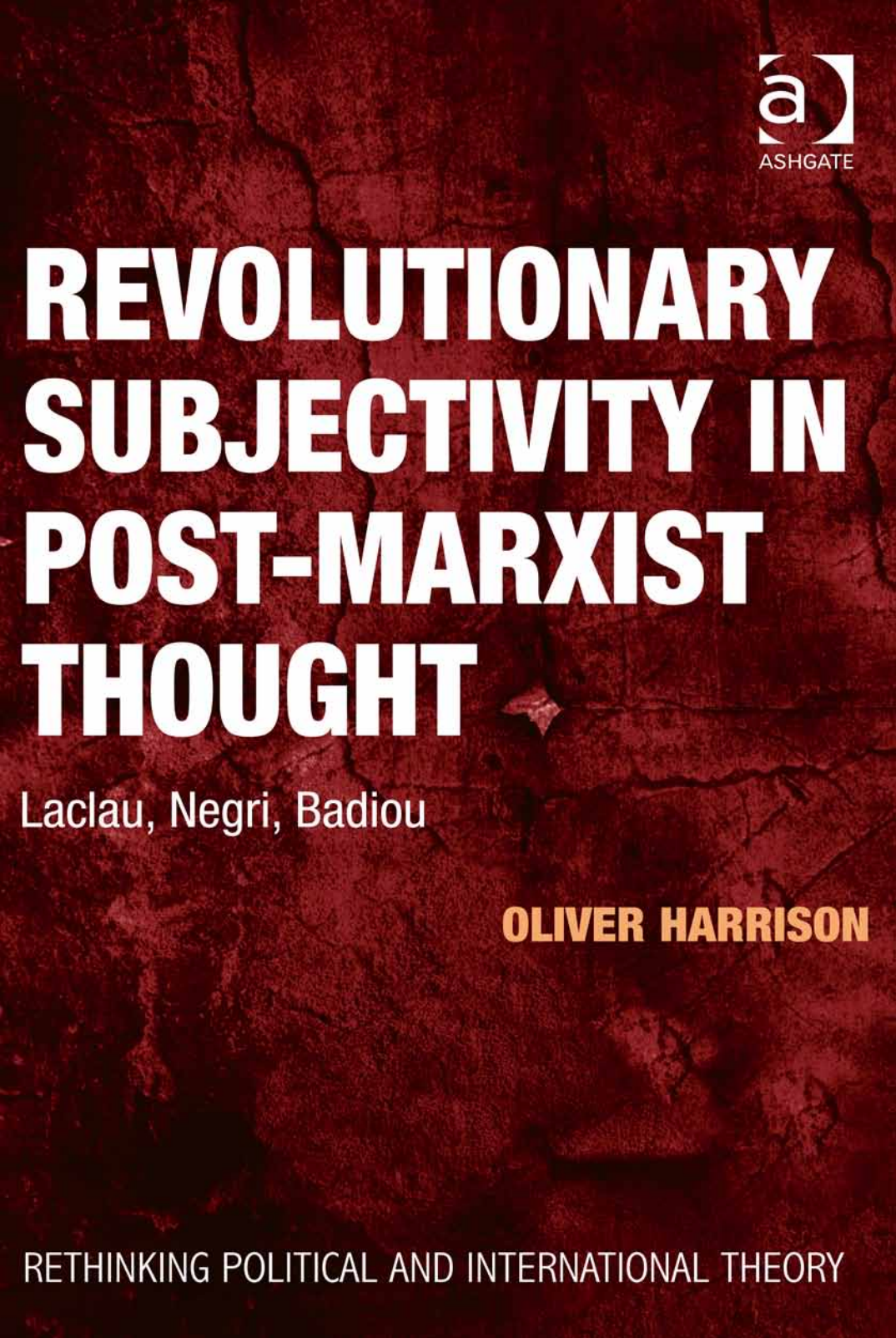
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Laclau, Negri, Badiou
OLIVER HARRISON
RETHINKING POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL THEORY

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Revolutionary Subjectivity in Post-Marxist Thought

Laclau, Negri, Badiou

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ASHGATE

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
110 Cherry Street
Suite 3–1
Burlington, VT 05401–3818
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for
Harrison, Oliver, 1982–
Revolutionary subjectivity in post-Marxist thought : Laclau, Negri, Badiou / by Oliver Harrison.
pages cm. – (Rethinking political and international theory)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978–1–4724–2133–3 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN 978–1–4724–2134–0 (ebook) – ISBN 978–1–4724–2135–7 (epub)
1. Production (Economic theory) 2. Capitalism – Philosophy. 3. Working class – Philosophy. 4. Marx, Karl, 1818–1883 – Influence. 5. Laclau, Ernesto. 6. Negri, Antonio, 1933– 7. Badiou, Alain
I. Title.
HD4904.H338 2014
335.4–dc23 2014011139

ISBN 9781472421333 (hbk)
ISBN 9781472421340 (ebk – PDF)
ISBN 9781472421357 (ebk – ePUB)

Contents

Acknowledgments *vii*

1 Introduction 1

2 From Marxism to Post-Marxism 7

3 Revolutionary Subjectivity in Marxist Thought 21

4 Ernesto Laclau – Hegemony and 'The People' 41

5 Antonio Negri – Self-valorisation and 'The Project of the Multitude' 69

6 Alain Badiou – Event, Truth, and the 'Communist Hypothesis' 97

7 Conclusion 125

Bibliography *131*

Index *147*

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the *Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice* at the University of Nottingham for giving me the space and opportunity for developing my ideas. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues at Nottingham Trent University, especially Ian Fraser and Lawrence Wilde; both of which have helped and supported me so much through the years. Thanks also to Tony Burns and Mark Wenman. Finally, I would like to thank my family.

Parts of this work have previously appeared in the following:

Harrison, O. (2011), 'Negri, self-valorisation, and the *exploration* of the common', in *Subjectivity*, 4 [1], April 2011, pp. 29–46.

Harrison, O. (2011), 'Revolutionary subjectivity in post-Marxist thought: the case of Laclau and Badiou', in *Global Discourse*, 2 [2], pp. 1–13. This was later reprinted in Harrison, O. (2012), 'Revolutionary subjectivity in post-Marxist thought: the case of Laclau and Badiou', in Johnson, M. ed. (2012), *The Legacy of Marxism: Contemporary Challenges, Conflicts and Developments*. London and New York. Continuum. pp. 183–199.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Revolutionary Subjectivity Today

In recent years, the question of revolutionary subjectivity has become more and more prominent in contemporary social and political theory. With the failure of 'actually existing socialism' and the seemingly unsurpassable hegemony of neo-liberal globalisation, one might be forgiven for asking why. Throughout the twentieth century, both politically and theoretically it was Marxism that dominated the discourse of left-wing revolutionary politics. Speaking at Karl Marx's funeral in 1883, Frederick Engels argued that Marx had discovered the 'fundamental law' that governed the constitution of human history, a law that when applied to the modern world had unveiled the means to which it would inevitably falter, and in so doing usher with it a fundamentally new form of communist society (Engels 1989, pp. 463, 464). The history of Marxism, however, was to be a painful one. Although it could claim relative success with the revolutions in Russia (1917), China (1949), and Cuba (1959) amongst others, politically it ossified into a doctrine that justified state terror, rather than one that advanced the cause of universal human emancipation. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in the winter of 1989 the demise of Marxism was deemed complete, leaving only a disastrously disfigured legacy in its wake.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century Marxism was also challenged theoretically. Coinciding with its many explosive political failures – Khrushchev's 1956 public denunciation of Stalin, the crushing of the rebellions in Hungary (1956) and in Prague (1968), and the terroristic excesses of the Chinese Cultural Revolution – throughout this period many Marxists found these revelations too much to bear, and gradually began questioning some of Marxism's most elementary claims. With the emergence of so-called post-Marxism in the 1980s, Marxism's political defeat appeared to be complemented theoretically, and as such – to use Trotsky's oft-quoted phrase – Marxism seemed well and truly consigned 'into the dustbin of history'. Despite this, following the Global Financial Crisis of September 2008, elements of Marx's thought have returned, inspiring numerous commentaries that have sought to explain it (see for example Callinicos 2010; Harman 2009; Harvey 2010). At times of capitalist crisis, then, it would appear that the Marxist critique of political economy remains authoritative for those attempting to understand the contradictory logic of capital accumulation. Yet, whilst this critique might have stood the test of time, the return to Marx hasn't usually also included his revolutionary prescriptions with respect to resolving such crises. Today however, this seems to have changed; particularly with respect

to the resurgent theoretical interest in the question of revolutionary subjectivity and, more generally, its connection to notions of 'communism'. In March 2009 for example, a conference held at the Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities – entitled 'The Idea of Communism' – drew around one thousand spectators, and brought together some of the most significant of today's contemporary radical theorists. Deemed 'the hottest ticket in town' (Campbell 2009), amongst others this included the likes of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Terry Eagleton. A follow-up to this conference was held in New York in 2011 and both of the conferences' proceedings were eventually published by Verso Books (Douzinas and Žižek 2010; Žižek 2013).

Purpose of the Book

Given the resurgent interest in the notion of revolutionary subjectivity and its connection to Marx's work, the purpose of this book is to examine the theory of revolutionary subjectivity in the work of Ernesto Laclau, Antonio Negri – both individually and in his co-authored work with Michael Hardt – and Alain Badiou. I will argue that it is Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity that remains at the heart of each of these thinkers' theories, and yet, in their own particular way each of their respective theories has taken a gradual path away from Marx, into the realms of what might better be termed 'post-Marxism'. After first introducing each of these thinkers, my justifications as to why I have chosen their work for this study serves well at this point as a means of pre-empting what the central arguments of this book will be.

The work of the late Ernesto Laclau is still considered by many as synonymous with post-Marxism, and his co-authored work with Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, is still considered *the* post-Marxist text. First published in 1985, Laclau and Mouffe's text adopted the label without hesitation, although as we will see they used the term in at least two senses. Since then, although not as prolific as the other two theorists chosen for this study, Laclau published a number of influential works, all of which essentially deepened the insights developed from at that time. These works include *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Times* (1990), *Emancipations* (1996), *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality* (2000), and most recently, *On Populist Reason* (2005).

Although a steady stream of translated earlier texts began to emerge during the 1980s and 1990s, the work of Antonio Negri – in the English speaking world at least – is also largely associated with one key text. Whilst works such as *Marx beyond Marx* (1982), *Revolution Retrieved* (1988), and *The Politics of Subversion* (1989) were crucial for those seeking to understand the nature of Negri's earlier thought and the specificities of the tradition from which it emerged, it was the co-authored (with Michael Hardt) *Empire* (2000) – followed up by *Multitude* (2004) and most recently *Commonwealth* (2009) – that cemented Negri's presence in contemporary radical thought. Interestingly, unlike Laclau, Negri has remained

largely ambivalent to the label post-Marxism, even though he has been explicit about the need for taking 'Marx beyond Marx'.

In the last decade or so, finally, the work of Alain Badiou has become increasingly central, spawning a more or less consistent release of translated materials. With works such as his *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1999), *Saint Paul* (2003), *Ethics* (2001), and perhaps most importantly *Being and Event* (2005) and *Logic of Worlds* (2009), there have also been a number of translations of his early works. Amongst others, alongside a number of key articles these include *Theory of the Subject* (2009) and, more recently, *The Rational Kernel of the Hegelian Dialectic* (2001). Badiou himself has neither adopted the label post-Marxist nor has he remained ambivalent towards it; rather, he has explicitly rejected it on the basis that it represents a form of politics that he has continually sought to distance himself from.

Given the prominence of each thinker's work in contemporary theoretical debates, it is unusual that they have not been systematically brought together before – certainly not in the way I propose to do here. Perhaps the closest attempts has been Nick Hewlett's *Badiou, Balibar, and Rancière: Rethinking Emancipation* (2007), and Alex Callinicos' *Resources of Critique* (2006); although in both cases there is a different arrangement of thinkers and, more importantly, these studies did not focus on either the specificity of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, or for that matter the complexities of what constitutes post-Marxist thought. Bringing Laclau, Negri and Badiou together for the first time whilst framing their thought specifically in relation to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, then, constitutes my first justification with respect to why I have chosen them for this study.

My second justification for their inclusion concerns the interesting commonalities between them. On the one hand, and by their own admission, this book argues that each thinker's theory of revolutionary subjectivity displays a remarkable degree of continuity from their early to later periods. Laclau for instance has stated that the trajectory of his work has been a 'maturation of certain original intuitions', rather than one characterised by any sharp break (Laclau 1990, p. 203). Negri too has retained his early intuitions, insisting as he did in early works that revolutionary change must still be understood on the basis of changing forms of labour (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 79). Badiou, finally, explicitly accepts that his current work is guided just as much as it was by an attempt to both retain and yet reconfigure the philosophical and political notion of 'the subject' (Badiou 2009, p. 522). Crucial for understanding this shared continuity, however, is uncovering the precise link that connects each thinker's earlier to later periods, for it is this link that complicates the extent to which each thinker fully abandons the conditions of Marx's own theory. This book will argue that, somewhat ironically, each thinker's post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity is established on the basis of a sustained engagement with aspects of a particular Marxist theorist's thought. To be more specific: central to Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity is Antonio Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony'; so too for Negri is Vladimir Lenin's flexibility with respect to organisational form; as too for Badiou is Mao Tse-tung's notion of

the 'inquiry' and the primacy of political praxis. Whilst Laclau, Negri and Badiou have all acknowledged their debt to each of these respective thinkers, I will argue that due to the fact that the latter were only reiterating something that was already present in Marx's own theory, as stated above, this complicates the extent to which they move definitively beyond him.

My third and final justification for the composition of thinkers studied in this book would appear to contradict the second. In other words, although I will establish that each thinker's theory of revolutionary subjectivity retains a distinct line of continuity, I will also argue that the post-Marxist nature to their theories is established via a significant break: one that sees all thinkers adopt a different ontological framework to the underlying Hegelian premises to Marx's. Additionally, not only did each thinker make this break at a very similar moment in their thought – both theoretically and practically – they did so also as a means of solidifying the contours to their earlier theories. Hence, whilst their respective 'ontological turns' can be considered the moment in which they broke with the premises to Marx's own theory of revolutionary subjectivity, this break was forged primarily as a means of shoring up the principles to their own. Laclau, for example, would turn to the Lacanian ontology of 'lack' as a means of deepening his earlier emphases on the development of a post-Gramscian theory of hegemony. In a similar fashion, Negri would turn to the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza as a means of providing his early theory of 'self-valorization' with a more positive ontological foundation. Finally, following the impasse of Maoism throughout the mid to late 1980s, Badiou would adopt the ontological principles of Cantorian set theory; again, as a means of solidifying his earlier re-worked theory of the subject. In sum, then, my third justification for the composition of the thinkers comprising this book lies in their shared attempt to adopt an alternative ontological framework as a means of overcoming the perceived inadequacies of Marx's. Yet, what is shared in this respect is only complicated by the fact that each thinker adopts different ontological frameworks to each other – the consequences of which I will draw out in my concluding chapter. Ultimately, after making some general claims as to the nature of post-Marxist thought itself, this book will argue that each thinker offers something vitally important for understanding the notion of revolutionary subjectivity today.

Chapter Outline

This book will adopt the following structure. In Chapter 2 I will situate the emergence of 'post-Marxism' in relation to the history of the Marxist tradition. Starting from the 'Marxism of Karl Marx' I will focus only on what I consider to be the most important points of development, especially for appreciating the emergence of post-Marxism towards the end of the twentieth century. In Chapter 3 I will establish the framework which I will use for discussing the post-Marxist nature of each of my chosen thinker's theories. Here I will do two things. My main

task, firstly, will be to explain Karl Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – both individually and via his co-authored work with Frederick Engels. The second task of this chapter will be outline the ways in which Lenin, Gramsci and Mao would adopt this theory; or to be more specific, the second part of the chapter will outline the extent to which their own theories of revolutionary subjectivity would essentially reiterate and expand something which was already present in Marx's.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will follow a very similar pattern, and will broadly be split into three inter-related parts. The first part of each chapter will outline each thinker's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity in relation to their own particular academic, activist or personal circumstance. Each chapter will suggest that these early formative experiences would be crucial for understanding not only the nature of each theorist's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity, but also the particular post-Marxist route this mature work would take. The second part of each chapter will identify the moment where each thinker's theory of revolutionary subjectivity explicitly departs from Marx's. At this stage I will argue that each thinker's attempt to go beyond Marx is conditioned by their adoption of a different ontological framework. Despite this, however, a connection to Marx's theory is retained due to their enduring fidelity to a respective Marxist theorist. The final part to each chapter will outline each thinker's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and then subject this theory to a critical analysis. Finally, in my Conclusion I will discuss the relative merits of each theory as a means of not only suggesting a productive synthesis, but also for making some general claims about post-Marxist theories of revolutionary subjectivity today.

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Chapter 2
From Marxism to Post-Marxism

Overview

In this short chapter I provide an overview of the way in which Marxist theory developed since Marx's death in 1883. I begin by outlining Marx's own theory, specifically by splitting it into three overriding themes – philosophy, political economy, and politics. This theory will be discussed in greater lengths in Chapter 3. After outlining Marx's theory, I concentrate on the way in which it developed into the various 'schools' of Marxism throughout the twentieth century. Here I will note not only the way in which Marx's theory was developed within Marxism, but also, towards the end of the chapter, the way in which specific aspects of Marx's theory would be eclipsed by the emergence of a new political and intellectual landscape, starting with structuralism and ending in post-Marxism.

The Marxism of Karl Marx

According to Vladimir Illich Lenin (1977a) 'the Marxist doctrine' is essentially an amalgamation of classical German philosophy, classical English political economy, French socialist theory – and 'revolutionary doctrines in general' (Lenin 1977a, p. 19). As a young philosopher Marx entered many of the debates in Germany at that time, the most important of which concerned the philosophical and political legacy left in the wake of Hegel's death in 1831. Here Marx would align himself with the 'young Hegelians'; those who believed that Hegel's dialectical method needed retaining as a means of continuing the critique of existing social and political institutions (Sinnerbink 2007, pp. 43, 44). Marx would adopt Hegel's method and apply it to his study of human history. Whereas Hegel understood the latter in terms of the transformation and dialectical development of human consciousness, Marx (1990a) famously gave Hegel's dialectic a material twist, turning it 'on his head' to 'discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell' (Marx 1990a, p. 103). Working through their former 'young Hegelian' comrades – most notably Ludwig Feuerbach – in works such as *The German Ideology* (1846), *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) and the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx and Engels argued that revolutionary change can only be considered historically, based on a given development of human productive activity. Discussed in more detail in the next chapter, according to them every historical form of society was constituted by a given 'mode of production', the unity of which was split between the 'forces of production'

on the one hand, and the 'relations of production' on the other. Employing the principles of Hegel's method, Marx and Engels (1993a) believed that it was the contradictory movement between these elements that explained periodic changes in forms of society. Gradually, they argued, the contradiction between the forces and relations of production would assume an increasingly violent character, whilst in the same instance providing the material basis for a new future form of society.

During the 1840s Marx began to develop his theory of politics, out of which his theory of revolutionary change would emerge. In 1842, his interest in political affairs was stimulated by his involvement in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a publication that was the 'product of a brief marriage between Left Hegelianism and the liberal bourgeoisie' (Löwy 2005, p. 23). By circumstance, during this period Marx engaged with matters of 'material interests', and began his study of political economy whilst also getting accustomed with French socialist and communist literature (Marx 1992a, p. 424). Whilst his initial reception of this work was 'extremely cautious', with his move to Paris in October 1843, its influence would combine with his own enthusiastic involvement in the various Parisian workers' organisations at that time (Lowy 2005, p. 64; Fernbach 1993, p. 15). It was these experiences – both practical and theoretical – that led Marx to emphasise the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, first outlined in his 'Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'. It was here, for the first time, that Marx identified the proletariat as the one class with 'radical chains', and the only class that could present its own particular struggle as the embodiment of a universal and general interest (Marx 1975, pp. 185, 186).

Marx's experiences of the 'Communist League' (1847–1852), the first 'International Working Men's Association' (1864–1872), and the Paris Commune (1871) would play a decisive role in the development of his revolutionary theory. In *The Communist Manifesto* – written on behalf of the Communist League in 1848 – Marx and Engels (1993a) famously outlined their vision of what they saw as an impending social revolution; one that would be led by a collectively organised and class-conscious proletariat. Central to this theory was the question of organisational form. Although Marx and Engels accepted the necessity of trade union struggle, they also believed that a parallel international workers' organisation was necessary, one that would guide the proletariat to 'winning the battle of democracy' and seizing political power (Marx and Engels 1993a, pp. 80, 86). These issues would continue to preoccupy Marx's theory in years to come, as witnessed through his involvement in the First International Working Men's Association (1865–1872). What remained central throughout, however, was his belief that the emancipation of the proletariat would be achieved via their own self-activity, one that would develop into more sophisticated forms through the educative process of class struggle (Löwy 2005, p. 149). Through his analysis of the Paris Commune (1871), finally, Marx deepened his understanding of the form to which an institutional workers' state would assume. To understand the

conditions necessary for this, however, one must turn to Marx's study of classical political economy.

As stated above Marx had first turned his attention to 'economic questions' in the early 1840s, especially when he started writing for the *Rheinische Zeitung* (Marx 1992a, p. 424). Many of his early analyses of political economy can be found throughout this decade, although perhaps most famously in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written in 1844. At this point, however, just as the title suggests Marx's economic analysis remained largely philosophical, particularly with respect to how he applied Feuerbachian categories to economic life. Furthermore as Löwy (2005) points out, his early theory of communism was presented in a 'rather abstract way', and Marx spent more time developing his theory of alienation as opposed to establishing what he would come to regard as a 'scientific' analysis of the capitalist mode of production (Löwy 2005, pp. 85, 86). In 1849 Marx moved to London and resumed his study of political economy, one that would culminate in *Das Kapital*. At this point, his turn to a more sustained analysis of political economy had a dual purpose. Firstly, Marx's aim was to provide a dialectical critique; one which revealed the historically transitory nature of the capitalist mode of production. Marx believed that once economic categories were revealed to be alienated or fetishised forms of social relations, the illusions that made the socially productive powers of labour appear as the inherently private powers of capital could be revealed for what they really were: forms of thought that corresponded to a very particular form of society that, although based on an increasingly brutal form of exploitation, was nevertheless historically progressive (Marx 1990). Marx's rationale for this, secondly, was his belief that its development brought with it both the objective and subjective contradictions that would lay the basis for a fundamentally different form of society – one based on the collective ownership of social wealth and a rational application of both science and technology as a means of reducing the historical burden of necessary labour. In this sense, as will be argued more in the next chapter, Marx's critique of political economy cannot be divorced from his attempts to establish a 'scientific' analysis of how capitalism could eventually be overcome.

Orthodox Marxism

After his death in 1883, Marx's legacy was left largely in the hands of his long-time friend and collaborator, Fredrick Engels. This would have profound consequences on how 'Marxism' would subsequently develop, for as many commentators have noted, the Marxism that Engels would foster was a more deterministic and evolutionary one than that which could be found in Marx himself (McLellan 1998, pp. 11, 13; Lichtheim 1961, p. 247; Carver 1989). As a 'general theory of an evolution embracing both nature and history', the principles of dialectical materialism were quickly established as Marxist orthodoxy, laying the basis to the formation of the Second International Working Men's Association (1889–1817).

Philosophically this Marxism drew heavily from the natural sciences, and in consequence tended to view human behaviour as 'entirely law-governed'. From this perspective, Marxism was now considered a distinctive 'world-view'; one which had discovered the fundamental laws governing both human behaviour and society itself (Molyneux 1981, p. 4). Perhaps more importantly, however, was the belief that Marxism had discovered the laws of history, and these laws were the outcome of a 'causally determined process analogous to the scheme of Darwinian evolution' (Lichtheim 1961, p. 237). Politically, the philosophical basis to this form of Marxism would have serious consequences, for if both the unity of the working class and the implosion of capitalist society were guaranteed by the hidden hand of history, the emphasis which Marx had placed on the dialectical unity of theory and practice 'virtually fell apart' (ibid., p. 238).

Throughout the early 1900s there were various attempts to re-establish this binary. In 1902, for example, Lenin reacted strongly against tendencies within the social democratic movement that regarded the development of revolutionary subjectivity as spontaneous. For him, without a specialised force of professional revolutionaries the working class would develop only a 'trade union' consciousness, and in consequence would never come to see the historical necessity of social and political revolution (Lenin 1987a). Not all of Lenin's contemporaries, however, agreed with his prescriptions. According to Luxembourg (1970), for example, Lenin's 'ultra-centralist' tendency drove too much of a wedge between the working class and its party, and quite prophetically she predicted that his theory of the vanguard party would only ever lead to an increased bureaucracy within it (Luxemburg 1970, pp. 116, 118). Ultimately, however, Luxembourg's faith in the revolutionary self-capacity of the masses was one heavily conditioned by the sense of historical inevitability so characteristic within Marxism during that time. After all, she argued, 'the logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historical process' (ibid., p. 121).

Despite such debates, for many the October Revolution of 1917 successfully put Marx's ideas into practice for the first time. However, this wasn't without making significant modifications to this theory. On the basis of the very specific socio-historical conditions in Russian society, towards the end of his life Marx had conceded some flexibility to his theory of historical materialism. For him, it was at least 'theoretically possible' that Russia could avoid the experience of capitalist development associated with the West and exploit its strategic integration with the latter as a means of forging a different path to communist development (Marx 1989a, pp. 354, 362; Marx and Engels 1989, p. 426). Following Trotsky's (2010) analysis of Russian society in 1906 – an analysis that Lenin had previously rejected – Lenin (2002) accepted that due to the particularity of Russian capitalist development – alongside her strategic placement in the global state system – Russia could instigate what conventionally would have been regarded as a premature socialist revolution. As it turned out this was precisely what was to occur, and for the rest of the twentieth century – rightly or wrongly – the paradigm for revolutionary communist movements had been set.

The initial excitement generated by the Russian experience quickly turned sour. Confronted with an 'imperialist blockade', growing bureaucracy, and a protracted civil war, Bolshevik rule became 'associated with the miseries of domestic war rather than the gifts of peace and land delivered after October (Anderson 1976, p. 14; Anderson 2010, p. 61). Following the death of Lenin in 1924, Stalin quickly manoeuvred his way into power, and through a combination of ruthless terror and the sheer pace of forced industrialisation millions would perish. As Stalinism 'fell like a hood over Soviet culture', the revolutionary upsurges in Europe during the first third of the twentieth century were successfully suppressed, and in as much the central conditions stipulated by Lenin and Trotsky for the success of the international communist movement were effectively annulled. Instead, Stalin espoused the idea of 'socialism in one country', and until the rise of Maoism in the 1960s and 1970s the hegemony of the Russian 'model' was to subordinate the international communist movement to its own particular foreign policy objectives (Anderson 1976, p. 21).

Western Marxism

Western Marxism was characterised by an attempt to free itself from the dogma of dialectical materialism, particularly with respect to its views regarding the inevitability of capitalist collapse and victory of the working class. Interestingly, this was done by returning to Hegel himself. In his *History and Class Consciousness*, for example, Georg Lukács attempted to rescue 'orthodox Marxism' from the deviations associated with what he considered to be Engel's pernicious influence (Lukács 1971, pp. xlii, 3). According to Lukács Marxism was principally a method; one whose 'lifeblood' was the Hegelian dialectic and Marx's emphasis on the unity of theory and practice. Against the idea that the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity was in some way inevitable, one of the great aspects to Lukács' theory was the way he would theorise the barriers to such, and like Marx here he would focus on the problem of 'reification': the fact that, due to the private appropriation of social wealth, the powers of labour appeared as the powers of capital. For Lukács, central to the unification of subject and object was the proletariat becoming conscious of the totality of capitalist society – and hence ultimately its strategic placement within it. However, when explaining how this 'ascribed' class consciousness would emerge Lukács could only fall back on the prescriptions advanced by Lenin years earlier – i.e. an ascribed class consciousness was dependent on the communist party. Furthermore, the emergence of this consciousness was improbable without 'an acute crisis in the economy' (ibid., pp. 40, 41), and in consequence whilst Lukács attempted to re-infuse Marxism with its dialectical sprit, politically at least he seemed to remain 'securely trapped' both by Lenin's notion of the vanguard party and the Second International belief in the final 'cataclysmic economic collapse of capitalism' (McLellan 1998, p. 178; Steadman Jones 1978, p. 42).

The work of Antonio Gramsci was another important moment in the trajectory of Western Marxism, and proved vital for 'cracking the shell' of the Marxism associated with the Second International (c.f. Hobsbawm 2011, p. 341). Gramsci's political thought was shaped through his involvement in the Italian workers' movement of 1919–1920 and his experience within the leadership of the Italian communist party during the 1920s (Anderson 1976, p. 45). In a similar way to Lukács, he attacked the 'mechanical materialism' of the Second International, particularly in relation to the political paralysis associated with their understanding of capitalist crisis. Making a key distinction between 'organic' and 'conjunctural' forms, Gramsci (1999e) argued that the extent to which economic crisis could be made explicitly political depended on a concrete analysis of the 'balance of forces' within a particular social formation. Whilst Gramsci also accepted the need for a centralised political organisation, he did nevertheless argue that this organisation had to be as 'organic' as possible to the movements and struggles of the proletariat. Central to the task of the party, he claimed, was to transcend sectional interests and attempt to establish a broader 'popular will'; one that formed a productive alliance between different sectors within society. Only then, he argued, could the proletariat overcome the 'world view' propagated by capitalist ideology and form its own counter-hegemonic 'social bloc' (Gramsci 1999e; Gramsci 1999d).

Critical Theory

Throughout the middle of the twentieth century the hegemony of capitalist society would prove more resilient than expected. After the 'great depression' in the early 1930s, the principles of Keynesian demand management would prove highly effective, both in terms of stimulating economic growth and institutionalising working class struggle as a means of doing this (Holloway 1995). During this period most Western capitalist economies experienced exponential economic growth, bringing with it high levels of employment, rising living standards, and a massive growth in the consumption of consumer durables. Initially coined by Max Horkheimer in 1937, Critical Theory laid the basis for the 'Frankfurt School' of critical Marxist theory. Like the work of Lukács and Gramsci before them, those who comprised this 'school' would attempt to distance themselves from the Marxism of the Second International, and yet as many commentators have noted, contextually this theory was largely pessimistic with respect to the possibility of revolutionary change (Negri 2008b, p. 24; Anderson 1976, p. 34; Mclellan 1998, p. 286). Not all, however, were as pessimistic as each other, and a good example of one of the more balanced approaches to the potential for radical change is the work of Herbert Marcuse.

In his *One Dimensional Man*, published in 1964, Marcuse (1991) argued that the domination of capitalist society lay in its 'technological rationality', one that made the very possibility of revolutionary change appear as unthinkable. According to him the reasons for this lay in developments both inside and outside

the factory. With modifications in both the 'character of work' and the 'instruments of production', the labour process itself had changed – particularly with respect to the workers' attitude towards it (Marcuse 2001, p. 29). Outside the factory, workers also seemed to adapt happily to the consumerist ethic characteristic of that time, amassing a wealth of what Marcuse called 'false needs' (ibid., p. 4). The demonstrative effect of this was that workers had become a stabilising force, and in consequence no longer appeared to be the 'living contradiction of capitalist society' (ibid., p. 60). Despite this pessimism, Marcuse never completely gave up on the revolutionary potential of the working class, if only to the continued 'chance' of their 'Great Refusal' (ibid., p. 257). Even at that point, however, Marcuse clearly believed that, in large part, the subjective basis for revolutionary change might indeed lie elsewhere, particularly amongst 'the more marginalised elements of capitalist society' (Marcuse 1969, pp. 60, 61; ibid., p. 256).

Structuralism

Whilst Marcuse questioned the revolutionary potential of the working class in the United States, the very notion of subjectivity would be questioned in France (Heartfield 2006). Taking its inspiration from the structural linguistics of Ferdinand De Saussure (2011), 'structuralism' was an intellectual movement characterised by 'a series of interconnecting but independent disciplines and attitudes', one which traversed an impressive number of different fields, ranging from anthropology (Lévi-Strauss), psychoanalysis (Lacan), epistemology (Foucault), and fashion (Barthes) (Poole 1969, p. 10; Poster 1976, p. 312). The guiding thread to all of these analyses was the critique of 'humanism' and its characteristic emphasis on 'man' (or any underlying conception of human essence) alongside the idea that history could be made intelligible by some underlying progressive rationality. In contrast, the structuralist approach was more attuned to theorising the durability of social structures; particularly the way in which human subjectivity was merely derived from the latter.

For the development of Marxism the most important thinker associated with the structuralist tradition was the French Philosopher, Louis Althusser. Reacting strongly against the existential-humanism of the likes of Jean Paul Sartre – one that had become dominant throughout France during that period – in his famous essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser (2008a) dismissed humanist notions of subjectivity by arguing that any class 'subject' cannot pre-exist its ideological interpellation into such. For him subjectivity was 'constitutive' only in the sense that it is a mere effect of ideology: it is the latter which plays 'the function of constituting concrete individuals as subjects' (Althusser 2008a, p. 45). Hence, whilst Althusser accepted that individuals are 'always already' subjects, this was only because they are born into pre-existing social structures (ibid., p. 50). Subjectivity, then, lacks any underlying 'essence', and in consequence Althusserian Marxism denied the subject's status as either the origin or essence of history: 'history is a process without a subject' (Althusser 2008b, p. 83).

Alongside Althusser's attack on humanist notions of subjectivity was his outright hostility to Hegelian dialectics, something he believed Marx had effectively abandoned in his later works (Althusser 2007, p. 157). In 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', written in 1962, Althusser (1982) criticised the Hegelian dialectic on the basis of its circular simplicity. For him, the Hegelian notion of contradiction was one where each successive moment in its internal development was directly expressive of its underlying unity (Althusser 1982, pp. 101, 102). In comparison to this, Althusser argued that Marxism posited a specifically 'overdetermined' contradiction; one that, whilst similarly involved an underlying 'general contradiction', nevertheless allowed for the relative autonomy of each of its successive moments. Althusser's point was to establish the contingency of historical social change. In more Marxian terminology, whilst Althusser accepted that 'in the last instance' revolutionary change would be dependent on the general contradiction between the forces and relations of production, for this contradiction to become 'active' it required a complex 'fusion' of each of its other moments (ibid., p. 100). As a consequence, as Poster (1976) points out, Althusser was able to challenge the idea that history was in some way marked by a linear or pre-determined *telos*, for if each constitutive moment of an overdetermined contradiction had its own relative autonomy, it had its own relative temporality too (Poster 1976, p. 353).

To some extent, then, Althusserian Marxism integrated the principles of structural linguistics into Marxist theory, allowing Althusser to attack the very notion of subjectivity and attempt to release Marx's theory from its more historicist readings. Interestingly, however, Althusser's attempt at reviving Marxist theory as a 'science' only ended up breaking the Marxism that had posited the unity of theory and revolutionary praxis. His unremitting focus on structures, in other words, worked only to dismiss the importance of subjectivity and, whilst it became a dominant force throughout the 1960s, the events of 1968 were to turn the tide not only on Althusserianism but also, and perhaps more significantly, on Marxism.

Post-structuralism

The Parisian events of May-June 1968 and its spirit of revolt have been described as 'a powerful beverage, an intoxicating mixture, an explosive cocktail composed of various ingredients' (Löwy 2002, p. 95). May '68 encompassed a variety of quite distinct elements. Initially, it was characterised by a student rebellion against the paternalism of the French education system, and yet, although its demands were relatively particularistic they quickly morphed into something much more universal, assuming moral, sexual, and/or aesthetic dimensions (Badiou 2010, pp. 49, 50). May '68 was also characterised by a highly militant workers' movement, one that enthusiastically avoided the moderating influence of both the conventional union and party apparatus. This movement was not confined to France alone, and indeed its temporality and ferocity was in some cases overshadowed by

other countries. What lasted only a few months in France, for instance, was in Italy to last some ten years (Lumley 1990).

Although the various 'events' that made up May '68 could be considered as quite disparate – and in the case of France relatively ephemeral – what was clear to those involved was that it signalled a resurgence of radical subjectivity; something which, as I noted above, was not something that Althusser's Marxism sufficiently accounted for. Indeed, Althusser's personal response to May '68 was in many ways highly reflective of the flaws to his own theory. Convinced that the only way to influence the French Communist Party was to retain some form of influence within it, Althusser followed the party line in denouncing the revolt of the students as 'infantile', belittling their demands on the basis that they would only end up strengthening bourgeois society (Johnson 1972, p. 81). In response, many of his former students openly denounced him, describing his lacklustre response to May '68 as 'laughable' (Rancière 2003, p. 195). In later works, although Althusser attempted to integrate into his theory a more sustained emphasis on 'class struggle', the damage had already been done. Althusserian Marxism got left behind, and yet unlike in the past what would come to replace it was not necessarily a new form of Marxism.

The shift from structuralism to post-structuralism marked a transition 'from the rigorous elaboration of structures to emphasising the power of signifiers' (Benton and Craib 2001, p. 164; Sarup 1993, p. 3). Although it proves difficult in delineating the thinkers associated with the former and the latter, according to Williams (2001) those associated with post-Structuralism shared an emphasis on what its forbearer sought to occlude: a theory of subjectivity. Equally significant, however, was the shared emphasis on continuing the critique of humanist thought in general, and the humanist 'subject' in particular (May 1994, p. 75). Williams (2001) points out that whilst the issue of subjectivity has been one which has dominated philosophers and political theory for 'centuries', traditionally this subject was always usually one considered as 'self-contained, unencumbered, [and] rational' (Williams 2001, p. 23). Essentially, it was this form of subjectivity which both structuralists and post-structuralists alike would continually bring into question, but as we have seen, the main problem with the former was that it essentially subsumed the subject into the structure. In a sense however, one could argue that structuralist analysis didn't so much completely dismiss the question of subjectivity, but rather attempted to understand the social mechanisms through which that subjectivity was constituted (Heartfield 2006, p. 40). It is precisely this line of enquiry that can be said to define both the theory and politics of post-structuralism. Hence, against the more pessimistic claims that post-structuralism marks the 'death of the subject', it is 'the production of subjectivity and the ways in which the subject is dislocated and repositioned' that makes post-structuralism significant (Williams 2001, p. 24). Here, then, the question of the 'subject' cannot be divorced from the more general question of 'subjectivity'.

As with their structuralist counterparts, post-structuralist theories of subjectivity can be found in a variety of French philosophers. Michel Foucault's early work,

for example, attacked the humanist notion of 'man' by emphasising its discursive production through the modern 'episteme' (Foucault 2004, pp. 421, 423). In later works Foucault would continue this line of enquiry, this time turning to analyse what he saw as the changing nature of power. In short: far from the 'subject' being the ground to knowledge, truth, or power – it is knowledge, truth, and power that is constitutive of the subject (Heartfield 2006, p. 73; Newman 2008, p. 50). In the realm of psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan theorised subjectivity in a similar way, although this time in relation to what he saw as the constitutive force of language, particularly in structuring the unconscious. Via his critique of the unified, autonomous and fully transparent 'ego', Lacan (2001) would thus similarly reject any foundational notion of the subject. Whereas Freud himself had granted the ego 'the status of an agency', Lacan conceived of the ego as a highly contingent linguistic construction, one inherently unstable and which persistently sought to cover up its internal 'lack' (Stavrakakis 1999; Fink 1995; Williams 2001, p. 32). A similar understanding as to the linguistic basis to subjectivity was outlined by Jacques Derrida, perhaps the most famous of post-structuralist thinkers. Derrida's project of 'deconstruction' was an attempt to undermine all sense of 'presence' or 'fixity', and of course, this dictum was applied directly to the 'subject' also (Heartfield 2006, p. 18). Derrida's emphasis on the constitutive nature of 'différance' was echoed in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (2004) who, in many ways like Derrida and indeed Althusser before them both, identified Hegelian dialectics as the principal target of their intervention. By drawing on philosophers such as Bergson, Nietzsche, and Spinoza, Deleuze was to produce the 'most focused and precise attack on Hegelianism', mainly on the basis of its incapacity for theorising 'individuation, becoming, and the arrival of the new' (Hardt 1993, p. xi; Sinnerbink 2007, pp. 171, 174).

In theoretical terms post-structuralist thought emphasises the constitutive power of difference, contingency, and indeterminacy. It is crucial to note, however, that post-structuralism did not emerge in a vacuum: as indicated above, it was the social and political events of May '68 that, in practical terms, gave it its credence. Whilst it is true that May '68 involved a significant workers' struggle, as we have seen this struggle was arguably already one which had adopted different forms to its predecessors. More importantly, such mutations were complemented with the emergence of a series of quite different social struggles; ones which, traditionally at least, had been marginalised by emancipatory theories which privileged the transformative potential of labour. What eventually became known as 'new social movements' was essentially an umbrella term – one that sought to encapsulate the difference and multiplicity of the various identities constitutive of their composition. Above all, then, May 68' indicated that progressive and emancipatory struggles lay 'elsewhere': somewhere quite different from Marxist political parties, Marxist leadership, or indeed the capacity of Marxism in general to properly understand them (Tormey and Townshend 2006, p. 3). As we have seen above, both structuralism and post-structuralism questioned many of Marxism's central theoretical and political claims, whether being the existence of a historically

foundational revolutionary subject or, behind that, the idea that history could be made intelligible through philosophy.

Arguably, it was the Hegelian inspired Marxist philosophy of history that drew the most criticism. After all, it was this 'narrative' that seemed to weave all the elements of Marx's theory together – including most importantly the idea that the proletariat was the historically inscribed revolutionary subject. Perhaps the most cogent critique of Marxism on these grounds was developed by Jean François Lyotard. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), published in 1979, Lyotard argued that both Hegel and Marx produced a theoretical 'metta-narrative', one that sought to totalise all aspects of the past, the present, and indeed, the future too. With the passage from modernity to post-modernity, however, according to him this narrative had effectively been made redundant. Post-modernity was characterised by an 'incredulity' to all forms of social and political theory that aimed to narrate the course of history, and in consequence, signalled 'an obituary for Marxism and its absolutist mode of universalising theory' (Browning 2000, p. 132; Newman 2008, p. 24).

Post-Marxism

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was published in 1985, and represents a work that integrated many of the post-structuralist themes outlined above and applied them in a sustained attack on the basis of Marxist theory. It was here that post-Marxism found its original and most enduring referent, yet as this study will seek to demonstrate this doesn't mean that all forms of post-Marxism must necessarily emulate their particular model. Laclau and Mouffe's aims were twofold. The first part of their book argued that, within the Marxist tradition there had been a simmering recognition as to the inadequacies of Marx's theory, particularly with respect to how he had predicted the course of capitalist development. The key moment in this narrative is the emergence of the concept of hegemony, the most developed exposition of which they identified in the thought of Gramsci. For them, it was Gramsci that pushed this concept to the limits of its underlying Marxian heritage, and yet ultimately couldn't extricate either the concept – or indeed himself – from it. The second part of their book attempted to do just that. Drawing on the thought of Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and others, Laclau and Mouffe sought to develop a specifically post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity, one centred on the notion of what they called 'a project of radical democracy'.

This theory will form the basis to an early section of Chapter 4 of this book, so I will not go into any more detail at this point. However, important at this stage is to examine exactly what Laclau and Mouffe meant by the term post-Marxism. Here, they made a useful distinction. On the one hand, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argued that many aspects of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity were now defunct. 'It is no longer possible', they argued, 'to maintain the conception of

subjectivity and classes elaborated by Marxism, nor its vision of the historical course of capitalist development, nor, of course, the conception of communism as a transparent society from which antagonisms have disappeared' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 4). In this first sense Laclau and Mouffe termed their work *post*-Marxist. In a second sense, however, Laclau and Mouffe argued that their own subsequent approach was not one of straightforward abandonment but rather included a certain redemptive strategy; one that sought to 'recover' the best within this 'intellectual tradition' and begin the process of 'bequeathing some of their concepts, transforming or abandoning others, and diluting themselves in that infinite intertextuality of emancipatory discourses in which the plurality of the social takes shape' (ibid., pp. 4, 5). In this second sense, then, their project was not only *post*-Marxist but also post-*Marxist*.

Since then, this initial distinction within post-Marxism has served as the basis for others to make their own. For example, Tormey and Townshend (2006) made a distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' forms of post-Marxism. Whilst the former refers to those who 'wish to be seen or perceived as working within the Marxist problematic', those associated with the latter 'self-consciously see themselves as working against orthodox Marxism however defined' (Tormey and Townshend 2006, p. 4). The 'uniting theme' to both forms, they add is a shared hostility to 'orthodoxy', as opposed to attempting to 'refine or hone it'. A more recent attempt to understand the nature of post-Marxism has been advanced by Göran Therborn (2009). According to him, post-Marxism can be understood in 'an open sense, referring to writers with an explicitly Marxist background, whose recent work has gone beyond Marxist problematics and who do not publicly claim a continuing Marxist commitment. It is not tantamount to ex-Marxism, nor does it include denunciation or renegacy; development and new desires, yes, maybe even divorce, but only on amicable terms' (Therborn 2009, p. 165). Noticeable here, however, is that Therborn's characterisation of neo-Marxism – 'theoretical projects which both signal a significant departure from classical Marxism and retain an explicit commitment to it' – corresponds closely with the definition of 'strong' post-Marxism outlined earlier. Indeed as Therborn himself accepts, it would seem that the boundary between post-Marxism and neo-Marxism is something which is increasingly blurred.

Conclusion

From the distinctions outlined above it would appear that post-Marxism is a slippery term. Alongside this, as Tormey and Townshend (2006) rightly point out, far from being a label that has become a 'badge of self-identification', post-Marxism is more often than not something that is used in a derogatory way to describe the work of others (Tormey and Townshend 2006, p. 1). Despite this, in their own way each of the distinctions within the term essentially agree on one thing, something which will be reiterated throughout this study: post-Marxism

needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, the extent to which a theory of revolutionary subjectivity moves beyond Marx's is not a straightforward one, for as Tormey and Townshend (2006) add, the process of attempting to go beyond Marx must necessarily include going back to him in the first place (Tormey and Townshend 2006, p. 11). At the heart of the problem, perhaps, is the extent to which post-Marxism conclusively leaves Marx behind. It is the purpose of this book to explore this ambiguity on an individual basis via the theory of revolutionary subjectivity in Laclau, Negri and Badiou. Crucial at this point, however, is to establish the benchmark from which the ambiguous nature of their own respective post-Marxisms can be problematised. This benchmark will be Marx's own theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and it is to this theory which I will now turn my attention.

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Chapter 3
Revolutionary Subjectivity in Marxist Thought

Introduction

This chapter outlines the theory of revolutionary subjectivity in the thought of Karl Marx, both individually and in his collaborative works with Fredrick Engels. As such, it establishes the analytical framework for the ensuing study; grounding the theory to which the post-Marxism of Laclau, Negri and Badiou will be mapped. After outlining Marx's understanding of historical social change the first part of the chapter argues that Marx's theory can be broken down into three inter-linked conditions: that revolutionary subjectivity is defined by productive activity; it emerges immanently with the development of both objective and subjective factors; and its goal is change at the level of totality – the seizure of political power and the establishment of a classless society. The second part of the chapter outlines the way in which aspects of this theory would be reiterated in the thought of three subsequent Marxist theorists. This part of the chapter is particularly important because, as stated in the introduction, it is Laclau's, Negri's, and Badiou's relationship to what is reiterated at this point that complicates their ensuing attempts to decisively leave Marx's original theory behind.

The Materialist Conception of History

For Marx and Engels (1974) any analysis of the nature of human existence must start with 'real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced in their activity' (Marx and Engels 1974, pp. 42, 47). Any form of society must decide exactly how they are to produce their means of existence, and indeed what they will end up producing. Through productive activity then, individuals indirectly create the social basis to their lives, and whilst in a sense this activity can be said to make history, it does so only under very particular conditions; ones which are 'directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx 1990b, p. 13). Alongside this emphasis on socially-determined and historically situated production, Marx believed that this process also developed both human needs and human consciousness – the latter of which was understood in terms of 'conscious existence' in the sense that, as outlined above, it essentially reflected the degree to which it had advanced both in material and social terms. Hence, both social

needs and social consciousness develop alongside forms of productive activity, and whilst the former is always conditioned by material constraints, due to the dynamism of the latter this 'reflection' is in no way a passive one (Perry 2002, p. 34).

For Marx, then, individuals must be situated both socially and historically. In both his youthful and mature works, the distinctiveness of the human species lies in its purposeful will: creative activity – what Marx called 'species-being' – becomes 'an object of his will and consciousness' (Marx 1992, p. 328). Historically, every labour process combines this 'purposeful will with the object on which that purpose is acted on, and the instruments of that work' (Marx 1990c, p. 284). The latter two of these elements – the object of labour and the tools used to modify it – constitute the 'forces' or 'means' of production; forces which 'living labour must seize upon … [and] … awaken them from the dead' (ibid., p. 290). The 'relations' of production constitute the ways in which such forces are put into practice, for as Marx points out, the act of production cannot occur in abstraction from 'definite connections and relations' between human beings themselves, and it is the historical nature of these relations that stamps society with its 'peculiar, distinctive character' (Marx 1996, p. 34). Understanding these production relations must necessarily include a consideration of the ownership and control of the forces of production. Here class analysis becomes central, and whilst there are numerous debates concerning exactly how Marx defined it, here I understand class to refer primarily to individuals' relationship to the forces or means of production. For Marx class relations were necessarily antagonistic due simply to the fact they were constituted by the exploitation of one class by another, and according to him it is the form which such exploitation assumes which 'distinguishes the various economic foundations of society from one another' (Marx 1991, p. 927).

In Marx's historical analysis the role of class struggle is vital for understanding how society periodically changes its form; '[t]he history of all hitherto existing society', Marx and Engels (1993a) famously argued, 'is the history of class struggle' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 67). Indeed, according to the model established in the *Communist Manifesto* this history is a relatively straightforward one, consisting of an 'uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight' between two different class subjectivities – subjectivities driven by their particular objective class interests. The simplicity of this model would later be revised significantly, particularly via Marx's analysis of more concrete and complex political instances (see Fernbach 1992b). For now, though, what is crucial to grasp is Marx's rationale as to why class society periodically changes from one form to another. According to Marx's (1992a) famous 'Preface':

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Thus begins an era

> of … social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure … No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material condition for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society (Marx 1992a, pp. 425, 426).

This passage is perhaps one of Marx's most infamous, due mainly to its various interpretations. The most common readings charge Marx with either – or both – 'economism' – the reduction of all facets of social life to economic forces – or 'historicism' – a teleological account of social change, positing the 'inevitable' demise of capitalist society and the concurrent inevitability of its communist form.[1] These readings cannot simply be ignored, especially given that, as we will see, the three thinkers I have included in this study take these readings quite seriously. My own reading of the passage above is that, for Marx, revolutionary social change is the result of the dialectically reciprocal relationship between the forces and relations of production. At a 'certain stage of development' the existing social relations of a given economic epoch begin to block the further progressive development of the forces of production. Changes in the latter lead 'sooner or later' to changes in the former, and the occurrence of social revolution is dependent on a sufficient development of both. Revolutionary change thus emerges immanently within and through the internal contradictions of the preceding form of society. At this point then, whilst the nature of social change might be debated, what needs to be emphasised is that for Marx the movement from one form of society to another was in many ways progressive, and to understand why one has to appreciate the form of subjectivity that be believed this development brought with it.

The Centrality of Productive Labour

According to Marx the development of the capitalist mode of production required 'two transformations, whereby the means of subsistence and production are turned into capital and the immediate producers turned into wage labourers' (Marx 1990c, p. 874). Whilst the capitalist class owned the newly developed forces of production – privately appropriating the social surplus that it produced – those who became the 'immediate producers' were forced off the land and had no choice but to head in their droves to the industrial complexes of the cities. For Marx this process brought with it a distinct degree of freedom for both the capitalist and the immediate producer. In the case of the latter, this class was free in a 'double' sense: free from their previous means of subsistence (i.e. the land) and free to choose which capitalist they would work for. Being 'freed' from the

1 For a recent discussion of both of these readings, including a rebuttal, see Eagleton (2011), Chapter 3.

land, however, meant they had no other option to survive, and in order to do this they would have to sell themselves to the capitalists (ibid., p. 272). Hence, in-line with its original Roman usage whilst one definitional aspect of the 'proletariat' was certainly its property-less condition, the other lay principally in the productive form which its labour created (Draper 1979, p. 34). To understand this, as Marx (1990c) famously suggested, one must turn to 'the hidden abode of production' itself (Marx 1990c, p. 279).

Meeting on an equal legal footing, the capitalist and the worker exchange their respective commodities at the market. In return for the worker's capacity to labour – what Marx called 'labour power' – the capitalist offers a monetary wage which is purported to correspond to the true value of the worker's labour. Yet, according to Marx, whereas it appears the capitalist is buying the worker's labour, he is in fact buying the worker's labour power; a 'peculiar' commodity which has the ability to generate new values. The discrepancy between the value of labour power and the actual value this labour valorised is the key to understanding the form of exploitation in capitalist society (Marx 1990c, p. 300). As stated, however, there is nothing obviously exploitative about this relation. In the production process the capitalist buys labour power, consumes it, and 'pays the full price for it' (ibid., p. 279). Hence, the peculiar nature of labour power as a commodity is 'a piece of good luck for the buyer, but no means an injustice towards the seller', and in consequence, the production of 'surplus value' has 'all the charms of being created out of nothing' (ibid., pp. 325, 346).

The establishment of a 'normal' working day was the result of 'centuries of struggle', and this assumed two characteristic forms (ibid., pp. 382, 412). At first this struggle contested the length of the working day. According to Marx, capital's 'vampire' like thirst for surplus labour regularly overstepped the physical and moral limits of the worker himself, and collective capital would only take note 'when society forced it to do so' (ibid., pp. 375, 376, 381). During this period the role of the state became more prominent, not only in securing the legitimacy of capitalist rule but also in 'granting concessions wrung from industry by the working class' (ibid., p. 390). For Marx, once capital reaches a mature stage of development the 'isolated worker … succumbs without resistance', and the only way in which workers can seek 'protection from the serpent of their agonies' is by coming together, collectively as a class, and force the state to pass laws to protect them from the worst excesses of capitalist domination (ibid., pp. 412, 415).

With the transition from what Marx called the 'formal subsumption' to the 'real subsumption' of labour to capital, the battle over the length of the working day would now take the form of a battle over its relative intensity.[2] With the development of large-scale industry capital would find a means of overcoming

2 Whereas in the period of 'formal subsumption' capital 'subsumes the labour process as it finds it', in the period of 'real subsumption' capital revolutionises productive capacity, rapidly developing the social forces of production with an increased application of science and technology (Marx 1990c, pp. 1021, 1035).

both the physical limitations of human labour and also the growing strength of its collective unity. Indeed, far from the productive forces developing in abstraction from the relations of production, Marx argued that it was in fact the relations of struggle that reacted back on the development of many forms of technology and machinery. 'It would be possible', he wrote, 'to write a whole history of inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working class revolt' (ibid., p. 563).

Although the capitalist use of machinery was instrumental in disciplining the 'refractory hand of labour', in the long run this only served to increase the socialisation of labour, and bring with it new forms of highly productive and co-operative subjectivity. In Chapter 14 of *Capital*, for example, Marx examined how the decomposition of the 'specialised worker' led to the emergence of the 'collective worker', one whose subjectivity would surpass the needs and consciousness of the former (Ibid., p. 469). On the one hand Marx considered this development as progressive in the sense that the productive powers of labour are clearly increased. However, he was equally quick to denounce the form this process necessarily assumed in its capitalist guise. As he explained, 'If, therefore, on the one hand, it appears as an advance and necessary aspect of the economic process of the formation of society, on the one hand, it appears as a more refined and civilized means of exploitation' (ibid., p. 486).

The domination of large scale industry highlights the most extreme form of what in his earlier works Marx termed 'alienation' or 'estrangement'. With the onset of large-scale industry not only does machinery appear as an 'alien power' but so too does science, knowledge, and skill (Marx 1993a, p. 694). Labour itself now 'loses all charm' and the worker shifts from being an appendage to his particular skill to being an appendage of the machine itself: 'the machine makes use of him' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 74; Marx 1990c, p. 548). Thus, from being the heart of the labour process the worker becomes an increasingly dismembered part of its body. Collectively, workers are physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually attacked (Marx 1990c, pp. 548, 552; Mészáros 1971, p. 93).[3] As stated above, Marx's denunciation of this process was clear. Yet one must recognise that this critique is combined with a clear respect for the way in which this development furthered the productive powers of labour. The bourgeoisie, Marx and Engels argued in 1848, 'has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 70). Ultimately, Marx's view on this matter must be situated in relation to what he believed this

3 It is also worth noting how, through this process, capital would utilise once marginal forms of labour power for dividing the collective strength of the working class. Of particular importance here was the employment of women and children, and also the strategic use of migrant labour. For the case of the former see Marx (1990, pp. 517, 526, 559, 560).

development would establish; namely, the objective and subjective conditions necessary for the possibility of its own eventual supersession.

The Objective Tendencies of Capitalist Development

According to Marx the objective tendency of capitalist development would be an increased propensity and increased intensity of economic crisis, the most prominent of which he believed would be a long-term tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Marx outlined this theory in relation to what he called 'the general law of capitalist development', discussing it with specific reference to its effects on 'the fate of the working class' (Marx 1990c, p. 762). In the short-run, Marx argued that the accumulation of capital would lead to a rise in both employment and wages, making the working class' 'dependence on capital … more endurable' and thus loosening the 'weight of the golden chain' (ibid., pp. 763, 769). In the long-run however, the tendency of capitalist development was to displace more and more labour power from the production process. With this rise in the 'organic composition of capital' Marx predicted an increased concentration and centralisation of social wealth, with only those with the biggest and most competitive capital avoiding being subsumed by monopolies (ibid., p. 777). As a result the demand for labour would fall in proportion to the growth of total capital, and although this would increase the amount of labour it incorporates, in relative terms it would do so 'in a constantly diminishing proportion' (ibid., p. 782). Ultimately, then, the long-term tendency of capitalist development was to make the exploitation of labour more intense, its employment more precarious, and at worst, eliminate it altogether. In this sense, Marx argued that capital 'works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production' (Marx 1993a, p. 700).

Far from being the most 'rational' form of society, for Marx capitalism's persistent crises revealed its underlying inadequacy. At base, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall was 'an expression for the progressive development of the social productivity of labour'; the fact that capital had run its course and now impeded the former's continued development (Marx 1991, p. 319). For Marx, behind these crises lay the basis for a fundamentally different form of society, one where 'the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time'; time which could be used for the 'free development of individualities' (Marx 1993, pp. 706, 708). What Marx called the development of the 'social brain' or the 'general intellect' referred precisely to the way in which technology and science could be applied rationally in order help this process (ibid., pp. 694, 705, 706). In one sense, then, capitalist crisis offered an objective basis for revolutionary change. In another more subjective sense, however, these crises also demonstrated the inadequacy of the ruling capitalist class, particularly with respect to its incompetence controlling the forces which they themselves had once brought into being (Marx and Engels 1993a, pp. 78, 79). As stated earlier, however, economic crisis alone does not ensure a social revolution. As Hallward

(2009) explains, 'what is most fundamental in Marx is not the 'inevitable' or involuntary process whereby capital might dig its own grave, but rather the way in which it prepares the ground upon which the determined diggers might appear' (Hallward 2009, p. 18). The subjective possibility of communism, in other words, lay first and foremost in the organisation, consciousness, and ultimately, revolutionary subjectivity of the working class. 'The greatest productive power' of all, Marx once argued, was 'the revolutionary class itself' (Marx 1976, p. 211), and it is the question as to its revolutionary subjectification that I will now discuss.

The Subjective Tendencies of Capitalist Development

To some extent Marx's emphasis on the development of the productive forces sought to highlight the 'revolutionary, subversive side' to the proletariat's increasing condition of social poverty (c.f. Marx 1976, p. 178). However, it is equally important to stress that revolutionary subjectivity was unlikely to develop out of pauperism or increasing social destitution alone. As Clarke (1993) and Draper (1979) point out, for Marx the 'dead weight' of pauperism only bred degradation, demoralisation, and desperation (Clarke 1993, p. 171; Draper 1979, p. 55). The real importance of the 'general law' of capitalist development lay in the commonality of experience which this situation provided. Capitalist development not only created the objective basis for its supersession, but also created the class subjectivity that could take up this task. Capital creates a subjectivity that is massified, highly concentrated, and whose interests and conditions of life become more and more 'equalised' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 75).[4] In this sense, according to Marx by virtue of its very existence the working class was already a 'class against capital' (Marx 1976, p. 211). Yet, through its increased strength in numbers, improvements in means of communication to co-ordinate its struggle, and the 'political and general education' provided by the bourgeoisie themselves, Marx believed that the working class could progress from being a 'class against capital' to a revolutionary 'class-for-itself'. It is this contradictory process which explains the subjective aspects of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

The most immediate form of working class struggle was conducted through the trade unions. Marx believed that this struggle, however limited, was absolutely central in teaching the working class how to act in a unified and collective manner. The real fruit of trade union struggle is thus not 'the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 76). In this sense, as Draper (1979) has pointed out, Marx was one of the first to connect the importance of trade union struggle to revolutionary socialism (Draper 1979,

4 Alongside this, Marx and Engels believed that the general contours of class society would become increasingly simplified, with more and more elements of the bourgeoisie having little choice but to side with the working class, providing the latter with 'fresh elements of enlightenment and progress' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 77).

p. 81). As seen through the battle of the working day, Marx believed strongly that the 'only social power of the workman is their number', and in this sense trade unions represented the first attempt for workers to consolidate this unity and 'associate among themselves' (Marx 1992c, p. 91; Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 76). Although the division of labour worked in various ways to divide the working class – both nationally and internationally – it was the commonality of the wage itself that could work as the basis for uniting it. Thus, trade union struggle provided a distinct degree of universality to the seemingly particularistic struggle for the maintenance of wages. By seeking to overcome the divisions in the working class, trade unions would thus make the struggle against the employers more effective.

Whilst initially defensive, Marx believed that as the 'veritable civil war' between the workers and capitalists developed, trade unions would have little choice but to radicalise both their form and function. 'Unconsciously to themselves', the trade unions were establishing the basis for 'superseding the very system of wage labour and capital rule' (Marx 1992c, p. 91). Yet, for Marx the success of this process depended on the trade unions extending the scope of their influence, enlisting 'the non-society men into their ranks' and thus convincing society at large that their interests are not narrow and secular, but broad and inclusive to all the 'downtrodden millions' (ibid., p. 92). Despite such appeals, the question remained as to how this transformation would come about, not only in terms of convincing other sectors of society that revolutionary change was necessary, but also with respect to how the working class would realise its essential role in this process. In this respect, the greatest barrier to the emergence and construction of revolutionary subjectivity was overcoming the ideology fostered by the ruling class itself. Perhaps Marx's most sustained discussion of this problem can be seen via the notion of 'commodity fetishism'.

According to Marx capitalist ideology naturalises the social relations on which it is based, relating them simply to what is believed to be human nature. Yet, such liberal ideology has its material foundations. On the surface of things capital does seem natural, fair, and it does indeed appear that the social powers of co-operative labour are merely the inherently private powers of capital (Marx 1990c, pp. 175, 680, 453). Clearly, the major problem here is that if workers believe these illusions to be true then they are unlikely to see the necessity of revolutionary change (Lebowitz 2003, p. 198). The objective basis to such illusions lies in the private appropriation of the products of social labour, mediated as it is through the impersonal mechanism of the market. Although the latter brings producers into contact with each other, the nature of this contact means that human beings relate to one another only in terms of the value of their respective 'things' (Rubin 1972, p. 7). As Marx himself put it '(i)t is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx 1990c, p. 165). The problem for Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, then, is that these illusions are hard to overcome due to their objective basis in the very structure of capitalist social relations. The reality is that these 'delusions' have a crucial impact on the subjectivity of the working

class: workers not only accept the reality of the capitalist form of production, but even come to believe in its eternal necessity (ibid., p. 899). Hence, one has to be clear at this point that, on this basis, capitalism produces the sort of workers that it needs, and their subjectivity is anything but revolutionary (Lebowitz 2003, p. 179). The question remains, then, as to how this subjectivity is overcome. Whilst trade unions represented a key step in 'preparing the workers for self-organisation' (Draper 1979, p. 97), Marx believed in an auxiliary organisational form; one which due to the international nature of the division of labour, would help co-ordinate the trade union struggle at the international level. In order to hasten the movement to becoming a 'class-for-itself', then, the working class had to develop its own political party.

The first systematic discussion as to the role of such an organisation can be found in the *Communist Manifesto*. The 'Communists', Marx and Engels argued, 'do not form a separate party' but work alongside the various workers' organisations already established. In practical terms, this party would represent the vanguard of the workers' movement, and theoretically its distinctive quality lay in its full comprehension of the 'line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 79). Hence, although guided by theory, this theory was not to be made in abstraction: it had to link dialectically to the 'actual movements and practicalities of the class struggle' (ibid., p. 80). The role of theory and indeed that of intellectuals thus wasn't something that Marx disregarded, although as Draper (1979) points out, he was at times suspicious of the latter (Draper 1979, p. 539). Theory, then, can only become a 'material force … capable of gripping the masses' once it relates directly to their own particular experience (Marx 1975, p. 182). Ultimately, however, the working class must educate itself, and the role of the communist party was to offer the guidance and independence it needed to do just that (Marx and Engels 1993b, p. 330). The general guidelines established in the *Manifesto* were reiterated with the establishment of the First International Workingmen's Association in 1864. According to Marx (1992d) the international was not drawn up by either 'a sect or a theory' but spontaneously by the workers' own volition (Marx 1992d, p. 99). Again, this association was designed not to replace existing workers' organisations but to work alongside them, providing a 'central medium of communication' that would effectively co-ordinate international proletarian struggle (ibid., p. 84). In sum, as Blackburn (1976) argues, Marx's emphasis on collective organisation was clear, and the relationship between the trade union struggle and the other auxiliary political organisations was crucial. When guided by the International, the trade union struggle 'would become the prime instruments of the self-emancipation of the working class' (Blackburn 1976, p. 23).

What seems clear at this point is that, in Marx's theory, revolutionary subjectivity is a tendency which emerges via a gradual educative experience; one that whilst certainly has its objective foundations, is neither spontaneous nor inevitable. Through productive activity humans not only modify 'external nature' but also modify their own (Marx 1990c, p. 283). In many ways, this dictum also

explains the movement from the working class being a 'class against capital' to a 'class for itself'. In other words, alongside capital's objective development emerges the subjective and political development of the working class. It is through class struggle that it constitutes itself as a class, and it is through class struggle that the working class may – in time – become revolutionary. The mass production of a 'communist consciousness', Marx and Engels (1974) argued, was dependent on the 'alteration of men on a mass scale', and such alteration 'only takes place in a practical movement, a *revolution* ... (Marx and Engels 1974, pp. 94, 95). Hence, Lebowitz (2003) summarises things perfectly when he argues, 'nothing is more central to Marx's entire conception than this coincidence of the changing of circumstances and self-change' (Lebowitz 2003, p. 180).

The Necessity of Political Power and the Establishment of a Classless Society

For Marx, the universal nature of the proletariat's oppression meant that, for the first time in human history, one particular class could act in the interests of humanity in general. To do this, the proletariat had to collectively re-appropriate the means of production and create a form of society consciously in control of its own destiny. Hence, whilst both a communist society and indeed 'communism' – understood as 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things' – corresponded to the needs of one particular class, Marx (1992c) believed that, whilst the proletariat would constitute the majority of the working population, it had nevertheless to 'convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow or selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions' (Marx 1992c, p. 92). Thus, revolutionary subjectivity meant not only the proletariat becoming a class 'for-itself' but also necessarily becoming a revolutionary class *for others*. As Mészáros (1971) explains, Marx's notion of 'class-for-itself' 'implies *self*-constituting *universality*, i.e. a conscious opposition not merely to bourgeoisie particularism but to all particularism whatsoever' (Mészáros 1971, p. 107). Central to this process, and thus central for understanding the third condition to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, is the conquest of political power and the establishment of a classless society.

For Marx and Engels (1993a) the universality of the proletariat's struggle could only be sustained through raising itself 'to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy' (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 86).[5] The conquest and

5 At this point it is interesting to note Marx and Engels' (1993b) earlier account of what they called 'permanent revolution'. Indeed, developed in 1850, this theory would prove highly prophetic in understanding many of the socialist revolutions characteristic of the twentieth century (Löwy 2005, p. 150). Despite the failure of the German revolution of 1849, Marx and Engels believed (wrongly, as it turned out) that a new wave of revolutionary fervour would seize Germany, one that if the working class initially aligned itself with the 'petty bourgeois democrats', could not only ensure the complete destruction of absolutism,

retention of state power, in other words, is essentially the object of revolutionary subjectivity. However, this isn't to state that once political power has been captured that the process of revolutionary subjectivity would end. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the conquest and retention of political power is, in-itself an educative experience (Lebowitz 2003, p. 193). What Marx famously called the 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat' was to be a very particular form of state power, one that governed the transition from capitalist society to communist society (Marx 1992e, p. 355). Marx's notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat was modelled on his analysis of the Paris Commune of 1871. For him, the commune was a 'thoroughly expansive political form'; a 'working' (as opposed to parliamentary) body which although principally was a working class government, it was also 'the true representative of all the healthy elements of French society' (Marx 1993b, pp. 209, 212, 216). Once again, then, this observation highlights Marx and Engels' awareness as to the necessity of tactical alliances in the quest for political power, particularly amongst elements of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie (Draper 1979, p. 358; Fernbach 1992a, p. 30; Callinicos 1995, p. 165). For Marx (1993f) the 'true secret' of the commune was that it had discovered the 'political form … under which to work out the economical emancipation of labour' (Marx 1993f, p. 212). Thus, not only did the commune provide the working class the space for its continued self-development, but it also served as a means for its future consolidation. The dictatorship of the proletariat, then, although instrumental to the goals of revolutionary subjectivity, doesn't in any way effectuate its dissolution. The point at which revolutionary subjectivity would dissipate would be the establishment of a communist society; a society where, according to Marx and Engels, private property had been abolished and the powers of socially co-operative labour been set free so as to collectively provide for the needs of all (Marx and Engels 1993a, p. 87). It would be this form of society, Marx once claimed, that would signal the end of all class antagonism (Marx 1992a, p. 426).

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but consolidate the conditions for its own future socialist revolution. To do this, Marx and Engels argued, the working class had to make that initial revolution 'permanent', and consistently press their temporary allies to give them as many concessions as possible, and in so doing, prevent them from establishing their own domination over the workers (Marx and Engels 1993b, p. 322). Central to this tactic, however, was the development of independent workers' organisations – armed if possible. These organisations would not only form an embryonic workers' government – making tactical use of the electoral mechanism – but would act to sustain the revolutionary subjectivity of the workers so as to consolidate their future revolutionary aspirations (Ibid., p. 325). Hence, from this perspective although Marx and Engels certainly did not retreat from the general principles of historical materialism, through their early theory of permanent revolution they did, nevertheless, introduce a key element of contingency with respect to the tactical question of seizing political power. Another key example of how Marx introduced such contingency to the more general theory of historical materialism was through his later comments regarding the possibility of revolutionary change in Russia. For more on this, see Marx (1989a, 1989b).

In summary, it is clear that Marx believed strongly in the self-capacity of the proletariat. For him, whilst guided by its various organisational apparatuses, the proletariat would become revolutionary through the educative process of class struggle; or as Lukács (1971) would emphasise, through the subjective comprehension of the totality of capitalist relations. Interestingly however, although as Cleaver (1986) notes Marx was above else a revolutionary, relative to other aspects of his work – perhaps somewhat ironically – for many this aspect of his theory remained underdeveloped (Carlo 1973, p. 39; Mészáros 1971, p. 106; Anderson 1976, p. 4). In what remains of this chapter I will examine the way Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity was re-visited in the thought of Lenin, Gramsci, and Mao Tse-tung. As discussed earlier, this will be crucial for my later analysis of the post-Marxism of Antonio Negri, Ernesto Laclau, and Alain Badiou.

Lenin – Organisation Form

Lenin's (1987a) *What is to be Done* remains one of the most significant Marxist texts of the twentieth century and, arguably, constitutes one of the first major attempts to rethink the parameters to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. The context to this particular intervention was Lenin's attack on what he saw as 'deviations' associated with the rise of reformist tendencies within the European social democratic movement. This tendency, he argued, resulted in a new form of 'opportunism', one that attempted to 'convert social democracy into a democratic reformist party, [and] the freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and elements into socialism' (Lenin 1987a, p. 56). To combat this, Lenin advocated the necessity of an 'advanced revolutionary theory', one that would act to guide the revolutionary socialist movement in the right direction. 'Without revolutionary theory', he famously argued, 'there can be no revolutionary movement' (ibid., p. 69). For Lenin, the most significant form of social democratic deviation concerned the question of spontaneity and what he termed 'economism'. Lenin claimed that the latter restricted politics to the immediate point of production, and in consequence fostered the idea that workers would spontaneously transcend bourgeois ideology. This 'subservience' to spontaneity was the principal target of Lenin's intervention, for according to him whilst the trade union struggle produced a 'consciousness in an embryonic form', unaided this consciousness would not become revolutionary (ibid., p. 82; Carlo 1973, p. 11).

For Lenin, the 'first ideology that comes to hand' with respect to trade union struggle was always reformist, based as it was on the belief that such struggles could be resolved peacefully within the framework of capitalist society. By virtue of this, Lenin famously argued that 'the history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness' (ibid., p. 74). Lenin's basic thesis stipulated that revolutionary consciousness could only be brought about politically, *outside* or 'from without' the immediate realm of this strictly economic struggle. As in Marx's theory, for

Lenin trade unions were indeed useful but were not in-themselves sufficient for the development of revolutionary subjectivity (ibid., pp. 107, 125, 141). Indeed, at this point of his argument Lenin merely reiterated Marx's own comments: revolutionary subjectivity required the development of the communist party, which must draw in other sectors of society in to the vortex of its struggle. Hence, for Lenin class political consciousness could emerge 'not on the basis of the economic struggle alone, but on the basis of all manifestations of public and private life' (ibid., p. 99). From this, Lenin advocated what he called an 'all-sided political exposure' – one that went amongst the 'people' and revealed the true nature of Russian autocracy 'in all its aspects'. Workers must thus be trained to 'respond to all cases of tyranny … no matter what class is affected', and from this taught to observe 'every other social class and all manifestations of the intellectual, ethical and political life of these classes' (ibid., pp. 97, 104, 112). In this context, then, Marx's emphasis on tactical alliances is thus clearly reiterated. Interestingly however, whilst Lenin didn't go so far as to question the identity of the vanguard of this struggle, one could argue that, due to the compositional complexity of Russian society at that time, he went further with respect to the issue of tactical alliances. In 1905 for instance, Lenin argued that although Russia's impending revolution was of a 'bourgeois-democratic' ilk, the most favourable way of securing the conditions for a future socialist revolution was by the social democrats forging an alliance with 'the people', articulated specifically through the slogan of a 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'. This alliance could thus ensure that the bourgeois revolution was made as thorough as possible; something Lenin believed was unlikely if left to the 'inconsistent' and 'selfish' Russian bourgeoisie themselves (Lenin 1977b, p. 457).

The most significant element of Lenin's 1902 pamphlet for our purposes, however, was the way in which Lenin's understanding of the specificity of Russian society forced him to rethink the relationship between the proletariat and its organisational form. According to Lenin, in the context of the highly repressive Tsarist state the social democratic movement had no choice but to establish a strict and highly disciplined division of labour within it. In this sense, he made a distinction between a workers' organisation and a specifically (clandestine) revolutionary organisation. Whereas the former was to be established along the lines of a 'trade organisation' – as inclusive as 'conditions will allow' – the latter would, by necessity, have to consist of an elite band of professional revolutionaries (Lenin 1987a, pp. 135, 137). Whereas Lenin envisaged professional revolutionaries working within the workers' organisations, the composition of the revolutionary party was restricted to a 'small compact core, consisting of reliable, experienced and hardened workers', without which, he added, 'no class in modern society is capable of conducting a determined struggle' (ibid., p. 145). The differences here with Marx's theory of revolutionary organisation should be clear: there was nothing which stipulated such a centralised and externally constituted authority. Yet, as Lenin would consistently reiterate, his own intervention was contextually specific – something which we could argue strongly Marx himself would have accepted. In other words, both the objective and

subjective requirements stipulated in Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – a theory which governed the basis to his notions of political organisation – were glaringly missing from Russian society at that time.

Lenin's modification to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity was to emphasise the tactics of organisational form, in the sense that the latter must always suit a specific time, context, and composition of the working class. Indeed, it is worth noting here that, whilst Lenin's notion of the 'vanguard party' has been undoubtedly one of his most enduring contributions to Marxist theory, it was only three years later that his position on this issue changed quite substantially. In his *Two Tactics* for instance, Lenin stated explicitly that the slogans and theories developed in 1902 had been effectively annulled by a rapid change in social and historical context (Lenin 1977b, p. 470). What Carlo (1973) calls 'Lenin's turn' hinged on the emergence of the soviets, which far from being the result of the intervention of an external vanguard, emerged organically during the revolution of 1905, and again in 1917 (Carlo 1973, p. 23). Indeed, in his reflections on the Russian events of 1905, Lenin clearly accepted that the movement from mass strikes to insurrection was developed by the masses themselves, and even autonomously from the various organisations that purported to lead them (Lenin 1977c, p. 530; Löwy 2005, p. 170). In sum, Lenin's modification to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity was one that, whilst reiterating something already apparent in Marx's own theory with respect to the unity of theory and practice, sought to rethink the contextual specificity of questions pertaining to organisational form. In Chapter 5 of this book, we will see that this issue is central to understanding Antonio Negri's own post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

Gramsci – Hegemony

The questions raised above regarding revolutionary alliances and the form and function of the revolutionary party were also taken up by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. When considering the relationship between the working class and the revolutionary party, however, Gramsci (1999a) began by making the distinction between 'traditional' and 'organic' intellectuals. According to him, traditional intellectuals were those that appeared to stand outside the fluctuations and periodic changes within a society's social relations. This quality, Gramsci argued, gives traditional intellectuals a sense of autonomy in the sense that it isn't immediately clear as to whose class interests they represent. Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, are those that emerge from a particular social group, and in time begin to develop an awareness of their specific function – 'not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields' (Gramsci 1999a, pp. 134, 137). Although Gramsci repeatedly reiterated his belief that all men were intellectuals or 'philosophers', he did nevertheless accept the idea that some individuals were more intellectual than others, and this was based on their

particular 'function' within the *ensemble* of social relations in a given society (ibid., p. 140). The critical function of modern organic intellectuals, he argued, was thus not only to represent their own social group, but also establish a broader framework for ideologically integrating the traditional intellectuals of other social groups (ibid., p. 142).

Gramsci's main concern was to try and understand exactly how the proletariat could develop its own organic intellectuals, and this led him directly to reconsider the role of the revolutionary party. What Gramsci called 'the modern prince' was a dynamic organisation, one which in order to avoid succumbing to bureaucracy had to relate constantly to the 'elementary passions' of the 'people-nation' (Gramsci 1999b, p. 767). For Gramsci, the revolutionary party had to act as an educator; not merely in the realms of politics and economics, but intellectually and morally too, finding ways to bind the various interests that made up the realm of 'civil society' (Gramsci 1999c, p. 517). In a similar way to Lenin, however, Gramsci argued that the proletarian party must ultimately raise proletarian consciousness from the 'fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions' that constitutes 'common sense' (Gramsci 1999d, p. 634). Governed by 'organic centralism', the party thus provides intellectual and moral guidance as a means of organising and expressing what Gramsci called a 'national-popular collective will', one where common sense becomes reconfigured on the basis of socialist values (Simon 1999, p. 120). It is the political construction of this 'collective will' that constituted the basis for the party moving beyond the 'economic corporate' interests of the working class, and instead, integrating the interests of the other social groups into a united 'social bloc'. 'In certain given conditions', then, the political party must 'exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups, and succeed in securing the development of the group which they represent with the consent and assistance of the allied groups' (Gramsci 1999e, pp. 329, 353, 406; Gramsci 1999a, p. 152).

For Gramsci the construction of this common 'will' was dependent on an analysis of the various 'balance of forces' that forged that particular juncture. In this sense, any ruling social bloc constituted an 'integral state' that ruled by a combination of both force and consent (Gramsci 1999c, p. 504). Thus, here Gramsci's theory reiterates the concerns we identified in Marx's; namely, the problem of commodity fetishism: the idea that in the ordinary run of things the working class would by and large passively accept the hegemony of ruling class ideology. For Gramsci, this consensual aspect of state power led directly from the ruling classes' ability to disseminate its own particular 'world view'. The major task for the proletariat and its party, then, was to establish its own 'counter hegemonic' world view, and although Gramsci accepted that capturing state power was instrumental in securing this process, more important was understanding the political strategy leading up to that. In this sense, as Hobsbawm (2011) has argued, Gramsci's major contribution to Marxist theory was to have 'pioneered a Marxist theory of politics', and central to this was the development of the concept of hegemony (Hobsbawm 2011, p. 319).

The concept of hegemony was taken explicitly from Lenin, and was used as a means of combating the assumptions of 'mechanical materialism'. Here Gramsci (1999e) argued that the onset of capitalist crisis did not automatically mean the likelihood of its revolutionary transformation. Whereas he accepted that capitalist development was prone to bouts of 'organic crises' – a notion used by Gramsci to signify a long term systemic crisis of a given hegemonic formation – it was only when this crisis became something 'conjunctural' that 'opposition forces' could emerge to reconfigure a social bloc in a different way (Gramsci 1999e, p. 400). One of Gramsci's most basic points, then, is that capitalist crisis will not necessarily lead to any particular outcome: political, economic, and cultural hegemony is not a mere epiphenomenon of particular crises – such crises can be articulated in a number of very different ways.

The extent to which a crisis is conjunctural, according to Gramsci, involves an analysis of the various 'balance of forces' that contextualise it (Gramsci 1999e, p. 383). On its most basic level, this refers to the dialectical relationship between the structure and the superstructure (Ibid., p. 399). Following Marx, Gramsci argued that the 'sufficient conditions' for any revolutionary transformation lay principally in the extent to which the productive forces had developed. From this, corresponded a 'subsequent moment' of the political balance of forces, or what Gramsci explained as 'the degree of homogeneity, self- awareness, and organisation attained by the various social classes' (ibid., pp. 405, 406). Just as we identified in Marx's theory, then, for Gramsci a conjunctural crisis became a possibility only once the working class had made the passage from being an objective class-for-itself to a revolutionary class-for-itself. Again, as in Marx's theory this process was dependent on the creation of tactical alliances. Our argument here, however, is that Gramsci's emphasis on this issue was perhaps more sustained than Marx's. For Gramsci, then, the working class and its allies would establish a commonality of interests 'welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world … ' (Gramsci 1999d, p. 665). In this sense it would be Gramsci's theory of hegemony that would be his most lasting contribution to Marxist theory. However, it would be the concept of hegemony that would also become crucial for the development of post-Marxist theory, especially in the work of Ernesto Laclau. This theory will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this book.

Mao Tse-tung – 'The Dialectical-materialist Theory of Knowledge'

Just like in the work of Lenin and Gramsci, Mao's Tse-tung's theory of revolutionary subjectivity would reiterate something already contained in Marx's; mainly on the basis of its application to a highly different context. In a country even more underdeveloped than pre-revolutionary Russia, however, Mao would not only emphasise the necessity of the revolutionary party and its need for tactical alliances, but would also displace the working class as the principal

revolutionary subject. For Mao, the necessity for revolutionary alliances was something that had been central to the history of the Chinese Revolution. For example, in his *Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society* written in 1926, although Mao affirmed the status of the industrial proletariat as the 'leading force' in revolutionary change, he conceded immediately that alliances would have to be created with both the 'petty bourgeoisie' and the 'semi-proletariat' (Mao 1965a, p. 19). In the context of that time however, it was the peasantry which would play the most decisive role.

In his famous *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (1927) for example, Mao insisted that throughout the central, southern and northern provinces, 'in a very short time' the peasantry would 'rise like a mighty storm' to overthrow the power of the feudal landlords. What was once regarded as a mere 'gang of peasants' had now developed into a full-blown revolutionary force, and the basis to this power was the establishment of their own forms of association, which according to Mao were based on very similar principles to the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets. Yet, this wasn't to say that all sections of the peasantry were as revolutionary as each other, and in a similar way to his preliminary 'inquiry' of the peasantry a year before, Mao associated the most revolutionary sectors with those must brutally oppressed by the 'local tyrants' and the 'evil gentry'. For Mao it was the poor peasantry which formed the vanguard of the newly emerging peasant associations, and it was their struggle which had created a revolutionary situation; completing the 'great task which for long years was left undone' (Mao 1965b, p. 32). Hence, whilst Cohan (1975) points out that Mao's emphasis on the revolutionary role of the peasantry was perhaps the most significant deviation of what was considered orthodox Marxist theory at that time (Cohan 1975, p. 101), one must remember that Mao's aim at this point was to highlight their strategic importance for a future 'national' revolution, and the purpose of his inquiry regarding the composition of the peasantry was to discover which layers would be the most 'responsive to communist party leadership' (Mao 1965b, p. 32).

The most significant aspect of Mao's argument at this stage was his claim that the peasantry had acted on their 'historic mission' by themselves – without the need for any vanguard bring it 'from without'. In this sense, Mao's faith in the peasantry or 'the masses' would become a hallmark to his revolutionary theory, and this faith was something much more 'mass-orientated than what may be found in the Leninist theory of revolution' (Cohan 1975, p. 102). As stated above however, this did not mean that Mao rejected the necessity of a highly centralised and disciplined political party. Indeed, his recommendations here with respect to the peasantry was not just for the Communist Party to accept the validity of their struggle, but to 'march at their head and lead them' (Mao 1965c, p. 24). Without the revolutionary party the activity of the masses is unsustainable: without the party 'it is impossible for the people to throw off oppression' (Mao 1967a, p. 35; Mao 1967b, p. 118). In a remarkably similar way to Gramsci, Mao accepted the need for both the production and recruitment of intellectuals, and yet perhaps

more prominent in his thought was ensuring that their connection to the masses was as organic as possible. For Mao the persistent danger with intellectuals was their tendency to dissociate theory from practice. Indeed, reiterating the comments made above, for Mao in many cases the masses actually knew more than the intellectuals themselves (Mao 1967a, pp. 37, 39). It is at this point that a major principle of Mao's theory of revolutionary subjectivity becomes clear: a 'completely developed intellectual' is one who learns from both direct and indirect experience; one who has a continual responsibility to test the validity of theory through its concrete application to a particular circumstance (ibid., p. 40). In this sense, he continues, 'only social practice can be the criterion of truth' and 'there can be no knowledge apart from practice' (Mao 1965d, pp. 297, 301).

Intellectuals, then, must always be organically bound to the 'masses'. However, whilst Mao believed that it was the ideas of the masses' themselves that constituted the basis for revolutionary action, this did not mean that these ideas were always completely correct. In this sense Mao's faith in the masses was one always tempered through his strategic emphasis on the role of the Communist Party. Just like Marx, Lenin and Gramsci, Mao similarly argued that, at times, revolutionary subjectivity would need raising from an initial embryonic state. In Mao's terminology, there must be a 'leap' from 'perceptual' to 'rational' knowledge, and in his essay 'On Practice', Mao relates these two forms of knowledge directly to Marx's distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself (ibid., p. 301). Just like in Marx's theory – although as argued above perhaps more visible in Lenin's – Mao's point is that perceptual knowledge is not 'false': perceptual knowledge corresponds to the level of appearances and thus corresponds with the masses' immediate unmediated experience. The point, then, is to use this experience and work to enrich it by 'investigating' further the lessons learnt from it. In Mao's terminology: 'Rational knowledge depends upon perceptual knowledge and perceptual knowledge remains to be developed into rational knowledge – this is the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge' (ibid., p. 303).

When relating this back to the relationship between the masses and is party, then, Mao's dictum was that of 'from the masses to the masses'. In concrete terms, this was a relatively straight forward process: the role of the party was to collect the masses' ideas, systematise them, return them, test them, and so on. The aim of this method was thus to make the masses' ideas 'more correct, more vital, and richer each time' (Mao 1967a, p. 119). To summarise, Mao's theory of revolutionary subjectivity re-affirms Marx's belief that revolutionary subjectivity was the outcome of a protracted educative experience. His most important contribution is to emphasise the dialectical nature of theory and practice, and in particular, emphasise its importance in terms of the production of 'knowledge' and 'truth'. In Chapter 6 of this study, just like in the case of Negri's relationship with Lenin and Laclau's relationship to Gramsci, the importance of Mao's insights will become clear with respect to Badiou's own post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

Conclusion

The work of Lenin, Gramsci and Mao reaffirms particular aspects of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, without however going as far as to abandon the latter's central conditions. Through Lenin's theory of political organisation, we are reminded that organisational form must always link closely to the practicalities of both the unevenness of capitalist development and the composition of the working class. Through Gramsci's elaboration of the concept of hegemony we are reminded of the absolute necessity of forging tactical alliances with the aim of establishing a broad 'popular will'. Finally, through Mao's 'dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge' we are reminded that revolutionary subjectivity is both constituted and sustained through the unity of theory and practice. All three of these contributions will feed directly into the post-Marxism of each of my chosen theorists for this study. Before I move on, however, I will quickly re-cap what I have taken to be the three central conditions of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

Firstly, for Marx revolutionary subjectivity is defined via the prism of human productive activity; an activity which he believed was revolutionised historically by the progressive development of the division of labour in society. Marx's respect for capitalism in this sense was clear, for it developed both the forces and relations of production with a pace and intensity unheard of throughout the history of humanity. More importantly, however, Marx believed that capitalism brought with it the seeds for its own destruction: a class which he expected – in time – to develop both the capacity and desire for ruling itself both politically and economically.

Secondly, to understand how this subjectivity emerges one had to consider both objective and subjective factors. Objectively, Marx believed that capitalism would block the further development of humanity's productive powers, and through its persistent crises reveal its inadequacies, both politically and economically. Objectively, then, a fundamentally different form of society was made possible by capitalist development itself. The movement from one form of society to another, however, was neither automatic nor spontaneous. Subjectively, revolutionary social change was dependent on a collective subject which came to see its fundamental necessity. Marx believed that this task fell to those whose subjectivity lay at the heart of the production process, which through the educative process of class struggle would, in time, transform themselves from being a 'class against capital' to a revolutionary 'class-for-itself'. Central here, however, was also the extent to which the working class became a class for others. Much like the objective tendencies of capitalist crisis then, Marx believed also in subjective tendencies for the political radicalisation of the working class.

Finally, initially for Marx the object of revolutionary subjectivity was the seizure of political power through the establishment of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. This was central to his theory of revolutionary subjectivity in two ways. Firstly, this aspect of struggle was just as educative as the struggle against capitalist exploitation. The reason for this was because Marx believed that it was here that the working class discovered its political and economic capacity for self-

rule. In a second sense, then, the establishment of a workers' state was only the first step by which the working class could dissolve itself – as a class – and from that, let to rest the history of exploitation and class antagonism.

There are thus three central conditions to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity: revolutionary subjectivity is defined through the prism of productive activity; it emerges immanently through both objective and subjective factors; its object is the conquest of political power and the establishment of a classless society. Additionally, however, one must also note the extent to which all three of these conditions are framed by Marx's theory of historical materialism. This, as will be shown in the following chapters and made clear in the conclusion to this work, becomes vital for understanding the nature of post-Marxism in general. Taking these three conditions as its basis, the ensuing chapters will examine the specificity of the post-Marxism of each of my chosen thinkers mentioned earlier. Now I turn to the first.

Chapter 4
Ernesto Laclau – Hegemony and 'The People'

Overview

This chapter outlines and assesses the post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and also establishes the structure for the ensuing two chapters. I will start by assessing the context from which this theory would emerge, particularly with respect to Laclau's early political experiences in his native Argentina. Laclau's (1977a, 1977b) early work displayed a deep dissatisfaction with theories that sought to reduce the complexity of revolutionary subjectivity to a rigid class analysis. Later, in his co-authored work with Chantal Mouffe (2001), he would overcome this problem by drawing heavily on post-structuralism, and in so doing find the tools for establishing the nature of his own post-Marxism. Laclau's work throughout the 1990s grounds his theory by turning to the Lacanian ontology of 'lack', and through his concept of dislocation returns to clarify aspects of his early thought, particularly with respect to the nature and importance of structural crises. In his most recent work Laclau (2005) reconsiders the importance of populism and its emphasis on the subjectivity of 'the people'. Reiterating earlier themes, he argues forcefully that revolutionary subjectivity cannot properly be conceived using a dialectical logic, and because of this Laclau's theory breaks all three conditions to Marx's theory. In my assessment of his theory I concentrate on three issues: class, discourse, and the normative deficit to his theory of hegemony.

Populism and 'The People'

From the late 1940s to the early 1970s Argentinean politics was dominated by Peronism; a peculiar mix of nationalism and social democracy headed by the enigmatic Juan Domingo Perón. During the 1960s Ernesto Laclau became a member of various left-wing organisations, and was particularly active in the student movement (Laclau 1990, pp. 197, 198). According to Laclau during that period Peronism displaced the conventional debates on the left, especially concerning the 'classical alternatives' of reform/revolution and Stalinism/Trotskyism. Due to the various alliances forged during Perón's first term in 1946, a 'permanent political division' had been created in the Argentinean left between the liberals on the one hand, and the nationalists on the other. Laclau himself sided with the latter, and according to him although this faction had a 'clearly nationalist

orientation', its real aim was to continue the 'anti-imperialist revolution' through a strategic 'hegemonisation of the democratic banners' (ibid., p. 198). The tactic here, was that by aligning itself to the nationalist cause, those on the left could eventually establish the basis to a more radical 'anti-imperialist' struggle. As Laclau explained, 'Our position was that socialists would only be able to consolidate and advance the anti-imperialist revolution if they could achieve a hegemonic position in the democratic struggles' (ibid.).

This strategy was a contentious one. Other socialists regarded Peronism as outright fascist, and opted instead to forge a different alliance with the more entrenched liberal oligarchy. Others still – such as the 'small ultra-leftist sects' – believed that populist strategy had run its course, and an 'all-out fight for socialism was required' (ibid., p. 198). For Laclau however, the question of tactical alliance was to become central. In the context of Argentinean society at that time, a more radical class politics could only become possible with the shrewdness to establish tactical alliances with non-revolutionary sectors. In hindsight, Laclau would argue that this strategy was doomed from the start. The reason for this was because, at base, it remained a theory that posited a rigid connection between political parties and the perceived objective interests of various social classes. 'Behind all this', Laclau explained, ' … was a Marxism of the most elementary kind, with its class based conception of social agents and politics as being simply a representation of interests' (ibid., p. 199). For Laclau it was this assumption that ensured that the Left only ever became a marginal ideological influence. In sum, then, it is clear that the question of strategic alliance was central to Laclau's early political experiences. Politics becomes something akin to a game, or better, a technique for the acquisition and retention of power. In this respect, according to Laclau, Perón himself proved himself particularly adept, and his eventual return to power in 1974 demonstrated this.

Laclau's 'first lesson in hegemony' was formative for both his early and later theory of revolutionary subjectivity. At this stage the Gramscian thrust is clear enough: revolutionary subjectivity is created via an alliance between the various layers constitutive of civil society. More than this, however, the experience outlined above also revealed the weakness of analyses which supposed the a-priori importance of one particular (class) identity within such an alliance. These practical lessons translated neatly into the theoretical debates to which Laclau entered in his early academic career. Through his own experiences, then, Laclau realised the necessity of loosening the relationship between hegemonic politics and its conventional Marxian underpinnings. Theoretically, this insight was developed in his book *Politics and Marxist Theory* (1977), particularly when examining issues such as fascism and populism. With respect to the former, Laclau criticised Nicos Poulantzas' own theory on the basis of its underlying assumption that fascist ideology had a 'necessary class belonging', an assumption that he believed was both 'presupposed and unexplained' (Laclau 1977a, pp. 100, 109). To overcome this problem Laclau drew on Althusser's twin notions of 'ideological interpellation' and 'overdetermination'. Here Laclau argued that collective

political identity is interpellated on a number of levels – not just that of class. In essence, for Laclau fascism could only be explained on the basis of its attempt to appeal to the full complexity of individuals' interpellated identity (ibid., pp. 104, 105). Thus, by utilising Althusser's notion of ideological interpellation Laclau's aim was to emphasise the importance of qualitatively different forms of collective identity – specifically 'non-class interpellations' – which proved to be more complex than their class counterparts. Reducing the former to the latter, he argued, was a persistent form of reductionism, and herein lay the underlying problem with Poulantzas' theory of fascism.

At this early point, Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity did not deny the importance of class or class struggle, but did nevertheless dislodge it from the immediate point of production to the spheres of politics and ideology. The strategic importance of class struggle, in other words, is shifted to an analysis of the more complex phenomenon of 'popular democratic struggle', one that corresponds to the interpellation of a wider social identity than that based solely on class. Despite this, however, whilst collective political identity might indeed be an 'overdetermined' phenomenon, Laclau argued that, in the 'last instance', popular democratic struggle was determined by class struggle. The reason for this he explained, was because 'popular democratic ideologies never present themselves separated from' but are rather 'articulated with 'class ideological divisions' (ibid., pp. 108, 109). Popular democratic interpellations (of which Fascism was a form of) are thus not intrinsically class ideologies (as Poulantzas assumed), but rather can be articulated by a variety of autonomous ideological discourses. In this sense, Fascism was simply one direction in which this game was played out (ibid., p. 111). Again then, the ultimate consequence of this way of thinking is that class struggle is displaced from the immediate process of production, and instead is located on a level which corresponds to individuals' identity not simply as workers, but in the wider sense of being part of 'the people'.

This emphasis on 'the people' is intimately connected to populist discourses (Canovan 2005), and Laclau used it strategically as a means of articulating exactly the kind of collective political identity he was trying to theorise. In another essay on the subject, and in a similar way to that of Fascism, Laclau argued that analyses of populism had continually suffered from class reductionism (Laclau 1977b, p. 159). Although social classes are of course present in populist phenomena, they have no necessary 'form of existence at the ideological and political levels'. Once again, Laclau is keen to argue that individuals have a much wider social identity than that which corresponds to their objective class position. Overdetermined social identity is a much more complex phenomenon: 'individuals are the bearers and points of intersection of an accumulation of contradictions, not all of which are class contradictions' (ibid., p. 163). This was not to say, however, that 'class' could not be of central importance; rather, Laclau's point was to warn against that particular interpellation closing in on itself, and in so doing avoiding the establishment of the various other connections necessary for the construction of a broader – and more strategically adept – form of political identity. Specific to

populism, then, is its appeal to 'the people': a highly diverse and malleable social subjectivity. The specificity of political and ideological struggle, on the other hand is more generic, taking place 'on a terrain constituted by non-class interpellations and contradictions', consisting of 'antagonistic projects' to articulate them (ibid., p. 166). Whilst in some sense this ideological struggle could be considered a class struggle, at this stage Laclau rejected the idea of their strict homology: 'the people' will always have an identity surplus to whatever class discourse they might – or might not – become articulated with (ibid., p. 195).

To summarise at this point, Laclau's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity evidently relates to his own experience in Argentinean politics, and Gramsci's notion of hegemony is quite clearly at the centre of it. If a revolutionary movement avoids establishing wider linkages, relying or appealing to what Gramsci called its own particular 'economic corporate' interests – and hence not 'articulating the people in their discourse' – they will never become hegemonic (ibid., pp. 174, 195, 196). Furthermore, by drawing on Althusser's notions of ideological interpellation and overdetermination, Laclau is able to shift the question of collective identity away from the centrality of class struggle at the point of production towards the more nefarious spheres of politics and ideology (Wood 1986, p. 50). Despite this however, whilst Laclau's dissatisfaction with class reductionism is clear, the importance of class is only displaced and not discarded altogether. What Laclau questions at this point is the assumption that, in-itself, class is necessarily the central determinant in configuring collective political identity.

'The Retreat from Class'[1]

First published in 1985, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001) – co-authored with Chantal Mouffe – Laclau would reiterate the problems identified above, whilst this time being quite unambiguous with respect to their intrinsic relationship to Marxism in general. In many ways, for Laclau and Mouffe these limitations had already been identified by Marxists themselves, especially Marx's predictions with respect to capitalist development and, from that, the revolutionary capacities of the working class. Alongside these crises of expectations, then, within the Marxist tradition the concept of 'hegemony' became increasingly central as a means of providing a more contingent theory of revolutionary subjectivity. However, as indicated in Laclau's earlier works, whilst this concept remained tied to its Marxist heritage it would always be plagued by a persistent problem: reconciling the contingent nature of hegemonic politics with the historical narrative associated with historical materialism. Of particular issue here was the latter's assumptions regarding the strategic importance ascribed to social class. In essence, Laclau and Mouffe's intervention was premised on breaking this binary; and in particular, abandoning the idea of that revolutionary subjectivity could be reduced to social

1 This subheading is taken from the title of Ellen Meiksins Wood's (1986) book.

class (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 87). As discussed earlier, Laclau was initially unwilling to go this far, accepting as he did the idea that – in the 'last instance' – revolutionary subjectivity was always determined by class discourses. It would be the rejection of this 'last instance' that would mark Laclau's decisive break, one which would lead to a distinctively post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Althusser's emphasis on 'overdetermination' was a crucial step in this direction, but it didn't quite go far enough. With reference to that 'last instance', they explained, Althusser's theory remained one of 'simple determination and not overdetermination' (ibid., p. 99). Drawing on the work of various post-structuralists dominant at the time,[2] the following passage is instrumental for unravelling the nature of their theory:

> … we will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated (Ibid., p. 105).

Here I will explain their theory in its generality before returning immediately to its application to the issue of collective, revolutionary subjectivity. Although criticised for its excessive 'obscurantism' (Geras 1987, p. 47), Laclau and Mouffe's argument progresses as follows. All 'objects' are discursively articulated, and the aim of this discourse is the transformation of as many 'elements' into 'moments' of it. When integrated into a discourse, the relationship between these 'moments' is understood via the relational principles of structural linguistics: each moment's identity is established on the basis of their respective differences with each other. Hence, 'all identity is relational and all relations have a necessary character', although this necessity derives not from an 'underlying intelligible principle but from the regularity of a system of structural positions' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, pp. 105, 106). Crucially, for Laclau and Mouffe any articulatory practice is limited by the contingent nature of the discourse which it produces, and the reason for that is because the transformation of elements into moments 'is never complete' (ibid., p. 107). Equally crucial, however, is that the regularity of such discourse is established only through the articulatory practice itself: it does not 'have a plane of constitution prior to, or outside, the dispersion of the articulated elements' (ibid., p. 109).

An articulatory practice is always possible, then, because the transition of elements into moments is 'never entirely fulfilled'. What remains are consistent attempts by various competing discourses to do so. Here, one reaches a critical point in Laclau and Mouffe's argument, for if one follows their logic one must

2 For one of the best short commentaries on the relationship between Laclau and Mouffe's theory and that of structuralist and post-structuralist thought, see Wenman (2003).

acknowledge the fact that the stability or coherence of all discursive objects is consistently threatened by the elements which elude the articulatory practices that try to integrate them. Any discursive 'object' – collective subjectivity included – is thus marked by an internal lack; haunted by the elements that have not or cannot be successfully integrated. This 'surplus' is what Laclau and Mouffe call the 'field of discursivity', and it is this field that ensures the contingent nature of all discursive identity (ibid., p. 111). Despite its incomplete nature, however, the role of discourse is nevertheless an attempt to complete it. By creating privileged 'nodal points', any discourse is able at least to 'arrest the flow of differences and construct a centre', one that offers the possibility for an object's identity to achieve some form of temporary and partial unity – without which it is assumed would result in 'chaos' (Wenman 2003, p. 588). Again however, this unity will only ever be temporary in the sense that there are always elements that avoid discursive signification, and because of this, always ensure the basis for future forms of articulatory practice.

From 'Contradiction' to 'Antagonism'

At this point it becomes clear how Laclau and Mouffe radicalise Althusser's theory of overdetermination, and here we can return and apply their discourse theory specifically to the issue of collective subjectivity. Against any underlying element – i.e. class – which is presumed to form the core of the latter, whilst accepting its possibility via becoming a privileged nodal point, what they reject is its a-priori status. The unity of any 'object', in other words, is only ever something forged through an articulatory practice. Without this, there is no core to any social identity – class or otherwise. Hence, due to the contingent and incomplete nature of all objectivity one must dispense with the idea that there can be one aprioristic centre to it (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 114). Collective subjectivity – revolutionary or otherwise – cannot be conceived apart from its discursive construction. Against any notion of a unified aprioristic 'subject' of the political, then, the only way Laclau and Mouffe are willing to conceive subjectivity is in terms of differential 'subject positions' – i.e. as an overdetermined ensemble of relational differences (ibid., pp. 121, 165). To be clear at this point: for Laclau and Mouffe collective subjectivity is the result of an articulatory practice and is created and sustained through a particular discourse. From this, what becomes clear is that for them, revolutionary subjectivity requires the existence of suitably revolutionary discourses. Yet, even these discourses are 'pierced by contingency' due to the elements which resisted totalisation. Hence, any revolutionary subjectivity can only ever be a precarious one, fixated partially around a particular 'nodal point' that provides its temporary unity and coherence. The consistency of this subjectivity is thus persistently in danger of being revealed for what it really is, and for Laclau and Mouffe this 'experience' is conceptualised through the concept of 'antagonism'.

Theoretically, the concept of antagonism is fundamental for establishing Laclau and Mouffe's hostility to the principles of dialectical logic. Whilst Laclau and Mouffe accept the conditions for an antagonistic experience may arise structurally within a given object (i.e. because it is structurally incomplete), they nevertheless argue that the developmental nature of this antagonism cannot be explained through reference to that object alone (ibid., p. 126). One particularly persistent example Laclau uses at this point is the struggle between the worker and capitalist at the immediate point of production. According to him, whilst in dialectical terms the relationship between the worker and the capitalist could be conceived in terms of 'contradiction', due to the fact Marx reduced these subjectivities to mere personifications of economic categories (i.e. wage labour and capital) there was no way he could logically establish that any ensuing struggle between them was 'antagonistic'. Following the logic established above, the only way in which this could actually be the case was if this struggle occurred 'between the relations of production and something external to them' (Laclau 1990, p. 11; Laclau 2000a, p. 202; Laclau 2005, p. 149). Hence, for Laclau the conflict between the worker and capitalist only becomes 'antagonistic' when this struggle denies an aspect of the workers' identity outside of the relations of production: i.e. by lowering wages and thus denying the worker the means to go and watch a Notts' County football match, and hence denying their identity as a Notts' County fan, etc. Hence, at its most basic level an antagonistic relation serves a 'revelatory function' in the sense that it is an experience which threatens one's sense of self (Norris 2002, p. 554). Yet in the same instance this threat is also constitutive, and the reason for this is that, because it reveals the internal limits to a given identity, it also necessarily poses the possibility of its eventual re-composition (Laclau 1990, p. 39).

Rethinking Hegemony – Between Difference and Equivalence

This re-composition of an object's identity following an antagonistic experience can occur in a number of different ways, depending primarily on the availability of particular discourses. In general terms, however, Laclau and Mouffe offer two alternatives: discourses which establish a 'logic of equivalence' and discourses which establish a 'logic of difference'. When antagonism is articulated through the logic of equivalence each moment constitutive of its unity loses their differential qualities and, instead, through reference to the element(s) that eludes it become equivalent to each other (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 128). In this sense, through equivalence negativity attains a 'form of presence', and this is established through dividing the 'discursive space' into two opposed camps – 'us' against 'them' (ibid., p. 129). The logic of equivalence, then, is one way of 'constituting the social'. The alternative lies in the 'logic of difference': one where an articulatory practice is established, but only on the basis that each of its differential moments remain differential to each other, and thus don't become in some way equivalent. In this sense, whereas the logic of equivalence works on the basis of identifying a common enemy – and

hence enacts a simplification of the social space by dividing it into two – the logic of difference in effect does the opposite, emphasising the 'expansion and increased complexity' of the social as opposed to its simplification (ibid., p. 130).

At this point the most significant divergence with respect to Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity and Marx's lies in the former's abandonment of the principles of historical materialism. It is for this reason that Laclau's theory breaks all three conditions of Marx's. As established in the previous chapter, Marx's theory was based on his belief that, historically, revolutionary change was driven primarily by the needs of particular social classes – classes whose needs contradicted the established relations of production. It is precisely this narrative, however, that Laclau's theory finds problematic. For him, the identity of a revolutionary subject cannot be theorised until its hegemonic construction into such. From Laclau's perspective, whilst Marx might have made the distinction between the working class being a 'class against capital' and being a 'class for-itself', Marx had nevertheless taken the working class to be what he wanted it to be, and not what in fact it was (c.f. Gorz 1997, p. 20). In consequence, the 'fundamental impulse' of revolutionary change was always already understood as the objective interest of one particular identity, and from Laclau's analysis this is a fundamentally flawed logic. Abandoned at this point, then, is Marx's emphasis on '*one* foundational moment of rupture, and of a *unique* space in which the political is constituted' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 152, *original emphasis*).

Laclau's hostility to Marx's theory of historical materialism thus ensures that his early theory breaks the first condition to Marx's, but bearing in mind the theory of historical materialism also underpins the other conditions, Laclau's theory departs from them, too. In relation to the second condition, then, whilst Laclau's theory accepts the importance of some form of crisis for the constitution of revolutionary subjectivity, at this early stage his understanding of such crises is understood solely in subjective terms, with very little emphasis on the specificity of their objective or structural bases. In their discussion of the 'democratic revolution' that swept Europe in the eighteenth century, for example, whilst noting the significance of the French Revolution for the 'invention of democratic culture', here Laclau and Mouffe concentrate only on its subjective effects, understood primarily in terms of the subsequent 'discursive conditions' from which previous forms of inequality eventually become considered illegitimate (ibid., p. 155). At this stage, then, Laclau's notion of structural crisis emphasises only the importance of particular discourses which come to articulate them. What is clear, however, is the extent to which Laclau's theory diverges with the third condition to Marx's theory – i.e. that the recurrent nature of such crises can only be resolved via the foundational act of social revolution. Such a view, Laclau and Mouffe contend, would necessarily involve an attempt at instigating a 'fully sutured' form of the social. Any such attempt they add would necessarily lead only to totalitarianism (ibid., p. 187).

At this stage, then, the basis to Laclau's break with Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity is governed primarily by his rejection of the principles of historical materialism. Yet, in a sense this departure is governed also by the

retention of a concept which played a crucial role in Marx's own theory and indeed the theory of many Marxists after him: the concept of hegemony. In other words, the argument here is that despite his obvious attempts to distance his own theory of revolutionary subjectivity from Marx's, the (continued) strategic importance of the concept of hegemony complicates the extent to which he fully does so. After all, as argued in the previous chapter, whilst Gramsci might have theorised the concept at a deeper level, the necessity of strategic alliances in Marx's theory was already apparent. Despite this however, it is clear for Laclau that what Marx (and Gramsci) had in mind with respect to strategic alliances did not go as far as Laclau and Mouffe's notion of a 'chain of equivalence'.

If the retention of the Marxist category of hegemony was the first stage in the construction of Laclau's own theory of revolutionary subjectivity, the second was to reconsider 'socialist strategy' in light of both the development of different forms of capitalist domination, and indeed the emergence of new theoretical and ontological tools to examine them. In this sense Laclau's post-Marxism was as much a recovery as an abandonment, for as Laclau and Mouffe argued, alongside the increased commodification and bureaucratisation of social life, the development of new 'cultural forms', and the various transformations in the labour process, the social terrain had developed in a way that Marx himself could not possibility have truly foreseen. In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe's intervention should not be understood as a denial of the possibility of revolutionary subjectivity; indeed, for them the changes mentioned above had in fact multiplied the potential points of antagonism, giving rise to a number of discourses to articulate them, and thus forming new forms of critique to re-think them (ibid., pp. 162, 163; Laclau 1990, p. 45; Laclau and Mouffe 1987, p. 92). In this context, then, 'we are confronted with the emergence of a *plurality of subjects*, whose form of constitution and diversity it is only possible to think if we relinquish the category of "subject" as a unified and unifying essence' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 181, *original emphasis*).

'Dislocation'

Following an influential critique of Laclau and Mouffe's theory in the late 1980s by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Laclau turned to the Lacanian ontology of 'constitutive lack' as a means of both rethinking and strengthening aspects of his earlier theory. Here Žižek's (1990) argument was that if the concept of antagonism was rethought in Lacanian terms, Laclau and Mouffe could theorise the limits not only of the social but of the subject itself (Žižek 1990, p. 250). Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of the subject established that, due to repressed desires established during childhood, human beings are constituted by an internal primordial 'lack'; one that would persistently plague the individual and manifest itself in a variety of different forms. Whilst these desires remain largely unconscious, what nevertheless lingers is a 'promise or aspiration' to satisfy them (Stavrakakis 1999, pp. 26, 27). This ontological lack, then, is a constitutive lack

and 'the subject' is constituted on the basis of continually attempting to cover – or fill – it up. Thus for Lacanian social theorists the reason why Lacan's theory is so fruitful when applied to the realm of politics or ideology, is because one can explain individuals' political or ideological preferences on the basis that they are merely identifying with something that they believe will give them the completion that they so desire. In the eternal search for the lost identity embodied in the repressed 'Real', the individual and collective subject thus attempts to find completion in socio-political objects of identification; what Lacan called the 'object petit a' (i.e. ideology, political parties, advertised objects etc.). Hence as Stavrakakis points out, Lacan's theory of subjectivity 'can be relevant for socio-political analysis because it offers a "socio-political" conception of subjectivity', and, according to him Laclau's development of this theory has been 'crucial' in doing so (ibid., p. 38; Stavrakakis 2007, p. 71).[3] Laclau (2005) himself leaves no room for doubt when stating the influence of this theory for the construction of his own, arguing at one point that, when combined with the notion of hegemony, it holds the key to social ontology (Laclau 2005, p. 116).

Returning to Žižek's critique of the concept of antagonism, according to him what appears as an 'external' blockage to a fully sutured object is in fact an internal blockage in being as such: 'the true antagonism' as Norris (2002, p. 558) puts it, 'is not inter- but intra-personal'. Hence, the concept of antagonism 'in its most radical dimension' would see those articulated as 'the external enemy (as) simply the small piece, the rest of reality upon which we project or externalise this intrinsic, immanent impossibility' (Žižek 1990, p. 252). The impossibility of society, then, is in fact a reflection of the impossibility of the subject. Hence, following Žižek's critique a 'distinctive mark' was left on Laclau's work, one which saw him integrate into his theory the Lacanian notion of the subject before its subjectification into its respective subject position (Stavrakakis 2007, p. 66). According to Critchley and Marchart (2004) the key benefits for Laclau's theory as a whole was that he could now avoid the excesses of both voluntarism and structuralism (Critchley and Marchart 2004, pp. 5, 6). What followed was the introduction of the concept of 'dislocation'; a concept which allowed Laclau a means of situating the 'subject' within the gap of a given structure, which in consequence allowed him to occupy a relatively nuanced position within traditional debates concerning structure and agency (Howarth 2004, p. 264).

Critics of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* argued that Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of social change was excessively voluntarist; stipulating that, on the basis of the availability of a particular discourse, effectively anything was possible (Rustin 1988, p. 167; Osborne 1991). As indicated already, the problem here was Laclau's notion of (or lack thereof) structural crisis, and from this perspective the concept of dislocation can be understood as a means of addressing this issue.

Like Marx, for Laclau a crisis in an established structure is an essential pre-requisite for understanding the possibility of revolutionary subjectivity, and

3 For a critical perspective on Lacanian politics, see Robinson (2004).

despite the arguments advanced in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau (1990) agrees that crises are not simply the outcome of subjective agency alone. Despite this, Laclau insists that his notion of structural crisis is different from Marx's, and once again the key to understanding this difference lies in his hostility to Marx's Hegelian legacy. In this respect, just as Laclau and Mouffe differentiated their notion of antagonism from contradiction, Laclau argues that Marx's notion of structural crisis can only be understood on the basis of contradictions internal to capitalist development, all of which, from his reading at least must mean that they are 'part of a process whose direction is predetermined'. Alongside this, as we have seen, Marx believed that revolutionary subjectivity would emerge immanently to capitalist development itself. In this sense, then, the revolutionary subject was conceived as 'completely absorbed by the structure' (Laclau 1990, p. 41). Laclau's concept of dislocation denies the possibility of either a fully constituted structure or subject. The only way to theorise the latter, he argues, is in the dislocation of the former (ibid., p. 41). Hence, although the subject is always the result of a series of previous 'sedimented' practices, its possibility of freedom lies in the fact that the structure is never fully structured – it too, just like any subject's identity, is pierced by a degree of contingency. The subject is thus 'thrown up'; it is neither completely determined nor self-determining. In consequence – and here the signs of Lacanian theory become clear – 'self-determination can only proceed through processes of *identification*' (ibid., p. 44, *original emphasis*). For Laclau, then, the subject emerges in the gap of a dislocated structure, and constitutes itself (and its identity) through its identification with something which that structure was deemed lacking.

Through the concept of dislocation Laclau theorises the limits to both structure and subject, and as stated above, some form of crisis remains central for doing this. The question remains, however, as to the precise nature of structural dislocations – particularly in relation to capitalism. For Marx such crises could be explained on the basis of capital's objective contradictions, most specifically the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. According to Laclau, however, capitalist dislocations are not fully inscribed or immanent to capital. Rather, capitalist dislocations are quite unpredictable and represent a fundamental anomaly to preconceived notions of historical development. Interestingly, despite the obvious differences between his and Marx's own account, when providing historical examples of such crises Laclau does nevertheless appeal to the Marxist tradition; most specifically Marx's aforementioned flirtation with the notion of 'permanent revolution' and Trotsky's subsequent emphasis on 'uneven and combined development' (ibid., pp. 45–51). For Laclau, capitalist dislocations have five aspects: they are the result of an overdetermination of complex elements; they do not follow the logic of any pre-conceived model; they produce ambiguous effects which result only in their political articulation; the subjects which attempt to do this are external to the dislocated structure and their identities are modified as a result of the articulatory practice; and finally, the greater the dislocation the more indeterminate will be its political articulation (ibid., pp. 49–51).

Bringing this section to a close, Laclau's turn to the Lacanian notion of 'constitutive lack' served to supplement his earlier Foucauldian notion of 'subject positions' with the notion of the subject of lack within the structure (Laclau and Zac 1994, p. 37; Critchley and Marchart 2004, p. 5). For Laclau, any subject is neither fully internal nor fully external to the structure, but emerges in the void or gap within it: the subject's capacity for self-determination emerges through its identification with what is perceived to be lacking in the structure. Finally, the concept of dislocation is used by Laclau as a means of explaining the importance of crises in established social structures; particularly with respect to offering the possibility for a revolutionary subject to emerge. However, in Laclau's theory this process is clearly different from the theory of Marx. Once again, their respective differences concern the extent to which dialectics can be employed as a means of understanding such crises. Laclau's most complete explication of his mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity can be found in his most recent work, *On Populist Reason* (2005). It is here, as Gaonkar (2012) points out, that whilst one finds a variety of 'shifts in focus and accent, the basic "conceptual architecture" developed by Laclau since *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* remains very much the same' (Gaonkar 2012, pp. 192, 196). With this in mind, the three core elements to Laclau's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity are as follows.

Towards a Theory of Populism

According to Laclau (2005) the possibility of revolutionary subjectivity depends firstly on a very particular form of 'demand'; one which emerges in the 'gap' of a dislocated structure and hence represents something which is 'in excess of what is differentially representable within it' (Laclau 2005, p. 108). This demand can be understood in at least two senses: either as a 'request' or as a 'claim', both of which are dependent on how they become articulated and how or whether they are subsequently dealt with. If the demand remains at the level of a request, for example, it is more than likely to be met in a differential manner, and as such the matter is ended. However, when a demand remains unmet then the possibility arises that other equally unmet demands may start to link themselves together. Hence – linking back to earlier terminology – if these unmet demands cannot be met in a 'differential manner' (i.e. by dividing them or keeping them separate from each other) then a chain of equivalences may be established; one where all the unmet demands join together into a temporary unity. As in Laclau's earlier theory, what results is the establishment of an 'internal frontier' which separates the equivalential chain of unmet demands from the institutional order that is unwilling or unable to settle them (ibid., p. 74). With the successful formation of an equivalential chain, what were once thus 'democratic' isolated demands now develop into 'popular' collective ones. As established in Laclau's earlier theory however, the key to fusing an equivalential chain is the availability of particular

discourses and 'nodal points' that act to suture the various demands together. Only in this way can the initial solidarity of the popular camp be transformed into a 'stable system of signification' (ibid., p. 74). It is the unification of popular demands through a symbolic form of equivalence that lays the basis for the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity, and in populist discourses the name for this antagonistic subjectivity is more often than not, 'the people'.

In-line with Laclau's early theory the key to understanding the transformation of democratic into popular demands lies in the 'two ways of constructing the social': the dual logics of difference and equivalence (ibid., p. 77). When articulated by a logic of difference each demand asserts only their own particularity, and hence relate to each other merely in a differential manner. Here the establishment of an internal frontier does not occur, and neither does the possibility of revolutionary subjectivity (ibid., p. 78). Putting things slightly differently, revolutionary subjectivity can be understood on the basis of the tension between the particular and the universal. 'Pure particularism', Laclau argues, 'is a self-defeating exercise', one that leads to a 'political blind alley' (Laclau 1996a, p. 26; Laclau 1996b, p. 48). In an argument that will be reiterated in the thought of Negri and Badiou, for Laclau the transformation of democratic into popular demands to occur it must necessarily work through identity politics: one demand must dissolve itself and act to suture the rest into an equivalential chain (Laclau 2005, p. 81). Crucial to remember here, however, is that there is no underlying universal demand. As Critchley (2008) puts it, 'the universal is not read off the script of some pre-given ontology but posited in a specific situation' (Critchley 2008, p. 104). Universality thus remains a possibility, but it can only be a partial university, and must always be the result of its hegemonic construction into such.

At this point, then, the first stage of Laclau's mature theory concerns the transformation of democratic demands into popular demands on the basis of the construction of a chain of equivalence. For this to occur, however, there must be an establishment of an internal frontier. This is the second principle to Laclau's theory, and a useful way of understanding how this occurs is by dividing the concept of 'the people'. Since Roman times there has always been debate as to whether 'the people' signifies the whole of a political community or rather the disenfranchised 'part' (Canovan 2005, pp. 12, 15). Laclau (2005) takes this 'stubborn ambiguity' between the 'populus' and the 'plebs' a little further, arguing that the distinctiveness of populist discourse are their claims to be the only 'legitimate' form of the former – 'a particularity which wants to function as the totality of the community' (Laclau 2005, p. 81). In this sense 'the people' refers not to the totality of an existing community, but is rather the signifier (or name) that attempts to articulate the lack within it. For Marchart (2005, 2012) Laclau's latter emphasis on the 'performative aspect of naming' represents a key development in Laclau's theory of hegemony, and yet in essence its role is merely to reiterate one of his earlier theory's main claims: that revolutionary subjectivity does not pre-exist its hegemonic articulation into such. As stated above, the key 'name' traditionally provided by populist discourse is usually 'the people', although Laclau accepts there might be others (Laclau 2005, p. 73).

With the dual notions of the 'populus' and the 'plebs' there is an underlying division within the concept of 'the people', but for this division to become radical an antagonistic frontier must be established between them. For this to occur however, a dislocation is necessary in the established social or institutional order, for without one there is no perceivable 'gap' within which the subject can emerge. Without this initial breakdown of something in the social order', Laclau explains, 'there is no possibility of antagonism, frontier, or ultimately, 'people' (ibid.). As stipulated in earlier works however, in the context of an increasingly dislocated global capitalism both the sites of antagonism and the proliferation of subject positions (i.e. potential popular demands) makes the hegemonic construction of a 'people' much more complicated. As we will see, not only does the 'internal frontier' become increasingly indeterminate, but so too do the links that connect the equivalential chain. Much like in his early theory, then, Laclau not only problematises the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity but also addresses the issue of sustaining it.

Empty Signifiers and the Socially 'Heterogeneous'

The third and final element to Laclau's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity explores this dualism in more detail. What is it, in other words, that provides a temporary unity to an equivalential chain? To understand this we must return to the basic demand. As indicated above, every demand is always of a very particular nature, and yet contains within it the possibility of 'splitting' itself into becoming a 'signifier of a wider universality' (ibid., p. 95). In the very same instance, however, the particularity of other demands must also (temporarily) be put aside; there is, as Newman (2008) puts it, a kind of 'contamination' between the particular and the universal, and according to Laclau it is the tension between the two – both with respect to the initial demand which becomes universal and the others which remain at the level of the particular – which determines whether an equivalential chain will stand or fall (Newman 2008, p. 178). Central to this is the production of what Laclau calls 'empty signifiers'. Empty signifiers unite an equivalential chain through signifying the lack within a dislocated structure. More generally, empty signifiers denote the structural impossibility of full signification as such. There is no possibility, in other words, that a particular social order could ever fulfil the emergence of every social demand. This would effectively constitute a closed society – a proposition that Laclau's approach consistently rejects. Crucially however, whilst Laclau rejects the possibility of 'totality' in this sense – and hence the third condition to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – what he accepts as possible is the aspiration for totality, or as he puts it, the possibility of totality as a 'horizon and not a ground' (Laclau 2005, p. 71). It is this aspiration for closure that spurs continual acts of identification on the part of the subject, and its persistence ultimately signifies the subject's power of self-determination (Laclau 1990, p. 44).

The production of empty signifiers is a highly contingent exercise. For instance, appeals to notions such as 'freedom', or 'justice' can assume a number of different meanings depending on the way they are discursively articulated. Furthermore, the more inclusive this signifier is – i.e. the more it is able to amass a number of different demands – the more unstable it is likely to be. The wider an equivalential chain becomes, in other words, the progressively 'emptier' the signifier that united it becomes. The signifier of 'change' in Barack Obama's (2008) presidential campaign was a perfect example of this. Initially, 'change' might have meant something quite specific, of which, was meant to denote the 'lack' in the Bush administration. This could have articulated the lack in the health care system, the lack in banking reform etc. In time, however, the signifier 'change' seemed to become completely devoid of actual content, spiralling out of control and managing to unite an incredibly diverse set of social demands. Obama's problem, however, was that once he got into power this 'change' had to become something very specific, and as was witnessed with his attempts to reform the health care system, it was at this point that Obama's project became increasingly indeterminate.

The instability of empty signifiers is also intrinsically linked to the instability of the 'internal frontier' which they help establish. As we have seen, the internal frontier effectively draws a line between the demands that constitute an equivalential chain and the 'un-responsive power' that denies them. It is here that an antagonistic relation is established, and it is through the empty signifier that a distance is established between 'us' and 'them'. The question arises however as to how consistent this distance can be kept. If the internal frontier was somehow called into question the unity which it established would also be compromised. To explain this occurrence Laclau makes a useful distinction between empty signifiers and floating signifiers. A situation where an internal frontier remains absolutely immobile, according to Laclau is quite unlikely, and the reason for this is because when confronted with a powerful equivalential chain a threatened institutional order is likely to act tactically to defend itself. One way of doing this would be to interrupt its opponents' equivalential chain by responding to some of its demands in a differential manner. In this way, 'the *same* democratic demands receive the structural pressure of *rival* hegemonic projects' (Laclau 2005, p. 131). Hence through the 'suspending' of its meaning, the empty signifier assumes a 'floating' status in the sense that what it signifies becomes 'indeterminate between alternative equivalential frontiers' (ibid.). Although structurally different, then, the relationship between 'empty' and 'floating' signifiers boils down – once again – to the 'openness of the social' and the contingent nature of hegemonic politics.

The final aspect to Laclau's theory concerns the role of what he calls the 'socially heterogeneous'. If we recall, for Laclau the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity is dependent on the establishment of an internal frontier: a divide between the 'us' and the 'them'. As we have seen, this frontier stems from a structural dislocation – some form of crisis in an established institutional order. This dislocation effectively provides the space from which demands – either in the

form of requests or claims – emerge. Yet the question arises as to who is formative in making such demands. After all, this cannot be 'the people' because the people are just the retroactive 'name' or signifier that might – or might not – be given to the collective subjectivity that emerges after the internal frontier has been established. Laclau approaches this issue by noting the impossibility that all social demands can be included within an equivalential chain. For him, equivalential chains not only distinguish themselves against an unresponsive power, but also against demands that do not correspond with the chain itself (ibid., p. 139). Due to their un-inclusive nature these demands are effectively left stranded, and as such do not have access to the 'general space of representation'. For Laclau, this particular form of exclusion thus signifies not only a gap within the form of representation, but also a gap in the very nature representation itself: 'perfect representation' is in fact impossible (Laclau 1996c, pp. 98, 99). This 'exteriority' that characterises the limits of representation is what Laclau calls 'social heterogeneity', and it is the 'socially heterogeneous' that are thus decisive in establishing a new internal frontier (Laclau 2005, pp. 140, 150).

Somewhat predictably, in Laclau's schema the emergence of the socially heterogeneous cannot be explained dialectically (ibid., p. 149). Just like capitalist dislocations are a fundamental anomaly to the model of historical materialism, so too is the socially heterogeneous with respect to the hegemonic construction of 'the people'. In consequence, due to the fact that 'history is not a self-determined process', just like 'the people' the emergence and subsequent identity of the socially heterogeneous cannot be aprioristically foretold. It is thus social heterogeneity as opposed to social homogeneity that explains both the constitution of the social and the formation of a 'people'. As in earlier works Laclau argues that the increasingly dislocated nature of global capital provides 'no privileged points of rupture and contestation' and it is 'impossible to determine who the hegemonic actors will be'. The only thing we can really stipulate about the socially heterogeneous is that 'they will be the outsiders of the system, the underdogs' (ibid., p. 50). In this sense, as Marchart (2005) points out, the socially heterogeneous are akin to a 'necessary by-product of naming', and represent a kind of 'dislocation of the naming process' itself (Marchart 2005, pp. 17, 18). Whilst Marchart laments the fact that Laclau's earlier work didn't connect these two notions – heterogeneity and dislocation – once again the former can be understood as a means of reiterating the persistent theme regarding the contingent and openness of the social. Put slightly differently: 'there is a Real of the "people" which resists symbolic integration' (Laclau 2005, p. 152).

Laclau's Post-Marxism: An Assessment

The core to Laclau's dissatisfaction with Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity is its dialectical underpinnings. For him, 'the contingent dimension of politics cannot be thought within a Hegelian mould' (Laclau 2000b, p. 64). As

established earlier in this chapter, because of this Laclau breaks all three conditions underlying Marx's theory. The earliest manifestation of Laclau's attempt to break with Marx's Hegelian logic could be seen through his tentative attempts to rethink the importance of class. Drawing on Althusser's theory of overdetermination, Laclau was able to argue that collective subjectivity is articulated not simply through the struggle between the worker and capitalist at the immediate point of production, but through antagonistic projects that aimed to articulate a wider social identity at the level of politics and ideology. The complexity of this subjectivity thus could not be reduced to one element alone. For Laclau, the construction of a revolutionary subjectivity is precisely that – a construction. Even at that early point, it is clear that for Laclau there is nothing immanently revolutionary to any social identity, and whilst he accepts the possibility of its revolutionary subjectification he insists on its complex and protracted nature. Thus, Laclau's earliest attempt to rethink the nature of revolutionary subjectivity saw him confront the question of class reductionism. At this stage, however, due to his acceptance that – in the last instance – the constitution of social identity is determined by class struggle he does not abandon this reductionism completely.

Laclau and Mouffe's radicalisation of Althusser's theory of overdetermination allowed them the opportunity to do this. 'Purified from its excesses', Laclau (and Mouffe) could now construct a theory of revolutionary subjectivity free from what they regarded as Marxism's unsubstantiated focus on class (Stavrakakis 2004, p. 257). The emergent concept of antagonism allowed Laclau and Mouffe to argue that revolutionary subjectivity is not constructed on the basis of the contradiction between two fully constituted social identities with concomitant historical 'interests'. Rather, the constitution of revolutionary subjectivity could only be explained through reference to what denied these identities, and such a relation could not be ascribed a-priori via historical narrative. In short, as Žižek (2006) points out, it is Laclau's later distinction between dialectics and heterogeneity that lays the basis to his anti-Hegelianism, and from that his post-Marxism (Žižek 2006, p. 203). Revolutionary subjectivity is not something that can be explained by dialectical logic: revolutionary subjectivity can only be explained through definitely breaking with this logic (Laclau 2006, p. 665). Against any privileged identity inscribed aprioristically through an ontology of social class, revolutionary subjectivity is discursively constructed through the establishment of a chain of equivalence, one that divides the social space into two antagonistic camps, and is held together by an empty signifier that articulates what is deemed missing from the order it opposes. Through his rejection of dialectical logic, then, Laclau breaks with all three conditions that I identified in Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity: revolutionary subjectivity is not necessarily defined by productive labour, it does not emerge completely immanently to capitalism, and there can be no final closure of the social.

The (Continued) Issue of Class

Laclau's hostility to 'class reductionism' is perhaps the hallmark of his post-Marxism, from his earliest work to his latest. This aspect of his theory has led to an interesting debate with Slavoj Žižek. On the one hand Laclau accepts that, structurally, not all empty signifiers are equally able to unify an equivalential chain (Laclau 1996d, p. 43). Due to the 'unevenness of the social', there is an underlying structural inequality between the capacities of different empty signifiers to play this role. However, Laclau is also adamant that this does not offer the basis for deducing the importance of one subject position – i.e. class – over any other. For Žižek (2000), a specifically anti-capitalist equivalential chain cannot be one whereby true equivalence is established. 'I do not accept', he states, 'that all the elements which enter into hegemonic struggle are in principle equal: in the series of struggles (economic, political, feminist, ecological, ethnic etc.) there is always *one* which, while is part of the chain, secretly overdetermines its very horizon' (Žižek 2000, p. 320). Žižek's claim, in other words, is that social class remains strategically more important than the other links in the chain. Laclau's response to Žižek's argument is predictable, and I will return to it below. My interest at this point is to consider in more detail Laclau's comments on class. Evidenced as early as *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, aside from the more generic philosophical rejection of 'essentialism' one of the key reasons why Laclau rejects the significance of class is to attack class reductionism: the idea that, at base, revolutionary subjectivity will always be 'sutured' by class. In more sociological terms however, Laclau has consistently dicussed the development of capitalism itself and the ensuing modifications on conventional class structures; modifications which, according to him have diminished the importance of class as a fundamental 'nodal point' – or in later works 'empty signifier' – for identity formation. Hence, due to the various 'structural changes in capitalism' class identity has become less and less important, and perhaps even obsolete. To support his claims here Laclau cites a number of different examples, ranging from the drastic decline in the working class' 'absolute numbers and structural organisation', its 'internal splits', its 'participation in a generalized mass culture', the growing importance of unemployment, the disappearance of the peasantry, rises in higher education, and the inclusion of more women into the labour market (Laclau 2000a, p. 206; Laclau 2000c, pp. 299, 300).

Such changes are well-versed, and there can be no doubt that the global contours of class have shifted significantly. Indeed, as Therborn (2012) has recently argued, if the social history of the twentieth century was 'clearly the age of the working class', what lies ahead is much less certain (Therborn 2012). We will see in the next chapter that these very shifts form the basis to quite a different form of post-Marxism in the work of Antonio Negri. Unlike Negri, however, what is interesting about Laclau's analysis is that, whilst keen to discuss the decline of a particular form of class 'identity' – that embodied in the industrial working class – he is much less keen to discuss the changing nature of class *tout court*. Far

from spelling an 'end of', in other words, some commentators have argued that an analysis of such changes might in fact enrich our understanding of new forms of class antagonism today. Indeed as Nick Thoburn (2007) has noted, although one might accept that traditional forms of working class subjectivity have experienced a relative decline – particularly in the West – this is not a sufficient basis to argue it signals the 'demise of class itself' (Thoburn 2007, p. 87). Thus whilst Laclau's theory has been significant for questioning the a priori privilege of working class identity in the construction of revolutionary subjectivity, some have argued that he inadvertently inherits some of the deficiencies of precisely the same model of class that his work has always sought to criticise. According to De Angelis (2005), for example, whilst Laclau and Mouffe's critique of the economism of orthodox Marxism was 'well founded', because they didn't properly question the reduction of class to waged labour they reproduced the very limitations of orthodox Marxism itself. More seriously, the consequences of this important omission are that Laclau and Mouffe's project essentially avoids positing the 'emancipation of capital as the central problematic of any emancipatory politics' (De Angelis 2007, pp. 172, 173). This claim is reiterated by Sherman (2011), who argues that 'by rejecting all references to class in his own political theory, it is Laclau who abstracts from the sociohistorical contents of subjectivity, thereby leaving subjectivities that are the very stuff of capitalist ideology to enter his overdetermined marketplace of proliferating agnostic discourses' (Sherman 2011, p. 97).

A related problem with Laclau's understanding of class is the way he consistently frames it through the question of identity. If we recall Laclau's principal problem with Marxist class analysis was that it believed this identity to be fully constituted, and because of this avoided the question as to how it became central for both individual and collective subjectivity. The concept of 'antagonism' was designed precisely as a means of decentring this assumption, revealing the underlying and continual limits to any identity. Hence – and perhaps due to Laclau's Lacanian ontology of 'lack' – Laclau's approach is only willing to conceptualise class in terms of a specific form of identification; i.e. 'class politics' as a more generic form of 'identity politics', one which as we have seen Laclau regards as becoming 'less and less important in the world that we live' (Laclau 2000a, p. 203). Some have questioned the usefulness of such an approach. Norris (2002) for example, points out that using 'identity as a prism through which to understand all political action' could prove problematic, particularly if crises 'cannot be understood primarily in terms of the loss, constitution, and negotiation of identity' (Norris 2002, p. 565). More generally, Thoburn (2007) argues that class is not 'a category of identity but is a perspective for approaching the continuous combat to configure life in the form against that which would resist it, and the forms of subjectivity that arise from that struggle' (Thoburn 2007, p. 87). In this sense class is not so much a process of identification, but of classification, or as I shall point out shortly in the work of Jacques Rancière, a process of *de*-classification. One good example of shifting the focus from 'class' to 'classification' – or rethinking the relationship between class and class struggle – can be found in the work of the British Marxist historian Edward Palmer Thompson.

The starting point for Thompson's (1995) notion of class was establishing the latter as a historical relationship, one between 'real people and context'. Just like any other relationship, class cannot be frozen into something static (such as a structural identity), as this would immediately annul what is historically specific about it. According to Thompson then, class is ultimately something that 'happens', and although he accepts that class *experience* is 'largely determined by the productive relationships into which men are born', the *consciousness* of this experience is largely a cultural phenomenon and thus cannot be reduced to production relations alone (Thompson 1995, p. 131). The danger, Thompson accepts, is that class can all too easily be treated as a 'thing'; as a pre-established identity that people adopt simply on the basis of their structural positioning in the relations of production. When one assumes that class is structurally determined by production relations alone, Thompson argues, there is a similar tendency to assume that one's class consciousness must necessarily correspond to one's class experience. Historically, he points out, this was precisely where the debates concerning 'false consciousness' emerge, and from this the perceived necessity of the tactical appendage of the Leninist vanguard party (ibid., p. 132). But according to Thompson, there is another way to conceptualise class without falling into this 'squalid mess', one that furthermore would avoid charges of 'essentialism'. For Thompson, it is not the case that classes exist and then struggle to protect their pre-existing identities or 'interests'. Rather, both class and class interests are established through the very process of class struggle itself: class is constituted through class struggle (ibid., p. 136).

Another example of how class and class struggle can be pulled away from Laclau's emphasis on identity politics can be found in the work of Jacques Rancière. Rancière's work is important because, on the one hand his political theory is strikingly similar to Laclau's, and yet on the other – albeit in a different way to Thompson – he is also unwilling to dispense completely with notions such as class and class struggle. The similarities to Laclau's approach are five-fold. Firstly, for Rancière (1999) any community is always built on an essential exclusion, and this exclusion is established on the basis of the way in which a community 'counts' its respective parts. What Rancière calls a 'disagreement' arises through a discrepancy of this count, where those that are not counted come to demand that they are. Politics is thus characterised by an interruption, one which is instigated by 'the part that has no part', the 'parts of the community that are not real parts of the social body' (Rancière 1999, p. 21). Through a major dysfunction in the count – secondly – the space which constitutes the social is divided into two antagonistic logics: one which both counts and assigns each part their respective place within the whole, and one which identifies a 'wrong' and, on the basis of an axiom of equality, acts to address it. The former Rancière calls the logic of 'the police' or 'policing', and the latter is what he calls 'politics'. Politics, Rancière explains, is thus an activity directly antagonistic to policing; it is one which demonstrates the 'contingency' of policing, and 'makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only

a place for noise' (ibid., p. 30). Politics is a radical declaration of equality at the heart of an order that denies it (ibid., pp. 31, 32).

A third similarity to Laclau's theory is that, according to Rancière, it is the antagonism between these logics that instigates the process of revolutionary subjectification. Politics does not pre-exist the 'processing of a wrong', and neither can any subject of politics. There is in other words, no pre-existing universal subjectivity outside the particularity of the wrong. Hence, the process of subjectivization produces 'a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experiences, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience' (ibid., p. 35). Fourthly, for Rancière subjectivization not only constitutes revolutionary subjectivity, but in the process transforms it also. The reason for this is because any challenge to the in-egalitarian logic of the police necessarily challenges the placement or identity previously established through the (discredited) count. In this sense, then, subjectivization is not so much a process of identification but one of a dis-identification (ibid., p. 36). Despite this apparent difference between Laclau's and Rancière's theory, for the latter any dis-identification is also necessarily an identification with something else, and for Rancière as in Laclau the generic name that signifies the 'gap' between the two logics described above is 'the people'. It is 'the people', he explains, that is 'the name of a political subject … a supplement in relation to all logics of counting the population, its parts and its whole' (Rancière 2010, p. 85). Again however, this subject can never pre-exist the identification of a particular wrong; it has no pre-conceived interests to satisfy, and hence cannot 'pre-exist the moment which it comes into being' (Rancière 1999, p. 41). Finally, like Laclau, Rancière accepts that there is nothing intrinsically revolutionary about the subjectivity of the people, due simply to the fact that the logic of the police can always act to temper the radical nature of 'the wrong itself'. In this sense, furthermore, there is no question that all wrongs will ever be fully extinguished: 'the persistence of the wrong is infinite because verification of equality is infinite (Rancière 1999, p. 39).

Despite the numerous similarities with Laclau's approach, as stated above Rancière is much less willing to abandon all notions of 'class struggle', even if his understanding of such a notion is also significantly different from Marx's. Building on Marx's idea that the proletariat was the universal force that would lead to the dissolution of all class, Rancière argues that the 'proletariat' was best understood not in terms of a positive socio-economic identity, but that of a more general 'operator of declassification' (Blechman, Chari, and Hasan 2005, p. 287). For Rancière then, the proletariat was the name that signified the gap between the logic of the police and the logic of equality. The proletariat thus signified a 'class that is not a class', a 'part that has no part'. Hence, Rancière resists Laclau optimism with respect to the proletariat's terminological decline on the basis of the power it once had. The proletariat in other words, acted as 'the symbolic inscription of "the part of those who have no part", a supplement which separates the political community from any count of the parts of society' (ibid., p. 289). In Laclau's terms the proletariat was once the 'empty signifier'; an 'open name for the uncounted'

(ibid., p. 290). For Rancière (and as I shall point out in Chapter 6, Badiou too) the proletariat – or the 'figure of the worker' – remains important today because of what it once represented, and according to him with its terminological decline, nothing as formidable has yet stepped into its place to play that role. It should be clear that both Rancière's notion of class struggle and his usage of the term 'proletariat' are markedly different from Marx's, especially the way that he is so keen to dissociate it from any specific socioeconomic referent.[4] Nevertheless, it seems also that Rancière's explicit retention of some of Marx's key concepts represents a distinct alternative to Laclau's persistent efforts at abandoning them, rightly or not.

Bringing this discussion of Laclau's treatment of class and class struggle to a close, I wish now to return to Slavoj Žižek's earlier point with respect to the unity and equivalence of equivalential chains. If we recall, Žižek's claim was that he did not believe that all elements constitutive of the latter were – or could be – truly equivalent. Žižek's rationale here is that the very possibility of Laclau's claims regarding the diminishing importance of class struggle is, paradoxically, the result of class struggle itself (Žižek 2000, p. 320; Žižek 2006, p. 188). In other words, for Žižek the structural dislocations in capitalism cited by Laclau – persistently as we have seen – cannot be explained in isolation from the workers' struggles of the past. We will see in the next chapter how Antonio Negri's form of post-Marxism is formed using the very same logic. For Žižek, then, it is the class struggle between workers and capitalists that must ultimately constitute the heart of any anti-capitalist equivalential chain. The latter, he explains 'structures in advance *the very terrain* on which the multitude of particular contents fight for hegemony' (ibid., *original emphasis*). In a sense, Žižek's claims at this point reiterate a debate that stemmed from Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) original intervention. At issue here, in other words, concerns the relationship between the structural (objective) location of the working class and the desirability (possibility) of anti-capitalist transformation. Norman Geras (1987) for instance, argued forcefully that the suggestion that all subject positions are equally placed in the struggle for socialism was an 'idealism run wild' (Geras 1987, p. 81). Echoing the later Žižek, Geras argued that the working class wasn't just any subject position. Owing to its objective placement in the relations of production it remained the principal subjectivity that was most able to constitute the heart of any successful anti-capitalist movement. Against Laclau and Mouffe's claims otherwise, it was as he put it 'mere fancy to think that the social agent subordinated by this relation (the relation of capital) could be anything but central to the project of its abolition' (ibid., p. 81). More recently this has been reiterated by Therborn (2012), who, whilst confirming Laclau's insistence that no 'leading role' for 'social alliances on which future transformations will

4 Although Laclau accepts the similarities between Rancière's approach to political subjectivity and his own, he remains unconvinced by Rancière's attempt to rework the notion of class and class struggle. As he bluntly explains, 'I do not see the point of talking about class struggle simply to add that it is the struggle of classes that are not classes' (Laclau 2005, p. 248).

base themselves' could be 'assigned in advance', nevertheless insists that 'even the best social movements are unlikely to overcome the inequalities of modern capitalism' (Therborn 2012, p. 26). In sum, there are clearly problems regarding Laclau's treatment of class, either with respect to how he filters the issue through the Lacanian notions of 'lack' and identification, or concerning the question as to whether one subject position remains strategically central for the constitution of an anti-capitalist equivalential chain.

Discourse and 'Interests'

Many of the initial critical responses to *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* focused both on Laclau and Mouffe's reading of the Marxist tradition and their respective theory of discourse. The heated debates with Norman Geras – conducted through the journal *New Left Review* – were a good example of the former. No doubt, Geras's charge that Laclau and Mouffe had actively sought to impoverish the history of Marxist thought summed up a tide of reaction from those on the traditional left (Geras 1987; Wood 1988). I will return to some of Geras's points below. For now, what I want to focus on is the issue of 'discourse'. If we recall, the elementary claim by Laclau and Mouffe was that all 'objectivity' is discursively constructed, including most importantly the 'social' itself (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 112). More specifically, it is discourses which articulate the crises stemming from particular antagonisms and/or dislocations, either on the basis of a logic of difference or a logic of equivalence. Initially, critics charged Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse for its supposed linguistic idealism (Osborne 1991, p. 209). According to this reading, material reality had effectively been dissolved into ideas or language. This critique, however, entirely missed the specificity of their theory, for what they in fact sought to argue was not whether something would or wouldn't exist outside of its discursive articulation, but whether it would be meaningful or not (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. 108; Laclau and Mouffe 1987, pp. 82, 84; Smith 1998, p. 85). At this level of abstraction, reference to tangible objects in this way seems logical. When applied to the notion of 'interests', however, one could argue that things begin to get more problematic. If we recall, Laclau's problem with Marx's emphasis on objective 'interests' was that he believed that they stemmed automatically from their structural location within capitalist social relations. In Laclau's reading these interests were not hegemonically articulated, but existed aprioristically; projected onto the working class by Marx's theory of historical materialism.

Returning to the disagreement between Laclau and Žižek above, Laclau's (2006) response to Žižek's claim that class struggle precedes the struggle for hegemony is, once again predictable. For him Žižek's approach represents an 'ultra-leftist liquidation of the political', based on a logic that working class interests emerge 'without any kind of genetic process' (Laclau 2006, pp. 657, 667). From Laclau's

perspective material 'interests' cannot be deduced – or rather reduced – in such a manner. As stated above however, in light of the previous discussion of discourse this raises interesting questions. Interests are clearly not tangible entities, and hence cannot strictly be said to exist prior to their discursive articulation. In their response to Geras, Laclau and Mouffe (1987) make this point quite clear: 'Ours is not a criticism of the notion of 'interests' but of their supposedly *objective* character: that is to which they are not conscious … Interests, then, are a social product and do not exist independently of the consciousness of the agents who are the bearers' (Laclau and Mouffe 1987, p. 96). Hence, for Laclau revolutionary subjectivity cannot be explained through reference to objective interests that are deemed to exist independently of a social agent's awareness of them. One certainly cannot rely on a philosophy of history which inscribes such interests aprioristically. Thus, as Wood (1986) has pointed out, Laclau and Mouffe's point is not just the rather banal idea that material interests do not automatically translate themselves into practical ones. The real issue is the wider claim that 'material interests do not *exist* unless they are translated into political objectives and concerted political action' (Wood 1986, p. 61).

There are important political consequences that stem from this way of thinking. Firstly, some have issued concerns about the role of elites and intellectuals in providing the discourse to which such 'interests' might be created. According to Wood (1982) for example, Laclau and Mouffe's discursive approach tends to shift the focus away from the struggle and self-capacities of those subordinated, to the unique abilities of those who are better placed to articulate them, particularly intellectuals or politicians (Wood 1982, p. 72; Robinson and Tormey 2009, p. 139). More generally, Robinson (2005) has questioned the sort of politics which stems from adopting Lacanian ontology, arguing in particular that it is inherently conservative and ultimately 'leads to an acceptance of social exclusion which negates compassion for its victims' (Robinson 2005). The latter point is certainly an interesting one, and serves well to reveal the relationship between ontology and politics. I will return to discuss this further towards the end of this book. The previous point – concerning the role of elites and intellectuals – can be taken-up once again via Laclau's mature notion of empty signifiers. We noted earlier Laclau's willingness to accept that there is an underlying inequality with respect to which particular demand can become the site of universality. In other words, due to the 'unevenness of the social' some subject positions are – in some way – more capable of presenting their own particular demand as the 'surface of inscription' of all the others. There are two points I would like to make here. Firstly, as Griggs and Howarth (2000) point out in relation to their analysis of environmental protests, there is the question of differential access, time, and capabilities which are likely to prove essential for making a particular demand visible or audible enough for the possibility of it becoming hegemonic. Alongside this, there is also the issue of how organisational form might impact directly on the establishment – and consistency – of an equivalential chain. In his critical review of Laclau's early theory of populism, Mouzelis (1978) makes

some very similar observations. According to him, although Laclau's theory had made some 'penetrating' observations, its main deficiency lay in the fact that he did not consider the 'organisational implications' associated with transforming popular democratic interpellations into something antagonistic (Mouzelis 1978, pp. 50–53). One suggestion at this point, then, would be a deeper and more concrete analysis of both the internal limits and possibilities within the dynamics of not only equivalential chains in general, but also equivalential chains associated with particular transformative movements. This line of enquiry will prove particularly important for the work of Antonio Negri, to be discussed in the next chapter.

A second potential problem with Laclau's theory of the empty signifier concerns the dual issues of state power and representation, the former of which forces us to re-visit the relationship between the third condition to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity to Laclau's. In other words, whilst Laclau's theory rejects Marx's emphasis on change at the level of totality – discussed in more detail below – there is nothing to this theory that rejects the necessity of either the seizure or retention of state power. Indeed, alongside his emphasis on the necessity of some form of order Laclau also insists that representation is 'crucial for the constitution of political identities' (Laclau 2012, p. 392). Many commentators at this point have queried the complicity of Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity with liberal-democratic politics, and in consequence have questioned just how 'radical' Laclau's theory is. Day (2005) for example argues that 'post-Marxism and liberalism rely upon a similar *logic*, a logic of representation of interests within a state-regulated system of hegemonic struggles. The expected outcome of the representation of a situation of inequality or lack of rights is *recognition* of the oppressed identity by the state apparatus' (Day 2005, p. 75).[5] A similar line of contention is advanced by Robinson and Tormey (2009), who argue amongst other things that Laclau's approach is unable to 'theorise forms of social movements beyond the state form'. For these authors – including Day (2005) – many contemporary social movements successfully avoid both 'leadership or representative structures', managing instead to further their own 'goals, objectives and meanings immanently or between members on a dialogical, reciprocal or horizontal basis' (Robinson and Tormey 2009, p. 150).

Despite these problems, as will be argued in more detail below it is clear that Laclau remains committed to some form of 'radical democracy', and his theory of the empty signifier is central to it. For Laclau the production of empty signifiers is crucial for any form of democracy, which – countering criticisms levelled above – 'is only radical if it involves an effort to give a political voice to the underdog' (Laclau 2004a, p. 295). As established however, the main importance of empty signifiers is that they keep the 'gap' in the social open, ensuring the continual emergence of and competition between different discourses – and the subsequent

5 In my view Day's (2005) characterisation of post-Marxism is overly simplistic, for as outlined in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that not all forms of post-Marxism operate with the same assumptions.

interests the latter articulate. In this sense it is worth noting here one of the most consistent aspects to Laclau's theory: the rejection of any fully constituted form of the social. Relating back to the third condition to Marx's theory, that final synthetic moment – the end of class antagonism – is thus wholeheartedly rejected. What is maintained however, and indeed what remains crucial for Laclau's theory on a whole, is of course the aspiration for such wholeness.

At this point, and interestingly from the point of view of this study, some have questioned the relationship between Laclau's post-Marxism and more 'orthodox Gramscian conception [s] of hegemonic practices'. Wenman (2003), for example, argues that whilst Laclau certainly rejects the possibility of a fully sutured totality (i.e. society), what his theory retains is the over-riding emphasis on the '*struggle* for society-as-totality' (Wenman 2003, pp. 338–51). In Laclau's theory, then, this struggle assumes an 'ahistorical ontological status'; one which emphasises the possibility of the hegemonic construction of a particular revolutionary subject, but of course rejects its a priori historical inscription in any given identity. According to Wenman, it could be argued that Laclau's post-Marxism 'is built around a *fetishism* of the category of totality' (Wenman 2003, pp. 558–91). From this perspective the complexity of Laclau's enduring relationship to Gramsci appears to confirm my thesis as to the complexity of Laclau's post-Marxism. Going one step further, despite it being central to his whole approach, some have even questioned the extent to which Laclau really does abandon notions of an underlying historical political subject. According to Marchart (2005), for example, in Laclau's mature work the notion of 'the people' appears to have a 'double appearance'. On the one hand 'the people' can be understood as a recurrent empty signifier which establishes an internal frontier and constitutes an equivalential chain. On the other, however, Marchart argues that 'the people' might in fact play a more fundamental role in Laclau's theory. For Marchart, then: 'Laclau's decision of *naming* the subject of the political amounts to the wager that a subject of the political exists to begin with' (Marchart 2005, p. 11).

Which Subjectivity? Which Frontier? Which Revolution?

Despite its apparent ambiguity, there is no doubt that 'the people' plays a central role in Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. As we have seen, however, the people's emergence cannot occur until a deficiency in a particular institutional order has been identified. After all, this is the precondition for the establishment of an internal frontier, an equivalential chain, and thus the performative dimension of the empty signifier. The emergence of a people, then, using Rancière's terms is dependent on *someone* identifying a primary 'wrong'. By Laclau's logic this cannot be 'the people' because 'the people' are nothing but the (potential) retroactive signifier that establishes the frontier in the first place. It is not 'the people' that establish an internal frontier but the 'socially heterogeneous' (Laclau 2005, p. 150). From this point of view, one could argue that the revolutionary subjectivity

of 'the people' is in fact directly dependent on the revolutionary subjectivity of the 'outsiders'. It is this 'substratum' or this 'remainder' that is crucial for understanding the political constitution of 'the people', and yet it is this aspect of Laclau's theory that – necessarily – he cannot really tell us much about. All we can really know is: (a) that their emergence cannot be explained dialectically; (b) strictly speaking they do not have a name (or identity); and (c) that they are the 'residue' of the construction of a previous 'people'. Hence whilst crucial for Laclau's theory on a whole a number of unanswered questions remain: do the socially heterogeneous have to be a collective subjectivity? What is the logic of their emergence? Despite these issues, as stated earlier the notion of heterogeneity serves well to differentiate Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity from Marx's, particularly with respect to the Hegelian underpinnings of the latter. The socially heterogeneous he states bluntly, 'have occupied centre stage to the point of shattering the very notion of teleological historicity. So forget Hegel' (Laclau 2005, p. 148).

Through identifying something deemed lacking in an institutional order, the socially heterogeneous are thus critical for establishing an internal frontier, from which an eventual 'people' can emerge. Yet, one of the most persistent critiques of Laclau's approach to theorising this process is an apparent normative ambivalence with respect to which 'internal frontier' he would – himself – like to see established. For example, one of Geras's (1987) most pertinent claims was that, due to Laclau and Mouffe's eagerness to highlight the openness and contingency of the social, the result was that they did not sufficiently establish a normative basis for any politics of their own (Geras 1987, pp. 69, 76, 77; Rustin 1988, p. 173). At issue here is whether this represents an internal deficiency to the specificity of Laclau's discursive approach. Lundbert (2012) for example, states that 'the greatest virtues of Laclau's version of the political stem from his relentlessly persistent application of a formal, almost structuralist account of the political' (Lundberg 2012, p. 304). The downside to this however, is a distinct detachment on Laclau's part with respect to his willingness to provide his own normative prescriptions.[6] One response to this might be that, in fact, it is clear that Laclau has always been committed to 'radical democracy'. This is certainly the argument of Gaonkar (2012), who argues that the most enduring aspect of Laclau's oeuvre is his fidelity to 'democratic politics and its radical egalitarian possibilities of our time' (Gaonkar 2012, p. 196). Despite this however, as Wenman (2003) puts it, until relatively recently Laclau was 'notoriously elusive regarding the ethico-political dimension of his work' (Wenman 2003, p. 582).

Prompted once again by Žižek (2000), Laclau's attempt to deal with this issue can be found in his discussion of the 'radical investment' associated with

6 As Simon Critchley (2004) points out, 'If the theory of hegemony is simply the description of a positively existing state of affairs, then one risks emptying it of any critical function, that is, of leaving open any space between things as they are and things as they might otherwise be' (Critchley 2004, p. 117). For Laclau's response to the specificity of Critchley's argument see Laclau (2004).

different respective empty signifiers. According to him no particular normative order is ethically preferable in-itself, and the only basis for deciding as much is through the degree of attachment or 'investment' that a people decide to place in it (Laclau 2000b, p. 81). Hence, for Laclau the varying degrees of 'unevenness' between differential discourses cannot be explained by the relative merits of a particular order, for the 'unstable relation between the ethical and the normative' is something that is established through the logic of hegemony itself. It is the subject that decides as to what is both ethical and normative, not the discourse theorist. Through the act of 'decision', then, the subject decides what ethical and normative order is best suited to fulfil their particular demand. Furthermore, although the ethical investment in a particular normative order is contingent in the sense that it cannot be deduced aprioristically – external to the decision itself – the subject who takes this decision is never a pure subject: 'he is also a background of sedimented practices organising a normative framework which operates as a limitation on the horizon of options' (ibid., p. 83).

Conclusion

If one follows Laclau's discursive logic there is thus no particular discourse or no particular order that is better or worse – in-itself – than any others. The only way in which this can be determined is through analysing the level of attachment a 'people' invest in it. In this sense Laclau's analysis is uninterested in the wider ethical question as the nature of the order chosen: 'it is not relevant' (ibid., p. 85). What is important however, is that a people choose *an* order, and in so doing avoid the space of the social collapsing into disorder (Laclau 2005, p. 88). As we have seen, in this sense whilst Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity breaks all three conditions to Marx's, to some extent there is an aspect of the third which remains in-tact, and this lies in the necessity of either seizing or retaining some form of state power. Like Marx, then, Laclau is not an anarchist, and despite the fact that his theory of revolutionary subjectivity is quite clearly post-Marxist he has certainly not given up rethinking the question of emancipation *tout court* (Ŝumič 2006, p. 182). Indeed, the guarded optimism of Laclau's theory is built precisely on his abandonment of what he sees as the deterministic – Hegelian – aspects of Marx's (Laclau and Mouffe 1987, p. 80; Laclau 1996e, p. 2). Despite this, we have raised two inter-related issues at this point, and they should be reiterated. Firstly there are questions regarding exactly what normative order such emancipation should bring about. With this – secondly – there is also the question as to whether such emancipation can be achieved within the established institutional frameworks of capitalist society. I reiterate these issues at this point because in the thought of Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou there is certainly no such ambiguity. I will turn now to the former.

Chapter 5
Antonio Negri – Self-valorisation and 'The Project of the Multitude'

Introduction

Antonio Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity emerged through his involvement in Italian post-war politics, and the *Operaismo* current of Marxist theory that developed in Italy during that time. Negri's early theory develops via his notion of proletarian self-valorisation. This theory built creatively on the tradition of *Operaismo* and argued that revolutionary subjectivity involved not just the resistance to capitalist exploitation, but also its creative supersession. The nature of Negri's post-Marxism is established at this point, not only through a particular reading of Marx, but more importantly through Lenin via the key Marxian problematic of organisational form. After turning to Spinoza in the 1980s to provide his early theory with a more positive – ontological – foundation, Negri's mature theory is developed in his co-authored work with Michael Hardt. Whilst articulating the changes in contemporary forms of labour, Negri continues to highlight its subversive possibilities. Whilst Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity remains much closer to Marx's than Laclau's, it shares the latter's hostility to Marx's philosophy of history. As with Laclau, however, the ontological foundations to Negri's theory have particular consequences, and these will form the basis to the closing discussion.

Operaismo

In a similar way to Laclau and his experience of populism in Argentina, Antonio Negri's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity was heavily conditioned by the social and political context in Italy at that time. During the immediate post-war period the body of the Italian workforce – particularly in the north – changed drastically on the premise that 'modernisation' was deemed necessary for Italy's ensuing post-war 'economic miracle' (Wright 2002, p. 7). This restructuring was achieved in a variety of ways, all of which would be of major interest for those trying to understand why the labour movement found itself so defenceless during that period. Alongside selective redundancies, increased surveillance, strategic migration and modifications to the labour process, the traditional organs of working class power were targeted directly. Considered as 'the internal enemy' and 'illegitimate potential participants', both the unions and left-wing parties were

excluded from government and the factories respectively (Ginsborg 1990, p. 187; Lumley 1990, p. 21). Alongside this, most existing trade union activists were the northern, male, semi-skilled workers still infused with the collective memories of the past; not those brought in from the south, who were unskilled and un-politicised (Lumley 1990, p. 24).

Alongside these problems in the factory grew tensions in society at large. Housing and living conditions were particularly strained, and the parties' inability to deal with these issues did nothing to foster workers' confidence in existing political institutions (Ibid., p. 28). In short, both the parties and the unions got left behind. Throughout the 1960s, however, spurred by a relative shift in their fortunes, a particularly aggressive workers' movement emerged; one that clawed back some of the bargaining power it had lost in the previous decade. These struggles assumed the form of a generalised 'refusal of labour'; ranging from innovative and unexpected strikes, sabotage, factory occupations, and organised slowdowns. Crucially, these struggles were also characterised by an ability and willingness to shun the officialdom of both the unions and parties, establishing autonomous forms of collective action outside and at times against their official sanction. In this context, a group of militant young scholars gradually began to pull themselves away from the orthodox concerns of their respective institutional alliances (Wright 2002, p. 15). In journals such as *Quaderni Rossi* and *Class Operaia* a particular blend of Marxist theory began to emerge – what became known as *Operaismo.*[1]

For the early *Operaisti* the most immediate theoretical task was to rethink the relationship between capital and labour. According to Mario Tronti (1979, p. 1), for too long had Marxist theory theorised class struggle as a mere reactive phenomenon. An inversion was needed: 'to reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and at the beginning is the class struggle of the working class'. Whether one regards this as a 'theoretical regression' (Lumley 1980, p. 129), a 'Copernican inversion' (Moulier 2005, p. 19) or simply for its 'scandalous novelty' (Wright 2002, p. 63), its importance as a fundamental axiom for the development of Negri's thought cannot be overstated. For Tronti, far from being the mere re-active objects of capitalist exploitation it was working class struggle that 'sets the pace' to which capitalist development was ultimately subordinate. Indeed, even in its objective form of being a 'class against capital', Tronti was keen to reiterate the fact that the key commodity which lay at the heart of the capitalist system lay in their hands: capital has no 'active life' without labour power. 'The simplest of revolutionary truths', he stated, was that 'capital cannot destroy the working class: [but] the working class can destroy capital (Tronti 1979b, pp. 10, 18). Yet, whilst living labour was indeed the dynamic element to capitalist society it had, nevertheless, to be subordinated to the dictates of capitalist accumulation. The

1 For more on the history of *Operaismo* see Wright (2002), and more recently the excellent collection of articles of that period, many of which are translated into English for the first time, in Filippini and Macchia (2012).

question remained, however, as to what would capital's response be if the working class set a pace to which it could not follow.

Raniero Panzieri (1921–1964) was to offer the most significant answer. For Panzieri (1980) throughout the history of its development, capital had repeatedly used technology as a means of strategically decomposing working class power. Such a view was gleaned from a collective re-reading of Marx, particularly the chapters in *Capital* that dealt with the development of the division of labour and the consequent growth and implementation of machinery in the factory (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 50). Against what he saw as the complicit union strategy of the time, Panzieri argued that far from being a mere 'passing phase … a painful but necessary transition', the capitalist use of machinery was used specifically for deepening its existing domination and offering 'new possibilities for the consolidation of its power' (Panzieri 1980, p. 49). At this point Panzieri's insights would be enriched by a series of 'workers' enquiries' held in the factories of Fiat and Olivetti (Wright 2002, p. 46). Here the key concept of 'class composition' would emerge; one which as Negri (2008a) explains, involves a dual analysis of both the 'technical' and 'political' characteristics of productive subjectivity (Negri 2008a, p. 105). Technically, class composition refers to the objective characteristics of labour itself, i.e. the way in which it is organised, the tools that it uses, the commodities that it produces, etc. Politically, class composition refers to both a present and anticipated development of its subjective capacities, all of which would develop in line with its technical determinants, i.e. the needs, struggles, and organisational capacities of the working class. The dynamism between these two elements is the key to understanding how productive subjectivity develops (Negri 1988b, p. 209). For instance, if the working class was able to 're-compose' its political composition to the extent that it challenges capitalist domination, capital would have to respond by 'de-composing' its technical characteristics; 're-composing' its own composition in order to de-compose the working class's. For the *Operaisti*, such 'cycles of struggle' were seen to constitute the history of capitalist development (Cleaver 1992, pp. 114, 115).[2]

During the 1960s this analysis was applied directly to the northern factories, centring on the subjectivity of what became known as the 'mass worker'. Technically, the mass worker was 'massified, it performed simple labour, and it was located at the heart of the immediate process of production' (Wright 2002, p. 107). More specifically, the mass workers' technical composition correlated with the Taylorist organisation of the labour process and the Keynesian regulation of capitalist social relations (Negri 1988b, p. 205). Politically, the mass worker struggled against the monotony of factory discipline, and attacked the productivity deals that had previously proved so successful in harnessing their struggles for higher wages. As stated earlier, however, the organisational nature of such struggles had the peculiar quality of being relatively 'autonomous' from their official sanction. Because of this, during this period the question of organisational

2 For a short summary, see Hardt and Negri (2000, pp. 50–52).

form became central. On this point Tronti (1979a) was insistent: organisational continuity might be a rarity but without it 'the revolutionary process will not begin' (Tronti 1979a, p. 6). This issue would prove decisive – both for the unity of *Operaismo* and Negri's subsequent development of it (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 56; Wright 2002, p. 61).

To summarise at this point, the theory of class composition establishes three fundamental axioms. Firstly, the organisational unity of the working class can never be assumed aprioristically. Through their studies of the labour process, Tronti et al. clearly realised that capitalist development produced a working class that was, in many ways, divided. Hence, revolutionary subjectivity could not be explained merely on the basis of its objective positioning in the relations of production, although it did, nevertheless suggest its strategic placement in the potential for disrupting capital accumulation. Secondly, the form – or composition – of the working class is something that is always very specific to a particular stage (or 'cycle') in the development of capitalism. As outlined above, this was something particularly evident in the Italian post-war context. From this, thirdly, the question of organisational form is perhaps the most important yet problematic issue to contend with. If the composition of the working class is indeterminate then so too is its organisational form. This essential inconsistency would plague Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and as we will see in more detail below, understanding the relationship between Negri's theory and Marx's involves understanding the extent to which Negri would turn to Lenin as a means of dealing with this issue.

The Theory of Proletarian *Self-valorisation*

With the 'Hot Autumn' of 1969 the struggles of the 'mass worker' reached their pinnacle. Once again, according to Negri (1988b) the working class had proved capable of challenging capital and, through the sheer force of its wage struggles, had now established itself as 'an independent polarity within capitalist development' (Negri 1988b, pp. 210–13). Capital's response was to restructure its own technical composition; the main tools of which included creating an increased socialisation, territorialisation, and flexibility to labour power (Negri 2005a, p. 143). Despite this, for Negri this certainly didn't spell an end to class antagonism. Rather, it only displaced it to a higher and potentially more radical phase. Crucially, according to Negri to theorise such potential required 'an innovation in the vocabulary of class concepts' – particularly with respect to rethinking the composition of the working class (Negri 1988b, p. 209). Whilst Negri was clear that this would undoubtedly involve reconsidering many of Marxism's central tenants, this certainly wasn't tantamount to their abandonment. Indeed, for him the strategic issue remained how – using Marx's own method – to conceive communism and 'make it into a historical force more fully than was possible for Marx'; a 'project for today' he added, '*but one that is still based on the theory of Marx*' (Negri 1984, p. 184,

original emphasis).[3] This project – alongside Negri's specific contribution to the study of class composition– would now take its most controversial form: from an analysis of the 'mass' worker to an analysis of the 'socialised' worker' (c.f. Wright 2002, p. 152; Dyer-Witheford 1999, p. 79).

Theoretically, Negri's theory culminated in a series of lectures held at the *École Normale Supérieure*, at the invitation of Louis Althusser in 1977. The subject of the lectures was Marx's *Grundrisse*, which although it had only been translated and published in its entirety only one year before, Negri had been studying for some years (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 60). According to Negri the severity of the workers' struggles throughout that period had not only inverted the principles of the Marxian law of value, but had actually destroyed it; alongside any 'dialectic' which bound working class subjectivity to capitalist development. In other words, surplus labour was now completely subordinated to necessary labour, meaning that the working class was effectively valorising its own 'needs' at the expense of the needs of capital accumulation (Negri 2005b, p. 183; Negri 1984, p. 71). Drawing heavily on Marx's distinction between the 'formal' and 'real' subsumption of labour to capital, Negri believed that capital had now extended its domination outside the sphere of production into the realm of circulation: the factory had now become a social factory. Yet, for Negri central to this analysis was understanding the modifications in class composition. The revolutionary subject, in other words, ' … must emerge precisely at the level to which the collective social force of social capital has led the process. *If capitalist is a subject on one side, on the other must be a subject as well'* (Negri 1984, p. 123, *original emphasis*). For Negri an increasingly socialised form of production went hand in hand with an increased socialised class composition; one capable of not only 'producing but also *enjoying* the wealth produced' (Ibid., p. 145). Hence, these technical modifications in class composition led to qualitatively different political forms of struggle, which according to Negri involved an abandonment of narrowly-based wage struggles and, instead, emphasis on the 'direct appropriation of socially developed wealth' (Negri 2005b, p. 181).

In Negri's early work capitalist crisis is always subjective, even with respect to the most apparent 'objective' explanations found in Marx – such as the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. 'The objectivity of the laws shows', he argued, 'once again, the subjectivity of their course, because *the relation between surplus labour and necessary labour is … the relation between the two classes … two opposed subjectivities*, opposed wills and intellects, opposed processes of valorization' (Negri 1984, p. 93, *original emphasis*). For Negri the basis to capitalist crisis is thus ultimately the struggle over the working day, and as such revealed an essential 'rigidity' to necessary labour: the fact that its quantity is determined through class struggle. Yet, for Negri this struggle had in fact become more radical – it was one which 'tends towards higher values and therefore tends to diminish – subjectively,

3 For more on how Negri justified his analysis in terms of Marx's own method, see Negri (1984, pp. 41–58). A later reiteration of this can be found in Hardt and Negri (2004, pp. 140–53).

actively – the surplus value that can be extorted' (ibid., p. 101). This radicalised refusal of labour, then, offered the possibility of a 'higher valorization on the part of the class, for a *self-valorization of the working class and the proletariat*' (ibid., *original emphasis*). Behind every wage struggle thus lies a principle of Negri's (post) Marxism that remains central – even today: 'the *power of living labou*r, the real key to the whole dynamic of production, is the motor that transforms nature into history' (ibid., p. 133, *original emphasis*). Following Marx and Engels, then, for Negri the socialisation of capital brought with it a socialisation of both needs and consciousness: 'the more work becomes abstract and socialised … the more the sphere of needs grows. Work creates its own needs and forces capital to satisfy them' (ibid.). Hence, what was once a 'contradictory' relationship between the development of the working class and the development of capital was now conceived as an 'antagonistic' one. The struggle of the 'socialised worker' operated purely via a 'logic of separation', and it was here that Negri's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity became articulated through his notion of 'proletarian self-valorization'.

Negri developed his theory of proletarian self-valorisation via the passages in Marx's *Grundrisse* entitled 'small-scale circulation' (ibid., p. 134). It was within this sphere, according to him, that the 'value of necessary labour is reproduced and determined', and where the initial act of refusal begins to develop into something more positive, a '*cycle*, a movement, a growth' (ibid., p. 135). Inverting the traditional reading of money as the abstract power of capital, Negri argued for a specifically proletarian use of money – one that becomes 'subordinated to self-valorization' (ibid., p. 138). On this level, then, Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity refers to an essential inversion: an active capacity to radically invert something that was once the power of capital – the strength to 'withdraw from exchange value' and enjoy life through the direct affirmation of use values (Negri 2005c, p. 241). Hence for Negri self-valorisation doesn't simply block capital accumulation, but rather engages a completely different form of social wealth; a wealth of radical needs based on the affirmation of 'multi-laterality and difference' (Negri 1984, p. 184). Negatively, this wealth could be measured by the extent to which both 'space' and 'time' are re-appropriated through the refusal of work. In positive terms, the measure of self-valorisation refers to how such spaces are developed (Negri 2005b, p. 260). Hence, central to the theory of self-valorisation is this very distinction between refusal and constitution, and in this way Negri was clearly attempting to radicalise the 'strategy of refusal' outlined initially by Tronti (1979b). Despite this, however, some have noted the cleanness of the distinction; particularly in practice (Cleaver 2003, p. 48).

'When we say self-valorization', Negri states, 'we mean the alternative that the working class sets in motion on the terrain of production and reproduction, by appropriating power and wealth, in opposition to the capitalist mechanisms of accumulation and development' (Negri 2005c, p. 255). Importantly, just like Marx's analysis of the Paris commune, Negri believed that the practices of proletarian self-valorisation constituted a form of 'proletarian dictatorship', one which depending on the dictates and rhythm of the class struggle was likely to involve some degree

of violence (ibid., pp. 260, 281; Negri 1984, p. 181). Yet, these issues had to be related to the question of organisational form. Indeed, it is crucial to note that, whilst the notion of proletarian 'autonomy' lay at the heart of Negri's theory, this did not mean that he rejected the necessity of some form of party organisation. Hardt (2005) points out, during the 1960s and 1970s Leninism was very much 'in the air' and thus Negri's interrogation of his work was effectively forced upon him by 'the political exigencies of the time' (Hardt 2005, p. 15). For Negri, what Lenin provided was flexibility with respect to understanding the relationship between class composition and organisational form, essentially allowing him to reformulate his theory of revolutionary subjectivity in the Italian context during that time (ibid., p. 9).

Whilst, at the time of writing, Negri's early study of Lenin's thought remains un-translated, from Hardt's (2005) analysis it becomes clear that Negri's reading of Lenin was perhaps just as imaginative as his reading of Marx.[4] According to Negri's analysis, the particular 'paradigm of worker subjectivity' – embodied in the 'professional worker' – identified by Lenin in pre-revolutionary Russia corresponded with very particular objective conditions with respect to labour's technical composition: it was highly specialised and contained various hierarchical divisions within it. As stipulated by the theory of class composition, the political composition of the subject must always correspond with the latter, and for Negri this was precisely what Lenin's notion of the vanguard party managed to do. As Hardt explains; 'In order to be grounded in the determinate worker subjectivity, the party should trace the hierarchical organization of Russian capitalist production and reproduce the same relationship between vanguard and masses found in the factory' (ibid., p. 18; Dyer-Witheford 1999, pp. 72–3). If this underlying flexibility with respect to Lenin's notion of organisational form was the key lesson that Negri would take from his thought, the paradox in Italy at that time was that, according to Negri, class composition had changed sufficiently to warrant going beyond the model Lenin himself had devised.

Much of Negri's political work throughout the 1970s can be seen as an attempt to do this, although his consistency on this matter is problematic (see Wright 2005a). Whilst one must always remember the urgency of the political situation in Italy at that time – a point Hardt (2005) emphasises repeatedly – within the space of a decade, Negri advanced numerous forms of party organisation.[5] In 1971, for instance, whilst accepting a qualitatively different class composition based on the 'mass worker', Negri advocated a 'new Leninism'; one based on a strict divide between a 'mass and a vanguard pole' (Negri 2005d, pp. 11, 35). Just two years later in 1973, however, whilst reiterating the hegemonic role of the 'working class in the large factories' Negri nevertheless urged strongly that this divide needed

4 'Negri's Lenin', as Hardt (2005, p. 14) puts it, 'is not the Lenin that is commonly presented'.

5 For a useful overview of the various positions Negri adopted during this period, see Murphy (2012, pp. 77–103). For an overview of the debates concerning this issue throughout the 1970s see Wright (2005).

to be bridged; this time through supplanting Lenin's notion of the 'professional' vanguard with its 'mass' counterpart (Negri 2005e, pp. 79, 85). Negri's early thoughts on the revolutionary party reached their pinnacle in 1977, and once again there were crucial developments from just four years earlier. This time, in light of the perceived hegemony of the 'socialised worker' Negri chastised the 'workers of the large factories' for undermining the unity of the 'social majority of the proletariat' (Negri 2005c, p. 251). In-line with what Negri believed to be the revolutionary practices of self-valorisation, the role of the party was now largely a subordinate one: to 'centralise the specificity of various proletarian sectors into a project of wage demands that lays out the basis for the struggle for the full re-appropriation of expanding social productivity', and yet also 'defend the frontiers of proletarian independence' as well as ensure its 'class consistency' (ibid., pp. 222, 276, 277).

To summarise this section, as in the case of Laclau, the contours to Negri's post-Marxism are established in his early works, and at this stage this theory is explained via his notion of proletarian self-valorisation. The basis to this theory, as we have seen, was Negri's re-reading of Marx – via Lenin – in light of what he deemed to be significant modifications in proletarian class composition. Whilst it is true to say that Negri believed he had found a way of going beyond Marx using Marx's own method, one could argue that Lenin was in fact the more significant force for allowing him Negri to rethink the parameters of Marx's theory – particularly with respect to this pressing issue of organisational form. Despite this, just like in the case of Laclau at this stage Negri's theory does not actually break with any of the three conditions of Marx's theory: revolutionary subjectivity is still defined through the prism of productive labour; it still emerges immanently to capitalist development; and it still involves change at the level of totality. The major clue as to how Negri's later theory would develop, however, can be identified, and just as we found in Laclau's theory, this concerns the extent to which dialectics is an adequate theoretical tool for theorising the notion of proletarian autonomy. Theoretically this could be seen through Negri's insistence that the practices of self-valorisation had effectively broken the law of value; the relation that in Marxist theory had always bound the wage struggles of the proletariat to capitalist development. In the context of the socialised worker, however, the struggle against capital now assumed the form of a 'logic of separation': 'the conditioning which self-valorization imposes on capitalist development is no longer an effect of the dialectic resolved within capitalist relations … antagonism is no longer a form of the dialectic, it is its negation' (Negri 1984, pp. 187, 188).

The Spinozan Turn

The culmination of Negri's political and theoretical activity during this time came to end with his imprisonment and his subsequent exile to Paris in the 1980s.[6] It

6 For the most comprehensive account of this period see Murphy (2005; 2012).

was here that Negri began to seriously study the work of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. There can be no doubt that this was a strategic move, driven primarily by not only his sense of isolation in prison but also the perceived need to go beyond the impasse of his Marxism of the 1970s (Henninger 2005, p. 158; Murphy 2012, p. 118). Whilst Negri was already familiar with Spinoza's work, it was during this period that he produced one of his most important works. In *The Savage Anomaly* (1991), originally published in 1981, Negri would find a theory which built positively on his earlier notion of proletarian self-valorisation, entrenching his belief as to its immanent constitutive power for creating the radically new. Two inter-linked themes in Spinoza's work were to be of particular importance: the concept of power and the notion of the 'multitude'. With respect to the former, according to Negri (1991) Spinoza's thought offers two inter-related conceptions: 'potentia' and 'potestas'; the latter of which, whilst appearing dominant, through struggle is ostensibly subordinated to the former (Negri 1991, pp. 191,192). In a slightly later work, Negri (1999) would reformulate this distinction, this time between 'constituted' and 'constituent' power. Here Negri argued that the history of revolutionary politics was effectively driven by the conflict between these two forms. Crucially, and in a similar way to Laclau's comments regarding Lacanian ontology, for Negri the importance of constituent power – and its underlying Spinozan heritage – cannot be overstated: it 'is the core of political ontology' (Negri 1999, p. 34). Unlike Laclau, however, during the 1990s Negri would combine his philosophical insights with a return to his more sociological inquiries of the past – particularly when analysing perceived changes in the class composition of labour.[7] Returning to Spinoza, central to the collective nature of 'potentia', secondly, is his emphasis on the notion of 'the multitude' – what Hardt (1991, p. xv) calls 'the protagonist of Spinoza's democratic vision'. In Negri's reading, the multitude functions as a critique of not only the sovereign and transcendental nature of 'potestas', but also its supposed limitlessness (Negri 1991, pp. 197, 198). Reflecting on the issue some years later, Negri would reiterate: 'If one could still speak of sovereign Power, this could only be in the form of the democracy of the multitude, that is, as the absolute self-government of the set of individuals who, in the unfolding of their desire, worked toward the constitution of the common' (Negri 2004, p. 114).

In sum, according to Murphy (2012) Negri's turn to Spinoza must be understood in three respects. Firstly, as stated earlier Spinoza gave Negri the tools for finding a way out of the destructive impasse of his earlier theory of self-valorisation, allowing him 'to cope with defeat and isolation and go beyond them'. Secondly and perhaps most importantly, like many other academics during that time Negri's turn to Spinoza was an attempt to overcome the perceived deficiencies of Hegelian dialectics (Ibid., p. 132; Ryan 1982, p. 216; Holland 1998). This hostility to dialectical thought was already well apparent in Negri's earlier work, and as we

7 For an account of Negri's activity during this period, see Casarino and Negri (2008, pp. 65–72*)* and Dyer-Witheford (1999, pp. 221–38).

saw laid the basis to his emphasis on theorising the struggle between capital and labour in terms of 'antagonism' instead of 'contradiction'. Finally, Negri's turn to Spinoza established the basis for an intellectual alliance between those associated with Althusser in France; including most importantly Guattari, Deleuze, and Foucault (ibid., p. 133). These alliances would prove especially useful during Negri's exile in Paris, particularly for the formation of Negri's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

Empire and 'The Multitude'

Negri's mature theory emerged through his co-authored work with Michael Hardt, particularly in their works *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009). The reception of these works spawned numerous debates; mainly due to the sheer breadth of issues and range of disciplines that their project traversed. *Empire* in particular seemed to generate the most interest, leading Slavoj Žižek (2004) to ponder whether Hardt and Negri had effectively re-written *The Communist Manifesto* for the twenty-first century. The starting point to Hardt and Negri's project was perhaps one of their most contentious. In the context of the accelerated processes of globalisation characteristic of the last four decades, Hardt and Negri (2000, pp. xi–xiv) argue that a fundamental paradigm shift has occurred with respect to international sovereignty. In-line with the 'irresistible and irreversible' growth of 'economic and cultural exchanges', what they call 'Empire' has emerged alongside a 'fundamental passage within the capitalist mode of production'; signalling a global form of power constituted by a lack of boundaries and centre to its power. With the decline of US hegemony, today's global order is constituted by a 'multiplicity of state and non-state actors', all of which enter a highly unequal 'collaboration' subject to a 'heterogeneous ensemble of demands and powers … ' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 225). The issues raised by these claims have been widely debated, and for our purposes we do not repeat them here (see Balakrishnan 2003; Passavant and Dean 2003). Importantly, however, in-line with Marx and Engels' enthusiasm for the growth of the world market in *The Communist Manifesto*, empire is regarded as a progressive development, which ultimately brings 'new possibilities to the forces of liberation' (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. xv).

As with Marx, for Hardt and Negri the key to this potential lies with the transformation it brings in human productive activity. The modifications in this respect, however, are more substantial than what Marx could have anticipated. Whilst Hardt and Negri (2000, p. 25) retain the aforementioned emphasis on the 'real subsumption' of labour to capital, their use of this theory is deepened through recourse to the post-structuralist philosophy of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, alongside the more sociological analysis which Negri engaged in during the 1990s. On the one hand, then, for Negri (2008b) life itself 'now belongs to the field of power … inasmuch as the investment of life by power means that life itself is a power' (Negri 2008b, pp. 30, 31). As might be

expected, however, in Negri's schema this domination is always only preceded by resistance (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 82), and once again the key to understanding this resistance lies in charting the modifications in both the technical and political characteristics of class composition. What Hardt and Negri term 'biopolitical production' hinges on 'immaterial labour'; a form of productive activity which, according to them, not only produces the 'means of life' but 'social life itself' (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 146). Crucially, then, biopolitical production ultimately involves the production of subjectivity itself: it is here 'where subjectivity is born and resides' (Hardt and Negri 2009, pp. 172, 173; Negri 2008b, p. 37).

According to Hardt and Negri (2004, p. 7) although in any type of society there might be a number of different forms of labouring practices, there is always nevertheless one that 'serves as a vortex that gradually transforms other figures to adopt its central qualities'. The manual labour associated with the 'mass worker' once played precisely this role, not only drawing other spheres of labour in line with its 'mechanical practices', but also to the 'rhythms of life' to which it became associated. The tendency today, however, is a shift from the hegemony of material production to immaterial production. This is not to say that the majority of workers worldwide are immaterial workers, or that the industrial working class is declining globally. Rather, as they state: 'immaterial labour constitutes a minority of global labour, and it is concentrated in (only) some of the dominant regions of the globe' (Ibid., p. 109). For Hardt and Negri, then, there is a qualitative tendency at work, and this tendency is something that 'no statistics can capture' (Ibid., p. 115).

Immaterial labour involves an increased 'feminisation of labour, a qualitative shift in the length of the working day, a growth in 'affective labour', and the rise of international migration (Hardt and Negri 2009, pp. 131–7). These changes in the technical composition of labour necessitate a further rethinking of Marx's methods. Of particular importance here is the problem associated with measuring the productivity of this labour. For Hardt and Negri although labour remains the 'fundamental source of value', this shift in the technical composition of labour means that value today assumes a fundamentally different form to which capital is capable of exploiting (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 355; Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 144). Although they accept that the exploitation of labour remains 'powerful and ubiquitous', they also believe that immaterial labour is characterised by a productive excess, one that is essentially beyond what capital can successfully subsume (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 356). Their reasoning for this is simple: immaterial labour produces 'social life' and capital 'can never capture' all of it (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 146). Crucially, immaterial labour is also capable of another kind of autonomy, one that disbands the necessity that someone must 'put it to work'. In other words, immaterial labour 'itself tends to produce the means of interaction, communication, and co-operation directly … the creation of co-operation has become internal to labour and thus external to capital' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 147). Hence, the most significant aspect of immaterial labour is its productive 'excess', and it is this excess that 'enables the constitution of spaces of self-valorization that capital cannot entirely absorb' (Negri, 2008b: 43).

The technical or objective basis to Negri's mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity lies in what Hardt and Negri term 'the common'. The common is a space that includes 'the languages we create, the social practices we establish, [and] the modes of sociality that define our relationships' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 139). As seen above, the production of the common involves the production of subjectivity, a subjectivity which includes a new and radical form of social wealth. For Negri (2008b), then, the common is an 'open field in which living labour moves independently. It is the terrain where the results of the production of independent subjectivities and the co-operation of singularities is accumulated … and consolidated. *The common is the sum of everything that the labour force produces independently of capital and against it*' (Negri 2008b, pp. 66, 67, *original emphasis*). Against the more conventional binary of 'public' and 'private' forms of ownership, Negri argues that the common is fundamentally different, for ultimately it provides the technical basis for the emergence of a new political composition of labour, and thus a qualitatively new form of revolutionary subjectivity. The name for this subjectivity is 'the multitude'.

The concept of the multitude is understood in two ways, each of which refers to two different temporalities (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 221). As established earlier, as a means of universalising the clash between two forms of power Negri adopted the Spinozan distinction between 'potentia' and 'potestas', and thus in this first sense the concept of the multitude is primarily ontological. From Spinoza, Negri (2004b) adopted a 'rigorously materialist ontology', one which allows '*existence to be considered as the possibility of subversion … '* (Negri 2004b, p. 99). In recent years this ontological dimension to the multitude has been unpacked via the twin concepts of love and poverty. The former, according to Hardt and Negri (2009) should not be understood merely in terms of material impoverishment, or lack. Rather, poverty is understood in terms of its potential strength; a strength that, when combined with love, is constitutive of being. In this sense, 'Being is not some immutable background against which life takes place but is rather a living relation in which we constantly have the power to intervene … Being is constituted by love' (Hardt and Negri 2009, pp. 181, 184). Ontologically, it is the clash of poverty and love that produces an increasingly open and expansive form of being, and in this first sense the concept of the multitude is one used to articulate this ontology. In a second sense, however, the multitude is understood in terms of a 'project' – which seeks to highlight the political emergence of a qualitatively new form of revolutionary subjectivity. Here we begin to see some fundamental differences between Hardt and Negri's theory and Laclau's theory analysed in the previous chapter.

As with Marx's notion of the proletariat, politically the multitude emerges via progressive transformations in productive activity, and it is the nature of its labour – its technical composition – that lays the basis for its political composition. Unlike Laclau's notion of 'the people', however, the multitude is defined not in terms of its 'identity' but rather the specific composition of 'singularities' from which it is composed. Unlike Laclau's notion of 'the people', the multitude is also

fundamentally a 'class' subjectivity – although due to its technical composition it is an infinitely more expansive form of subjectivity than the working class (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 224). Finally, unlike Laclau's emphasis on the 'socially heterogeneous' – a subjectivity located at the margins of a given society – for Hardt and Negri the multitude must be conceived at the very heart of empire's rule; more so – due to the nature of its labour – than the working class was in Marx's analysis of capitalism. Despite this, exploitation remains the lifeblood of the capital relation, and the key question for their analysis remains the key question in Marx's: how the multitude becomes revolutionary.

Exodus and the Exploration of the Common

In contradistinction to Negri's early work (Negri 1984, p. 103), Hardt and Negri (2009) make a distinction between objective and subjective crises. In this sense 'not all crises are the same' and at this point the parallels between their own theory and Marx's are quite explicit – both in terms of how they explain these crises and indeed the language they employ to do so. Objectively, capitalist crisis emerges through its propensity to 'fetter' the continued development of human productive activity. In Hardt and Negri's schema, it is the fettering of the common that constitutes the key tendency for capitalist crisis today. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, by attacking, segmenting, or depleting the resources of the common, capital inadvertently lowers the productivity of labour. Secondly, by making labour more and more precarious, capital bars the creativity of immaterial labour by stripping it of both its time and autonomy. Finally, by restricting global labour flows, capital also acts to drain the common of its collective knowledge and expansiveness (Hardt and Negri 2009, pp. 145–8). Hence, each of these contradictions place 'fetters on the productivity of biopolitical labour', and yet with the advent of biopolitical production – where the productive forces are internal to the 'general intellect' of the multitude – the consequences of these contradictions are even more radical than Marx himself could have envisioned. For Marx the objective tendencies for capitalist crisis were not enough, in themselves, to lead to a social revolution. Again, Hardt and Negri concur. 'Crisis', they explain, 'does not mean collapse, and the contradictions of capital, however severe, never in themselves imply its demise or, moreover, create an alternative to capitalist rule' (ibid., p. 151).

What objective crises present are an opening – or an opportunity – for a subjective force to grasp the moment, and in so doing unravel the true potential of its productive activity. Initially, resistance the capitalist expropriation of the common is accorded by the very nature of the 'labour relation' itself (ibid., p. 153). As stipulated by Negri's earlier theory of self-valorisation, however, resistance must be supplemented with creation. In the context of biopolitical production Hardt and Negri argue that this moment tends towards a generalised 'exodus': a subtraction from capital's rule, overcoming its artificial barriers and affirming its subjectivity

within and through the common. This is only possible, however, on the basis of the increasingly autonomous capacity of immaterial labour. Whilst on the one hand the wealth it creates is exploited, as in Marx's theory this is precisely what lays the basis to class antagonism. Thus, in the same instance 'it retains its capacity to produce wealth, and this is its power. In this combination of antagonism and power lies the markings of a revolutionary subjectivity (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 153). Just as in Marx's theory, however, there is a hiatus as to how the revolutionary break will occur and, as in Marx, it is here that the issue of organisational form – an issue that was so central to Negri's early work – returns to the fore.

Hardt and Negri are adamant that collective organisation is necessary to constitute any possibility of revolutionary change. However, as with the case of Negri's early work, many today still question the extent to which Hardt and Negri deal with this issue. Laclau's (2005) critique represents this position well. For him, Hardt and Negri's theory lacks any conception of how revolutionary subjectivity constructs itself through the establishment of hegemonic equivalence. Crucially, for Laclau the reason for this lies in Hardt and Negri's Spinozan ontology; one which, according to him, allows Hardt and Negri to sidestep the most complex and important of issues. Thus, as 'there is a natural tendency to revolt … no political construction of the subject of revolt is needed … their unity is just the expression of a spontaneous tendency to converge … Unity is a gift from heaven' (Laclau 2005, pp. 240, 241). Hardt and Negri's response to this critique essentially reiterates their underlying differences to Laclau's own ontology; particularly with respect to the latter's emphasis on 'the people'. For them, any 'people' is a unity associated with an anachronistic form of sovereignty, an increasingly redundant mode of representation, and an oppressive form of (private) property. Emphases on the revolutionary subjectivity of a 'people', in other words, are incompatible with the specificity of the multitude's class composition: 'the plural singularities of the multitude thus stand in contrast to the undifferentiated unity of the people (Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 99). In philosophical and ontological terms, Hardt and Negri thus differentiate their position from Laclau's well. Yet, the practicality of Laclau's critique remains: how does the multitude – strictly singular in its composition – come to act in some form of collective unison?

For Hardt and Negri (2009) answering this question requires a mechanism for 'revolutionary decision making', one which just like in Negri's earlier theory must use as its basis the analysis of class composition, and in particular, Lenin's insights with respect to organisational flexibility. As in the past, Lenin's notion of the vanguard party – and appeals from those such as Žižek who continue to argue for its necessity – is rejected on the basis that it doesn't suit the multitude's class composition. Whilst rejecting the specificities of Lenin's model, however, Hardt and Negri remain faithful to its underlying premise: any consideration of organisational strategy must start with a concrete analysis of a particular class composition. To do this, one needs to understand precisely what Hardt and Negri mean by the notion of 'singularity'. There are three aspects to this, all of which relate 'intrinsically' to the idea of multiplicity (ibid., p. 338). Firstly, all singularities

are relational in the sense that they cannot exist apart from the relations they have with others. Every singularity, then, 'points toward and is defined by a multiplicity outside of itself'. Secondly, whilst every multiplicity is also necessarily internally divided, this division does not undermine it but in fact constitutes its very being (i.e. being multiple). Finally, in consequence of being both internally and externally singular, every singularity is in a constant state of flux, or 'becoming different'. In this sense from Hardt and Negri's perspective, theories – such as Laclau's – which emphasise unity through 'identity' can only freeze such multiplicity and hence ultimately destroy the very source of the multitude's power.

Despite this obvious distinction between Hardt and Negri's approach and Laclau's, both approaches share something quite crucial: an underlying hostility to Hegelian dialectics. For Hardt and Negri 'singularity politics' is not driven by dialectical negation. In an interview published in 2008, Negri pointed out that his gradual dissatisfaction with dialectics lay precisely in its inability to adequately theorise singularity. The dialectic, he argued, is a 'false key, a false solution', a method that 'lacked any internal obstacles' and always 'tries to recombine and reconcile everything, to bring [and] make everything fit together' (Casarino and Negri 2008, pp. 46, 122). This shared distain for dialectics unites both Laclau's and Negri's approaches; the extent to which Badiou's thought would follow we will turn to in the next chapter.

Hardt and Negri argue that the multitude is just as much a political construction as 'the people', and yet according to them its form is vitally different. Although they accept Laclau's emphasis on the importance of 'identity politics', they do so only on the basis of emphasising the need to work through it, and in so doing establishing what they call a 'singularity politics' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 340). Hardt and Negri's claim at this point is that organisational form cannot be grafted onto the multitude in any (external or hierarchical) way that attempts to smother or unify their differences. For them, this is precisely what Laclau's theory does. Citing the latter's theory of populism directly, Hardt and Negri argue that, in the context of biopolitical production, this theory is simply unworkable. Due to the fact that the productivity of immaterial labour is based on the collective knowledge, creativity and 'productive encounters' within the common, a political project driven by 'hegemony' would only act to undermine the needs of biopolitical production itself (ibid., p. 305). On the other hand, however, appeals to spontaneity are also rejected (ibid., pp. 164, 169). The only option available is for the multitude to discover its own organisational form; one that corresponds directly with its compositional needs. 'Spontaneity and hegemony are not the only alternatives', Hardt and Negri claim; 'the multitude can develop the power to organise itself through the conflictual and co-operative interactions in common' (ibid., p. 175). In other words, the necessary prelude for the multitude finding an adequate organisational form is not simply the production, or even discovery of the common, but in fact its *exploration* (Harrison 2011).

An exploration of the common is similar to what Hardt and Negri call the establishment of 'revolutionary parallelisms'. Hardt and Negri are aware that

the singular struggles of the multitude are neither spontaneously compatible nor in themselves progressive. Through their concept of 'intersectionality', they propose that organisational practice must involve both a 'translation process' and a 'political process', both of which act to help the multitude overcome their (non-productive) differences and help them act in some form of communion (ibid., p. 342). In a very similar way to Laclau, then, the consequences of respecting the diversity of singular struggle is an acceptance of the relative equality amongst them. Like Laclau, Hardt and Negri thus also reject Žižek's aforementioned claim that some struggles are necessarily more strategically anti-capitalist then others. Here, Hardt and Negri establish the notion of revolutionary parallelism; without which 'any revolutionary struggle will run aground or even fall back on itself' (ibid., p. 343). Hence, despite their insistence as to the underlying class nature of the multitude's subjectivity, the danger remains that, in identitarian terms, the struggle against empire might become sutured to one particular struggle over and at the expense of others.

If it is from within the common that revolutionary subjectivity emerges, it is its exploration that serves as the basis for the multitude overcoming its internal divisions. Central to this process is what Hardt and Negri call the 'logic of the encounter', and it is this logic which serves to consolidate a multiplicity of 'insurrectionary events'. An interesting example of this is explained through the notion of the 'biopolitical city' or the metropolis; something which appears to represent a reformulation of the social factory thesis developed in Negri's earlier work. For Hardt and Negri, the metropolis today represents for the multitude what the factory represented for the mass worker and, as we will see, in a similar way to Badiou's notion of an 'evental-site' they believe it might just offer the material conditions from which 'insurrectionary events' might emerge. Once again, the importance here of the common is critical. Not only do people live together and share resources, they also intermingle with different 'cultures, languages, knowledges [and] mentalities' (ibid., pp. 250, 252). Hardt and Negri are of course aware that these 'new encounters are not always progressive, yet they believe in the possibility that a 'politics of the metropolis' can organise such encounters in a productive fashion, facilitating the production of 'new social bodies with ever greater capacities' (ibid., p. 255). Through exploring the common in the context of the metropolis, then, Hardt and Negri seek to theorise the way the multitude can overcome the artificial divisions within it. Yet it is also through this notion of exploring the common that Hardt and Negri explain how revolutionary subjectivity can come to consolidate itself. Here they point to the necessity of the creation of common 'institutions'; institutions through which the multitude can learn how to rule itself politically and economically. In contradistinction to Marx's theory, however, for Hardt and Negri this process must not be prefigured by the seizure of state power. For them, not only has this strategy only ever resulted in the reintroduction of repressive forms of constituted power, in the context of biopolitical production it is no longer adequate on the basis that it would crush the innovative and collective vitality of the common. Hence, for Hardt and Negri the

institutionalisation of revolutionary subjectivity is absolutely necessary, but only to the extent to which this does not block the constituent power of the multitude and the needs of the common (ibid., p. 359).

Negri's Post-Marxism: An Assessment

The best place to start when reflecting on the relationship between Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity and Marx's, is by highlighting Negri's own explicit continual references to that theory. This, however, is governed a-priori by Negri's particular reading of Marx, and as we established earlier, by-and-large this was based on Tronti's famous 'reversal of the polarity'. This reading sought to highlight the relationship between capitalist development and class struggle, arguing in particular that the latter was the key driver of the former. In this sense whilst the forces and relations of production are reciprocally antagonistic, the relations – i.e. class struggle – effectively seem to take precedence over the forces:

> At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles: it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own development must be tuned (Tronti 1979a, p. 1).

There can be no doubt that Tronti's thesis remains the basis to Negri's post-Marxism today: 'Constant capital confronts variable capital; capitalist power confronts the resistance from the labour force. This tension is what produces economic and historical development' (Negri 2008a, p. 42). In the first instance then, when considering the relationship of Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity to Marx's one has to emphasise the influence of Tronti. Yet, from the passage above there is already something that adjusts what I took to be Marx's emphasis on the dialectically reciprocal relationship between the forces and relations of production. This imbalance is only intensified when Negri goes on to radicalise Tronti's thesis. Take for instance the early Negri's insistence that:

> The whole of capitalist development, ever since the working class established itself at a high level of composition, has been nothing other than the obverse of, a creation to, a pursuit of proletarian self-valorization – an operation of self- protection, or recuperation, of adjustment in relation to the effects of self-valorization, which are effects of sabotage of the capitalist machine (Negri 2005c, p. 241).

The difference here is very subtle, but quite crucial. For Negri the power of living labour is not only insubordinate but is, at times, openly aggressive. Indeed, as established in the first part of this chapter, Negri's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity – understood in terms of the notion of proletarian self-valorisation –

theorises labour not only in terms of its capacity to refuse capitalist command but also its ability to take the initiative; to push the boundaries of possibility and articulate something radically new. Whilst Marx was certainly attentive to the way that the proletariat's subjectivity gradually became more self-conscious, this latter aspect wasn't arguably something overtly explicit. The key to understanding this discrepancy between Marx's and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, however, serves well to reiterate something crucial to Negri's post-Marxism. In other words, as seen in both the quotations above, for Tronti and Negri the nature of capitalism itself had changed, and for Negri this change necessitated rethinking the relationship between the forces and relations of production. Thus for Tronti it is only 'at the level of socially developed capital', or in the case of Negri, 'ever since the working class established itself at a high level of composition' that its struggle assumes a more radicalised autonomous form. In this way even though Negri's conceptualisation of historical change diverges slightly from the (dialectical) model stipulated by Marx, it does so only on the basis of changes in capitalist development; changes that whilst Marx himself might have anticipated, could not realistically have foreseen in their entirety. Hence, Negri's attempt to go beyond Marx is a project which seeks to take Marx beyond Marx, in the name of Marx himself. As stated earlier, however, the real key to Negri's passage beyond Marx is really the thought of Lenin. The reason for this, as I have argued, is because in Negri's theory organisational form has been the most persistent and important issue for his understanding of revolutionary politics. Indeed, as Murphy (2012, p. 231) has pointed out, this issue has dominated Negri's theory for at least fifty years, and his attempt to deal with it wasn't governed by his turn to Marx, but rather his turn to Lenin.

In Negri's later collaborative work his (continued) relationship to Marx is reiterated. 'To follow Marx's method, Hardt and Negri (2004) argue, 'one must depart from Marx's theories to the extent that the object of his critique, capitalist production and capitalist society on a whole, has changed (Hardt and Negri 2004, pp. 140, 141). This clearly does not involve an abandonment, but simply that 'in order to follow Marx's footsteps one must really walk beyond Marx and develop on the basis of his method a new theoretical apparatus adequate to our present situation'. Theoretically, in Negri's work the basis to such changes are consistently articulated in terms of the transition Marx called the 'formal' to the 'real' subsumption of labour to capital; what George Caffentzis (2005, p. 104) has called Hardt and Negri's 'primary Marxian loan word'. Indeed, the importance of this conception is crucial in both understanding (and justifying) what Hardt and Negri regard as the tendential changes in capitalism – and thus too the modifications they subsequently make to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – discussed below. One objection here, however, lies in the extent to which this periodisation is as clear-cut as it might seem. Caffenztis, for example, argues that although this 'conceptual move is attractive', it is made problematic due to the fact that this supposed 'transition' had in fact already taken place in Marx's day (ibid., p. 106). To some extent Hardt and Negri might retort that, in-line with the pace and intensity

of globalisation over the last three to four decades, this process is surely more advanced than it could have possibly been in Marx's time. Despite this, however, other commentators have questioned the usefulness of Hardt and Negri's attempt to theorise these changes; particularly with respect to their reliance on Spinoza and those within the post-structuralist tradition. David Harvey (2010) for example, has argued that the influence of Spinoza in particular is highly problematic, mainly because according to him it allows Hardt and Negri to 'bypass consideration of the material basis of revolutionary endeavours in favour of abstract and, at the end of the day, somewhat idealistic formulations' (Harvey 2010, p. 212).

A related and yet deeper problem with Negri's theory lies in its paradigmatic nature (Holloway 2002, p. 170). In both his early and later work it is clear that Negri theorises phases of capitalist development in terms of one 'epoch' to another. This use of 'periodization' allows theory to trace the caesura from modernity to post modernity, or from Fordism to Post Fordism; 'it frames the movement of history in terms of the passage of one relatively stable paradigm to another' (Negri 2008a, p. 32; Hardt and Negri 2004, p. 142). Within such paradigms each 'cycle of struggle' is constituted by a number of inter-related forms: a dominant form of sovereignty or capitalist power; a hegemonic form of labour; a particular form of subjectivity; and a suitable organisational form. In today's context the dominant form of sovereignty is of course 'empire'; the hegemonic form of labour 'immaterial'; the particular form of subjectivity embodied in the 'multitude'; and the adequate organisational form, as we have seen remains largely unknown. Negri's tendency, then, both individually and in his collaborative work is to 'capture the new, to classify it, to label it, and make it fit' (Holloway 2002, p. 170; Holloway 2009a, p. 99; Turchetto 2008, p. 297).

The danger with this approach lies perhaps in its most appealing quality – i.e. its neatness. However, this neatness is problematic, and in some senses might even reflect the underlying limitations of the grand nature of Hardt and Negri's project. Indeed, the comparisons Žižek (2001) suggested between the sweeping vision of the *Communist Manifesto* and Hardt and Negri's work are incisive, although there are major differences which I will go onto discuss below. At this point, however, I would like to suggest that one example of the limitations of Hardt and Negri's paradigmatic approach could be applied directly to the issue of global organisational form. We have seen that, through their enduring fidelity to Lenin's emphasis on the necessity of tactical flexibility, Hardt and Negri present a compelling case for the rejection of hierarchical forms of organisational practice. For them, although this might have been suitable for a relatively underdeveloped class composition characteristic of the past, today this no longer suits the needs of the various singularities which make up the political subjectivity of the multitude. In the context of biopolitical production, then, any organisational form must be based on a politics of singularity; one that is very careful not to stunt the economic and political needs of the common. Yet, if one undertakes a more concrete analysis of a global class composition, one could argue that there are – still – areas in the world where, according to Hardt and Negri's schema, class composition might be

sufficiently underdeveloped such as to necessitate a more conventional party form of organisation. In this sense, once again one might argue that the sociological benefits of the early theory of class composition have been distilled by the grandeur of abstract philosophical speculation. Dyer-Witheford (2008) makes precisely this point, arguing that Hardt and Negri's theory ideally needs 'the shock of empiricism' as a means of grounding it in a more concrete fashion. Here he suggests a variety of modifications, although his emphasis on producing a more balanced account with respect to the multitude's political defeats is particularly useful (Dyer-Witheford 2008, p. 261).

In this sense, then, one could argue that Hardt and Negri's analysis of contemporary class composition is not sociological enough, particularly on a global scale. Despite this, what remains clear in Negri's theory – as it was for Marx's – is the importance of theorising class composition through the prism of developments in human productive activity. Indeed, by his own account the principal reason why Negri still calls himself a Marxist is because through every one of his own concepts he continually brings them back to the question of labour (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 148). In Chapter 3 we established the importance of productive activity for Marx in two senses. Firstly, for Marx this activity had an underlying ontological dimension in the sense that, through labour, humans not only modified external nature but also their own. Secondly, in a more political sense Marx believed that this activity's progressive development could, in time, allow the possibility of a form of society that could organise itself both rationally and collectively. Putting the question of ontology to one side, in Hardt and Negri's theory there are no serious deviations from the above: there can be no doubt that productive activity remains as important for their theory of revolutionary subjectivity as it did for Marx's. Due to the extent to which they regard its contemporary development, however, there are some important qualifications to this agreement, the most significant of which lies in the change of form that this labour now increasingly assumes. In other words, whereas for Marx the hegemonic form of labour was predominantly industrial, for Hardt and Negri the tendency today is that all forms of labour are progressively immaterial. Hence, as Negri (2008a) explains, whilst 'work still remains at the centre of the entire process of production' it cannot simply be 'reduced to a purely material or labour dimension' (Negri 2008a, p. 20).

Organisational Form and the Question of Solidarity

Interestingly, silent in Hardt and Negri's account is the reason why Marx emphasised the vanguard character of industrial labour. As established in Chapter 3, for Marx the importance of this form of labour was due to the subjective and objective tools which it provided the working class for its struggle for radical social change. Whilst we have seen that the principal emphasis in Hardt and Negri's theory is on 'immaterial' forms of labour – which they locate at the pinnacle of contemporary

labouring practices – there is debate as to whether this emphasis privileges such workers over others. To some extent Hardt and Negri have attempted to respond to this charge, emphasising the 'equal opportunity of resistance' from all sections of today's global class composition (Hardt and Negri 2004, pp. 106, 107). For Lamarche (2011) furthermore, Hardt and Negri's discussion of 'the poor' is further evidence that they see no underlying significance to any particular substratum within immaterial labour (Lamarche 2011, p. 67). Despite these claims this argument is unconvincing; particularly if one examines the tradition from which Negri's ideas became such a prominent part. Wright (2007) for instance points out that the study of class composition in the 1960s was always closely tied to a perceived need for identifying the 'driving nucleus' behind its development (Wright 2007, p. 278). From this perspective one could also revisit Negri's (2005c) pamphlets of the 1970s, especially with respect to his appeals to the socialised worker to impose on the factory workers the 'recognition of the centrality of productive labour' (Negri 2005c, pp. 251, 261).

A similar tendency reveals itself in Negri's later collaborative work, this time at the end of *Empire* where, whilst careful to avoid charges of Leninist vanguardism, Hardt and Negri (2000) appeal to what they call 'the militant', which they describe as 'the one who best expressed the life of the multitude: the agent of biopolitical production and resistance against Empire' (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 411). In this work it is the militant's self-valorising subjectivity that 'resists imperial command in a creative way', linking resistance 'immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of co-operative apparatuses of production and community' (ibid., p. 413).[8] Despite their claims to the contrary, then, for thinkers such as George Caffenztis (2003) Hardt and Negri's thoughts on this matter remain true to the lingering 'Marxism-Leninism' of Negri's past. (Caffenztis 2003, p. 129). My own thoughts – developed in the conclusion to this book – are that Hardt and Negri are not necessarily wrong to privilege such workers. Rather, my claim is that they should accept the premise of their argument and avoid the temptation – so characteristic of today's radical politics – to necessarily dismiss more conventional forms of organisational practice deemed associated with the past.

In both his early and later periods, the centrality of productive activity thus remains at the core of Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. As such, Negri's theory retains the first condition of Marx's. Via the theory of class composition, however, it is Negri's attempt to 'update' Marx's theory that has led to the most criticism. From even those associated with the *Operaismo* tradition, such as Sergio Bologna (2005), Negri's class analysis was subjected to an uncompromising critique, with Bologna questioning Negri's tendency for 'constructing and on occasion inventing another social figure to whom can be imputed the process of liberation from exploitation' (Bologna 2005, p. 40). Following Hardt and

8 In this way Negri's early theory of self-valorisation is very much still at the heart of his mature theory of revolutionary subjectivity (Harrison 2011).

Negri's more recent work, some have questioned the quantitative basis to their claims – particularly with respect to the hegemony of immaterial labour. Thompson (2005) for instance, argues that in empirical terms 'those deemed immaterial workers constitute only a small portion of workers, even in two of the most advanced capitalist societies amounting only to perhaps 10 to 15 per cent' (Thompson 2005, p. 85). On one level it has to be said that critiques such as these entirely miss Hardt and Negri's point. Their claim after all, is that the dominance of immaterial labour is a qualitative tendency and not a quantitative one. However, despite this one could argue that, given the central role their notion of immaterial labour plays in their overall project, it is perhaps surprising that Hardt and Negri have avoided engaging with more empirically-based evidence (Wright 2005b). One of the main problems of not doing this, as Camfield (2007) points out, is that the theory of immaterial labour is far too encompassing and cannot adequately allow us to draw out the many (hierarchical) distinctions within it (Camfield 2007, p. 31). In light of their more detailed recent analyses in *Commonwealth*, however, it is fair to say that Hardt and Negri (2011) have clearly sought to respond to such critiques; particularly with respect to the issue of 'precarious' labour (Hardt and Negri 2011, pp. 146, 245).

A related problem with Hardt and Negri's notion of immaterial labour – particularly in the context of decades of neo-liberal globalisation – concerns the question of solidarity, so central to Marx's belief in the revolutionary capacities of the proletariat. Once again, this belief serves well to highlight why Marx emphasised the importance of the progressive development of productive activity. The development of modern industry, as established in Chapter 3, provided workers with a very specific physical and geographic proximity; a condition one would assume was vital for any possibility for developing a sense of solidarity with one's fellow workers. This proximity, then, was essential for Marx to theorise the proletariat as the object and subject of history. Central to Hardt and Negri's theory of immaterial labour, however, is the idea that production today is no longer based on such proximity. Today, they claim, production assumes an increasingly 'virtual existence'. In-line with the rise of the production and communication of knowledge and information, immaterial labourers 'need not be present and can even be relatively unknown to one another, or known only through the productive information exchanged' (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 296). What is less clear in Hardt and Negri's account, however, is how networks of solidarity are developed between quite disparate forms of labour; between, say, call centre workers in Bangladesh and flight attendants in New York. Of course, in one sense this problem isn't necessarily anything specific to the issue of immaterial labourers. Scholars of more traditional labour movements – particularly in the age of globalisation – have continued to explore these issues (Bieler et al. 2007). Despite this, given such distinctiveness with respect to the various qualities of immaterial labour it seems clear that even the more traditional problems of organising the many layers of a global workforce are only compounded.

One way of dealing with this problem is suggested via Hardt and Negri's theory of the metropolis. If, as they claim, both labour power and wealth are now dispersed throughout the common – and the metropolis represents to the multitude

what the factory did to the industrial worker – then one possibility is to theorise a sort of unionism of the metropolis itself. Useful here, could be Hardt and Negri's (2000, 2009) more practical demands such as the establishment of a global citizenship and some form of social wage, the latter of which incidentally could also be found in Negri's earlier work (Negri 2005c, pp. 250, 251). For this to work, however, the traditional role of the unions would have to be radically rethought. As Negri (2008b) explains, one would have to 'leave behind certain forms of struggle linked to the factory, to the wage … and move onto forms of struggle over citizenship and biopolitical rhythms of development' (Negri 2008b, p. 212). Tactically, then, there is leeway in Hardt and Negri's theory of the metropolis to address the problem with supplanting more traditional forms of workers' solidarity, although this aspect to their theory certainly remains relatively underdeveloped.

The notion of immaterial labour is central to Hardt and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, but as we have seen it is not without its problems. Yet, arguably the real importance of this theory lies in its relationship to 'the common', and this returns us to the second condition of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Effectively, once again Hardt and Negri follow Marx in the sense that they argue it is capitalism which produces both the objective and subjective conditions for a new social form of production. As we established in Chapter 3, for Marx (1993a) this form of production would be characterised by the collective and rational management of a new form of social wealth, one which did not posit labour time as its necessary measure but rather the needs of the social individual (Marx 1993a, pp. 694, 705, 706). Hardt and Negri's notion of 'commonwealth' fits very closely to this schema, albeit as we have seen in an updated form. As Negri himself states, ' … the common comes into being on the basis of social praxis – which is another way of saying, of course, that the concept of the common is a fundamentally Marxist concept' (Casarino and Negri 2008, p. 128). Just like the second condition to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, however, Hardt and Negri also believe that the subjective conditions necessary for revolutionary rupture are also immanent to capital. Mirroring Marx's distinction between a 'class against capital' and a class 'for-itself', Hardt and Negri (2009) argue that although the conditions for 'resistance' are 'given to the workers in the labour relation itself', revolutionary subjectivity – exodus – requires a further development, one which is part and parcel of their notion of the 'project of the multitude' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 153). According to Massimo De Angelis (2007) however, one of the main problems with their approach is the way they tend to theorise the relationship between these objective and subjective conditions. Hardt and Negri's tendency, he argues, is to suggest that the immeasurability of immaterial labour is something internal (or organic) to its own technical characteristics, as opposed to being the very substance of political struggle. For De Angelis (2007), then, the question as to the immeasurability of immaterial labour can only be decided through the struggle between two fundamentally different 'value systems': one which continually attempts to reduce all aspects of life to value, and one which struggles against this imposition (De Angelis 2007, p. 168).

At this point we have seen that, whilst updating Marx's theory in light of perceived changes in capitalist development, Hardt and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity remains aligned with the first two conditions of Marx's. We now need to turn to the final condition, which also serves well to underline one of the most problematic aspects to Hardt and Negri's theory on a whole. The final condition to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity stipulated that its object was the seizure of political power and the establishment of a classless society. Through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat it was here according to Marx, that the proletariat learned how to rule itself both politically and economically. To some extent, once again Hardt and Negri's theory would appear to confirm Marx's theory at this point. However, there is one major difference. As stated earlier, there are various reasons Hardt and Negri reject the strategic necessity of seizing state power. In practical terms, not only is the nation state increasingly redundant in the context of globalisation, but alongside the family and the corporation, the nation is regarded as one of the common's principal 'corruptions' (Hardt and Negri 2009, pp. 160–64). Theoretically, however, Hardt and Negri's position here reiterates something we also identified in Laclau's theory; namely, the rejection of Marx's philosophy of history. Thus, whilst they accept a 'materialist teleology of singularities', this teleology is one which is in no way pre-determined, and 'has no illusions about invisible hands or final causes pushing history forward. It is a teleology pushed forward only by our desires and our struggles, with no final end point' (Negri 2008a, p. 41; Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 378; Negri 2010, p. 7).

The Politics of Dignity

In this respect, Hardt and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity mirrors Laclau's, and at this point we are beginning to identify something crucially important for post-Marxist theory. Indeed, just like Laclau's turn to the Lacanian ontology of lack, one could argue that Negri's turn to Spinoza shared its fundamental premise: to avoid what he considered to be the more deterministic aspects to Marx's theory. As in Laclau's theory, however, this 'turn' has its consequences, and in the case of Negri this concerns the way his theory understands the relationship between capital and labour. Even in Negri's early work one finds the tendency to posit working class struggle and capitalist development as, in a sense, two distinct movements: cycles of struggle periodise historical development and are driven by 'two opposing vectors', where labour appears 'as a sort of St. George always ready for insurrection' (Dyer-Witheford 1999, p. 69; Lumley 1980, p. 125). Many of Negri's subsequent concepts are also governed by this logic, including most importantly the Spinozan distinction he identified between *potestas* and *potentia*, and from that the notions of constituent and constituted power. Some however have questioned the neatness of such binaries. Vatter (2005) for instance has queried the extent to which it is possible to theorise constituted and constituent power in the way Negri does (Vatter 2005, p. 66). Of particular concern is the way

Negri avoids theorising the internal relationship between these forms of power. Put slightly differently: the principal problem with Negri's theory in this respect is that he separates existence from constitution (Bonefeld 2003, p. 79; Holloway 2002, p. 170). Thus, in more conventional Marxian terms, positing labour and capital as separate entities overlooks the fact that, in capitalist society, the latter is merely the alienated expression of the former. In Negri's account there is no such internal relationship, and in consequence his approach could be charged with 'romantic obsessions with autonomy', overestimating the power and limits not only of labour but also of capital (Thompson 2005, p. 91; Holloway 2002, p. 174). Here, it seems a more tempered approach is needed; one that perhaps avoids theorising revolutionary subjectivity via recourse to ontology and, instead, returns to a more concrete and empirical account of the issue.

Whilst sharing the general thrust of Negri's approach, one influential attempt to do this can be seen through the work of John Holloway (2002, 2010), and indeed the 'open Marxist' approach in general. Like Marx – and Hardt and Negri – the starting point for Holloway's theory of revolutionary subjectivity is the shared emphasis on human creative activity. This activity – what Holloway re-labels in terms of 'doing' – is an inherently social process but in capitalist society is objectified into an alien form. Because of this, 'the powerful present themselves as the individual doers, while the rest simply disappear from view' (Holloway 2002, p. 28). Thus what was initially a self-determining 'power-to' is now inverted into the static and dominating form of 'power-over'; a power that denotes not 'the assertion of our subjectivity but the destruction of our subjectivity' (Ibid., p. 29). Holloway's proximity to Marx's own theory is demonstrated quite clearly when he continues to detail the relationship between these two forms of power. According to him, power-to and power-over are not separate entities. Whilst there is certainly a binary antagonism between them, this binary is no way an external one (ibid., p. 35). Much like Hardt and Negri, Holloway is also keen to point out that the relationship between power-to and power-over is not one of reciprocal dependence: although power-over depends on power-to, the latter has the potential for autonomy from the former. Despite this however, as with Marx's theory Holloway accepts that this isn't how things present themselves. In other words, the attributes of power-to appear as the inherent properties of power-over. This 'delusion', as outlined in Chapter 3 of this book was what Marx referred to as 'commodity fetishism', and for Holloway this remains the principal problematic when considering the issue of revolutionary change. The benefit of Holloway's analysis is that he takes this issue seriously. The problem with Negri's theory, however, is that effectively he doesn't, and the reason for this – arguably – is because of his underlying ontology.

Like Marx, for Holloway class struggle is not an ontological condition. The struggle of human 'dignity' is not trans-historical: people struggle for self-determination in situations only where that capacity is denied (Holloway 2010, p. 43). The basic principle behind any possibility of revolutionary change is the fact that no matter how much capital dominates peoples' lives, there is always a

remainder – a residue of 'dignity' that cannot be fully subsumed. Dignity, then, is the substance not only of resistance but also revolutionary subjectivity. Dignity is the 'ice-breaker', the 'pick-axe', the 'blade hacking at the strands of the spider's web that holds us entrapped' (Ibid., p. 49). This isn't to say, however, that beneath the ice one will discover a pre-existing dignity, and neither does it mean that the struggle for dignity will be an uncontaminated one. Capital might appear as an external 'alien' power, but that world is not only external: 'we carry it inside us'. Hence, not only is our subjectivity corrupted but so too are the 'cracks' that this subjectivity might open. As Holloway (2010) explains, 'our cracks are not pure cracks, our dignities are not pure dignities. We try to break with capitalist society, but our break still bears its birthmarks. However much we try to do something different, the contradictions of capitalism reproduce themselves within our revolt. We are not pure subjects, however rebellious we might be. The cracks, both as spaces of liberation and as painful ruptures, run inside us too' (ibid., p. 64). Thus, whilst Hardt and Negri do indeed discuss the 'corruption' of the common, in their schema the common appears as something that must guard against becoming corrupted. In Holloway's schema, however, the spaces opened by the force of dignity *already are* corrupted.

Whilst in practice their approaches might not be that different, Holloway's repeated emphasis on theorising the barriers to revolutionary subjectivity offers a more realistic account of the latter, and the key to this emphasis lies in positing labour as potentially autonomous from capital as opposed to positively autonomous from capital. Whilst this tendency was already apparent in the Marxist tradition Negri emerged out of, his turn to ontology serves only to entrench it. Just like we saw in the case of Laclau, then, exploring the political consequences of Negri's ontological turn is vital for providing an assessment of that theory. Interestingly however, whilst Holloway's approach might be closer to Marx's with respect to his emphasis on the continued problem of commodity fetishism, like Hardt and Negri – alongside Laclau and Rancière – he too rejects Marx's philosophy of history, this time by appealing to the non-synthetic dialectics of Theodor Adorno (Holloway 2009a, p. 12).

Conclusion

The principles of Negri's post-Marxist theory of revolutionary subjectivity were established early, and in a similar way to Laclau's relationship to Gramsci's notion of hegemony, Negri's theory today has not managed to dispense with the key Marxian problematic embodied in Lenin's emphasis on organisational form. In this sense, Negri's path away from Marx is governed, via Lenin, by this very issue. This being said, however, it seems clear that Negri believes to have found the tools for going beyond Marx in the method of Marx himself; a theme which cannot really be identified so strongly in the post-Marxism of Laclau. The differences between Laclau's and Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity become even

clearer when relating the latter back to the three conditions of Marx's. Like Marx, Negri defines revolutionary subjectivity through the prism of productive activity, its emergence can be explained immanently to capitalist development, and its object similarly involves change at the level of totality. As we have seen however, the third condition is much less clear-cut, for in Negri's account this process must not involve the seizure of state power, nor does this process necessarily mean an end to all class antagonism. Crucially, it is Negri's turn away from the Hegelian underpinnings of Marx's philosophy of history that links his post-Marxism to Laclau's. Whether Alain Badiou does the same is yet to be seen, and it is to this theory that I will now turn.

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Chapter 6
Alain Badiou – Event, Truth, and the 'Communist Hypothesis'

Overview

Alain Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity emerged via his engagement with Maoism in France during the 1980s. Here, Badiou established the central problematic which would subsequently guide all of his theoretical and practical work: a theory of the subject. Whilst his early theory essentially retained all three conditions to Marx's, this theory would be modified substantially towards the end of the 1980s. As with both Laclau and Negri such modifications stemmed from Badiou's deeper recourse to ontology, although this time with respect to the mathematical principles of set theory. Through his theory of the 'event', Badiou argues that revolutionary subjectivity involves an enduring fidelity to the 'truth' of an unforeseen crisis in an established 'situation'. In more recent works Badiou refines this theory slightly, reigniting themes found in his earlier work. Central at point becomes his notion of the 'communist hypothesis'; one which is used primarily as a means of justifying his divergence from Marx's theory on the one hand, and yet on the other as a means for rethinking this theory today. My assessment of Badiou's theory focuses on his notions of event, subject, and also considers the general effectiveness of what he believes revolutionary subjectivity must involve today.

Maoism and the 'Theory of the Subject'

Although a largely marginal political movement, French Maoism would flourish for some fifteen years, particularly in the early 1970s where it was highly fashionable with the students and the intellectual 'avant-guard' (Bourg 2005, p. 473). Established in September 1968, perhaps the most famous Maoist organisation in France was the *Gauche Prolétarienne* (GP). For the GP, if the spirit of May '68 was to be revived this would require both 'provocative propaganda' and, at times political violence (Drake 2001, p. 140; Bourg 2005, p. 489). For his part, in 1970 Alain Badiou would help establish a slightly different Maoist organisation – the *Union des Communistes de France Marxiste-Léniniste* (UCFML). For Badiou and his colleagues, the significance of Maoism was threefold. Firstly, one accepted Mao's dictum of 'from the masses to the masses' (Mao 1967b, p. 119). Intellectuals must trust and learn from the masses, and all political work must act to sustain

this continued dialectical link between theory and practice (Badiou 2008a, p. 131). Secondly, one must abstain from all activity within bourgeois institutions (elections, political parties etc.). This was a key difference from the Trotskyites at that time, and as I shall point out later remains a crucial axiom for Badiou's politics today. Finally, the UCFML was more akin to a 'union' than a conventional party structure. Politics had to sustain the link to actual political processes, and not risk becoming objectified into a rigid party structure (ibid.; Fields 1988, p. 98).

In the early 1970s many of France's Maoist organisations began to dissolve, and the hopes and fervour of 1968 gave way to a very different political and intellectual climate. Amongst other things, the French left had to confront a growing reformism, the defeat of the Portuguese revolution of 1975, the revelations as to the excesses of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the rising threat of the 'figure of the terrorist' – particularly in Germany and Italy (Drake 2001, p. 152; Ross 2002, p. 173). To paraphrase Callinicos (2006), the 'leftist tide' was well and truly 'receding' (Callinicos 2006, p. 91). Alongside this emerged the so-called *nouveaux philosophes*. Spurred by the 1974 publication of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, for Badiou these 'new philosophers' were to signify a highly significant form of reactionary subjectivity. Whilst the 1970s offered many reasons for militants to give up their struggle, theorists such as André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévi went one step further; betraying their militancy and using it as a means of establishing legitimate and moral authority, 'manufacturing a certain representation of themselves as the emergence, ten years after the event, of the first "true voice" of May '68' (Ross 2002, p. 169). More generally, the media savvy new philosophers claimed that any theory of totalising change would inevitably lead to totalitarianism, and in consequence suggested that 'there is nothing better that can possibly be imagined than the way we are right now' (ibid., p. 170). Badiou's most significant work during the 1970s – his *Theory of the Subject* – was a direct attempt to work through and understand the context outlined above, and also rethink the question of revolutionary subjectivity.

The starting point to Badiou's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity is the Maoist understanding of contradiction.[1] Against the 'circularity' associated with conventional Hegelian dialectics, Badiou (2009a) insisted that all contradiction must be understood as 'creative scission': against the idea that from the 'Two' (thesis/antithesis) one can establish the 'One' (synthesis), Badiou argued that 'there is only one law of the dialectic: One divides into two' (Badiou 2009a, pp. 14, 15). Applying this notion of the dialectic to the 'subject', then, Badiou establishes a 'split' between the working class and the proletariat. Whereas the former is positioned objectively in the relations of production, the latter refers to its revolutionary subjectification (Feltham 2008, p. 35; Callinicos 2006, p. 93). Within bourgeois 'imperialist' society, then, the working class is objectified by capital – it is 'placed' as a mere factor of production. Capitalist society is thus

1 For an overview of Badiou's early Maoist texts, many of which remain un-translated, see Bosteels (2011) and Wright (2013).

conceived as a specific order of placement – what Badiou calls 'splace'. For Badiou the proletariat emerges when it 'forces' its existence as the working class by forcing the place that capitalist society accords it; 'every subject surpasses its place by force (Badiou 2009a, pp. 35, 36; Wright 2013, p. 49). Importantly, if the proletariat is thus essentially an ephemeral phenomenon in the sense that it emerges only through periodic revolt, so too according to Badiou must our understanding of 'history' itself. Thus, far from having any strictly linear development, Badiou argues that history progresses in a series of stops and starts, all of which depends on the emergence of a subject that acts to 'periodize' it (ibid., pp. 18, 92).

What Badiou calls 'subjectivization' refers to the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity, or in his words, the 'time of insurrection'. However, subjectivization must always be supplemented by a more constituent moment – a 'subjective process'. This process accounts for the consistency of revolutionary subjectivity, and the 'law of the subject' lies in successfully connecting these two moments together: revolt must be tied to recomposition (ibid., pp. 160, 244, 259). In order to do this the subject must work through a complex series of 'subject effects', all of which – crucially – when combined can lead to very different forms of subjectivity. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, for Badiou a revolutionary subject consists of four 'subjective figures [tied] into a single knot' (Bosteels 2011, p. 90). In his terms, whilst avoiding the terroristic excesses of the 'superego', the initial 'anxiety' associated with subjectivisation must be followed by an essential 'courage', one that accepts the uncertainty of revolt and wagers on a 'justice' that is, at that moment, essentially undecidable' (ibid., pp. 286, 294; Wright 2013, pp. 167–71). Courage is the ability to persist, to hold the line and 'force' the recomposition (and yet ultimate destruction) of 'splace'. Justice is the essential outcome, which involves occupying the void left by the destruction of splace and establishing something radically new (ibid., p. 264). Hence as Bosteels (2011) points out, courage and justice articulate 'the process whereby an existing order not only breaks down, gets blocked, or is reinforced in its old ways but actually expands, changes, and lends coherence to a new truth' (Bosteels 2011, p. 89). To retiterate, then, to ensure the consistency of revolutionary change all four 'subject effects' must be knotted together in the correct way (Badiou 2009a, p. 284).

At this point the role of the Maoist party becomes paramount. In fact, at times Badiou associates 'the subject' directly with the Maoist party itself (ibid., p. 243; Bosteels 2011, p. 105). His rationale here is twofold. Firstly, Badiou accepted that the 'force' of the proletariat was never completely 'pure', and thus the role of the party is to 'concentrate' it through its purification of both 'leftist' and 'rightist' deviations (ibid., pp. 12, 37, 38; Feltham 2008, p. 49). With the help of its party then, the working class traverses its 'objective existence' and establishes its 'political existence' as the proletariat. Its aim is the destruction of all forms of structural placement: 'the disappearance of the space of the placement of classes. It is the loss … of every index of class (Badiou 2009a, p. 7). The essence of the 'subject'

is not simply the destruction of splace, but in and through that the destruction of itself (ibid., p. 62). The second reason why Badiou emphasises the necessity of the Maoist party was because according to him, the latter was crucial for working through the problematic left by its more Leninist counterpart: self-dissolution. In other words, although the latter had proved itself adapt at seizing power, it had effectively failed to let it go. This, according to Badiou, was precisely what the Maoist party in China was attempting to resolve through the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Ibid., p. 205; Badiou 2010a, p. 273).

Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity at this stage has three elements. Firstly, the 'subject' is specifically political, militant, and yet is one that must essentially be found or 'demonstrated'. It is neither 'substance nor self-consciousness … cause nor ground', and thus must be considered in terms of a question, and not a pre-supposition (ibid., pp. 198, 278, 280). In a similar way to Laclau, Badiou insists that we must understand the 'structures within which subjects appear' (Pluth 2010, p. 3). Secondly – as in the case of Laclau and Negri – Badiou's problematises not only the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity but also its consistency. Indeed, as I have pointed out this was something that clearly preoccupied those who were taken by the events of May '68, and like many others at that time, Badiou's answer was to turn to the Maoist party. For Badiou, the possibility of communism lay in an ethics of 'confidence', both in the revolt of the masses and the mass line established by the party itself (Badiou 2009a, pp. 330, 331). However, as Hallward (2003) has pointed out, at this stage Badiou also had a lot of faith in history as a means of securing the whole process (Hallward 2003, p. 39). In other words, although Badiou theorised history primarily in terms of its antagonistic 'periodization', at base his faith in the insurrectionary capacities of the 'masses' was one driven by a belief in a 'minimally objective telos' (ibid., p. 39; Feltham 2008, p. 84). Finally, apart from both the emergence and consistency of revolutionary subjectivity, Badiou was also concerned with the very real potential for its deviation. Already at this early stage, within Badiou's theory of the subject the question of deviation is an all too real immanent possibility.

On the surface of things Badiou's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity retains all three conditions to Marx's: revolutionary subjectivity is defined through productive activity, it emerges immanently through a combination of objective and subjective factors, and its object is indeed change at the level of totality – understood in terms of the establishment of a place-less society. Crucially, however, where Badiou's theory departs with Marx's is the way he conceives of the 'subject' and indeed 'subjectivity' in general. In other words, at this early stage Badiou's notion of the subject is one which articulates a very particular procedure – a 'singular and fragile synthesis of multiple processes' (Feltham 2008, p. 78; Wright 2013, p. 156). Furthermore, although this subject can only be understood via its revolt, this revolt is not so much one between two antagonistic social classes, but rather between being and its more generic placement within a structure of placement (Callinicos 2006, p. 93; Sotiris 2011, p. 38).

The Impasse of Marxism

Just like Laclau and Negri, during the 1980s Badiou revised his early theory quite significantly. The driver here was the perceived impasse of Marxism, the latter of which had effectively lost its 'historical foothold' and could no longer serve as 'an internal referent for nascent forms of emancipatory politics' (Toscano 2008, p. 537). The key 'transitional' text from this period remains un-translated in English, although many commentators agree that this remains the most obvious point for establishing a 'break' within Badiou's youthful to more mature works (Toscano 2008; Power 2012).[2] Whilst it is true that Badiou had already registered the crisis of Marxism in 1977, it was the failure of the Chinese Cultural Revolution that, he would later accept, had brought an end to a particular 'sequence of political militancy'. Here we should note the following.

The first lesson characteristic of the failure of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was to rethink politics itself; particularly with respect to the idea that it originates or springs via the party form. This is not to deny the role it had played in the past; rather, for Badiou this particular form of organisation had exhausted all it had to offer. Now, Badiou would argue that political struggles must be understood on a strictly 'singular' basis and not be 'totalised by a party that would be simultaneously the representation of certain social forces' (Badiou 2002b, p. 96). We will see in more detail later, however, that – just like in the case of Negri – this rejection of the Leninist/Maoist party form does not mean that Badiou dispels with the issue of organisation completely. With the dissolution of the UCFML in 1985, Badiou and his comrades quickly established a new political organisation – *L'Organisation Politique* (OP) – and this was predicated precisely on rethinking this issue. Secondly, Badiou distanced himself from the traditional importance ascribed to social class and in consequence, traditional Marxist political strategy. Whilst he accepts that Marxian class analysis remains a 'fully reliable tool', it is nevertheless crucial to 'move beyond the idea that politics *represents* objective groups that can be designated as classes … [it is] … no longer possible to assign the revolutionary mass actions or the organisational phenomena to the strict logic of class representation' (ibid., p. 97; Badiou 2005a, p. 488). In a move that signalled a key shift of emphasis, from the 1980s onwards Badiou would begin to highlight the importance of immigrant workers, and more generally argue that politics had to separate itself from its more traditional economic referent (Pluth 2010, p. 25). Finally, Badiou would also revise his thoughts on the state. As I have shown, in Badiou's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity the state was something that was to be destroyed. In Badiou's mature work, however, the object of revolutionary subjectivity is to keep the state at a distance, whilst nevertheless forcing it to acknowledge or 'count' something radically new. Emphasis on destroying the state is thus dropped, and politically, today it is more a matter of creating the conditions for getting something out of it (ibid., p. 98). Hence, although certainly more 'measured' Badiou's hostility to the state would remain a principal aspect of his

2 For a more sceptical account see Bosteels (2013).

later thought (Hallward 2003, p. 98). By his own admission then, with the crisis of Marxism in the 1980s Badiou's early theory of revolutionary subjectivity had reached an impasse. However, far from associating himself with the various proclamations as to the death of Marxism – and indeed the death of the subject – Badiou's task was to establish what could still be salvaged (Feltham 2008, p. 87; Toscano 2008, p. 539).

Ontology and 'The Event'

Like Laclau and Negri, Badiou turned to ontology as a means of both deepening and rethinking aspects of his early theory. However, whereas Laclau turned to psychoanalysis and Negri turned to philosophy, Badiou would turn to the mathematical principles of set theory. Whilst this 'turn' was already apparent towards the end of Badiou's *Theory of the Subject*, as Bosteels (2011) points out, in *Being and Event* Badiou's task would be to articulate a more 'coherent ontology' as a means of providing his theory of the subject with a tighter 'ontological support' (Bosteels 2011, p. 106). Although formidably complex – particularly for those with an aversion to mathematics – Badiou's theory is able to establish not just a 'loose analogy or suggestive kinship', but in fact a direct equivalence between the principles of set theory and various questions concerning social justice and political representation (Norris 2009, pp. 7, 8; Wright 2013, p. 70). For Badiou, every form of society counts those deemed to be its members in a variety of ways. One way could be simply numerical – there are 63.7 million people living in Great Britain, etc. More important are the specificities of how such societies classify each individual or group – i.e. by giving them a specific 'name' or 'identity', such as 'workers', 'students', 'immigrants', 'pensioners', etc. Crucial for Badiou's argument however, is the fact that any such count is based on an underlying exclusion – or what Badiou calls 'the void' (Badiou 2005b, pp. 54, 55). Hence, the consistency of a social count is always already pierced by inconsistency. In a similar way to Laclau's notion of the 'socially heterogeneous', then, in the void lie those who are either not counted properly or not counted at all. As in Laclau's theory, though, the possibility remains that such a void might make its catastrophic or disastrous return (ibid., pp. 93, 94). For this to occur there must be a very specific 'historical situation', one whose abnormality offers the conditions for something quite unexpectedly new to emerge; what Badiou calls an 'evental-site' (ibid., p. 175). The existence of such a 'site' thus offers the objective foundations from which the void of a particular society – that which wasn't counted properly or counted at all – makes its dramatic appearance. The name for this occurrence is 'the event'.[3]

3 According to Badiou (1999) events can occur in four fundamental realms of human existence: love, science, art, and politics (Badiou 1999, p. 79). For our purposes, the most important form of event is politics, which according to Badiou (2006a) is distinctive in the sense that the form of subjectivity which usually stems from it is intrinsically a collective one (Badiou 2006a, p. 142).

According to Badiou although an 'event' can be 'localized' within a given 'situation', its distinctiveness lies in the indiscernible 'supplement' that it brings with it. Whilst connected in some way, then, this connection between an event and its site is not enough to guarantee the occurrence of the former – the evental-site is 'only ever a *condition of being* for the event'; it merely opens up its 'possibility' (ibid., p. 179). Furthermore, although an evental-site is connected to a particular situation, what the event brings certainly isn't. The reason for this is because the event is essentially a reactivation of the void, and this void was not 'officially' counted in the first place (Hallward 2003, p. 114). The evental supplement is in this sense totally unique, and in ontological terms belongs to 'that-which-is-not-being-qua-being' (Badiou 2005b, p. 189; Badiou 2002a, p. 41). Crucially, for Badiou one of the peculiarities of an event is its ephemeral character: it disappears as quickly and unexpectedly as it emerges. From within the situation it disrupted, it is 'impossible' to prove whether the event in fact took place, and in consequence whether it was related in some way to that particular situation (Badiou 2005b, p. 181). Thus, understood as a 'kind of flashing supplement that happens to a situation', what the event leaves behind is a 'trace', and in order to understand the event's true significance this trace must be picked up on and investigated (Badiou 2002a, p. 72; Feltham 2008, p. 120).

Faithful, Reactive, and Obscure Subjectivity

The undecidability of an event is solved through an 'intervention', the 'essence' of which involves both its 'illegal nomination' and 'unfolding this nomination in the space of the situation to which the (evental) site belongs' (Badiou 2005b, p. 203). What makes this evental name 'illegal' is the fact that although it is drawn from the evental-site, what it signifies is something in excess of both the language and knowledge of the situation at stake (ibid., p. 204). For the latter, although it can certainly register some 'novelty', the connection between the evental-site and the name of the event makes no sense: it 'cannot succeed in fixing the rationality of the link' (ibid., p. 208). Hence, unless 'someone' wagers on the possibility that an event has indeed occurred, from within the situation itself 'it will always remain doubtful whether there has been an event or not' (ibid., p. 207). The dual notions of 'nomination' and 'intervention' are thus the first stages of revolutionary subjectification – revolutionary in the sense that in order to assess the relationship between an event and a situation, one must necessarily break with what was deemed possible by the latter. Much like in Marx's theory, then, for Badiou an objective crisis in a situation is both necessary and yet insufficient alone to explain this subjectivity's emergence. Badiou's 'subject' is not merely the reflex of an objective crisis. Rather, this subject must make a radical subjective commitment to a particular event, and in so doing both think and act differently in the situation '*from the perspective of its evental supplement*' (Badiou 2002a, p. 41, *original emphasis*). Intervention is thus not the work of a 'hero' but rather of a concerted discipline, and the 'subject'

that emerges in consequence is really a subject to something other than itself – it is a wilful subject to the (unknown) consequences of an event (Badiou 2005b, p. 41).

Through a series of 'enquiries', fidelity establishes whether there is a positive or negative relation between the event and the situation from which its site could be located. The 'minimal gesture' of fidelity is thus establishing there is a connection or not (ibid., p. 330). Badiou is keen to emphasise the particularity of such fidelity: there is 'no general faithful disposition' (ibid., p. 233). Furthermore, although these enquiries are essentially replicating the counting procedure of the disrupted situation, Badiou is clear that there is no homology between their respective forms. In other words, fidelity is not just any counting procedure: fidelity attempts to establish the coherence of a situation in relation to what wasn't counted in the first place (ibid., p. 237). A 'non-institutional fidelity' thus forms a kind of 'counter-state', one which establishes a different situation based on a different 'legitimacy of inclusions' (ibid., p. 238). The outcome of establishing a positive connection between an event and its situation is what Badiou calls a 'generic truth'. Here the distinction between 'knowledge' and 'truth' becomes paramount. Every situation has its established 'encyclopaedia or knowledge', and this knowledge (including the language that is used to articulate it) acts to establish what is deemed possible – or countable – within that situation (ibid., p. 328). As we have seen, the distinctiveness of an event is that it brings something indiscernible to that situation. In this sense the event 'does not belong to the language of the situation' and in consequence it is 'foreclosed from knowledge' (ibid., p. 329). Establishing the truth of an event, then, cannot rely solely on the encyclopaedia of existing knowledge: 'fidelity is not the matter of knowledge. It is not the work of an expert: it is the work of a militant (ibid., p. 329), and the ultimate goal of a truth procedure is to rework a situation so that the truth revealed can become 'normalised' (ibid., p. 342).

This final step of a truth procedure is what Badiou calls 'forcing'. The 'law of the subject' lies in the establishment of its own 'subject language', one that traverses the encyclopaedic knowledge of a situation and supplements it with the truth that was established throughout its procedure. The subjective nature of this process is absolutely central to Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Indeed, whilst his theory of the event can be compared in some ways to Thomas Kuhn's notion of a 'paradigm shift', one of the key differences is the emphasis Badiou places on the former. As Norris (2009) explains, amongst other things there is 'far greater stress' on this aspect of Badiou's theory than in Kuhn's (Norris 2009, p. 154). The undecidable nature of an event can only be established via 'the subjective principle' – a radical commitment; a 'confidence' or 'belief' that a truth procedure will not be conducted in vain: '*Do all that you can to persevere in that which exceeds your perseverance. Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you*' (Badiou 2002a, p. 48, *original emphasis*). Clear from this quote is the precise relationship Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity establishes between the 'subject' and 'truth'. Badiou is absolutely clear that the former is not synonymous with the latter – the subject always 'falls short' of the truth in the sense that its consequences lie

infinitely beyond it. Badiou's 'subject' is thus swept up by the truth; carried away by something outside of its grasp. Thus, although the subject can certainly be said to 'produce truth', this truth does not reside within it: the subject is taken up by fidelity and is thus 'suspended' from truth. In other words, the subject is the mere mechanism – or support – through which a truth may eventually become established (Badiou 2005b, pp. 396, 397, 406).

In *Logic of Worlds* – subtitled 'Being and Event 2' – Badiou (2009b) would make a number of important revisions to the theory advanced in its predecessor. For the purposes of this study I would like to concentrate on two in particular: one which revises his notion of the objective occurrence of an 'event' and the other which qualifies his understanding of the form of subjectivity that may emerge in consequence. For many commentators including Hewlett (2007), whilst Badiou's notion of the event was one of his theory's most exciting, ultimately it provided only a partially plausible understanding of radical social change (Hewlett 2007, p. 57; Sotiris 2011, p. 43). Indeed as Pluth (2010) points out, the status of the event was one of an 'unaccountable mystery … which seems to emerge spontaneously, descending from the sky like a miracle' (Pluth 2010, p. 68). In *Logic of Worlds* Badiou deals with this issue by revising the relationship between an event and its evental site, or rather, the 'world' which an event may come to disrupt. Here, what Badiou also does is account for different types of change that an evental-site might bring forth. At one end of the scale, the first form of change is what Badiou calls a 'modification', described as both authorised and 'internal to the logical disposition' of a particular world/situation (Badiou 2009b, p. 359; Badiou 2010b, p. 74). As seen above, for Badiou 'real' or 'genuine' change requires a site with a particular 'intensity of existence' to spring from. The key shift in Badiou's theory at this point is that such intensity cannot be found in the 'ontology of the site' itself; this, he adds, will depend on the consequences of such intensity (ibid., p. 371; Pluth 2010, p. 81). The second form of change in this respect is what Badiou terms a 'fact'. A fact is the first form of change that actively requires a site to originate from, yet this site is one 'whose intensity of existence is not maximal' (Badiou 2009b, p. 372). Next, what he calls a 'singularity' refers to a site 'whose intensity of existence is maximal'. Finally, the strongest and most radical singularity is, of course, the event: that whose 'consequence [s] in the world is to make exist within it the proper inexistent of the object-site' (ibid., p. 372–7).

Badiou's later schema is thus able to account for more nuanced forms of change, and as such, arguably responds to charges that his previous theory implied political passivism – i.e. that one must somehow wait for an event to occur before one can act politically. Indeed, as Pluth (2010) points out, Badiou's later theory reiterates not so much an event's occurrence but rather 'what is being done with them'. Dependent on the 'intensity' of its site, the occurrence of an event depends largely on its consequences, and as with Badiou's earlier theory, the only way of determining the latter is through a subjective fidelity to it. Hence, an event's consequences are 'an entirely practical matter', and depend on the relationship individuals decide to establish with it. Here we come to the

second revision to Badiou's earlier theory. If we recall, in *Being and Event* Badiou emphasised one particular theory of the subject – the 'faithful' subject who, seized by change, submits themselves to the unpredictable trajectory of investigating the consequences of an event. This process was precisely what Badiou understood as a revolutionary subjectivity. In *Logic of Worlds* Badiou revises this theory also, and in the process reiterates themes already present in his earlier *Theory of the Subject*. In Badiou's later schema he admits that the faithful (revolutionary) subject is but one form of subjectivity that an event might bring forth: the others are what he calls a 'reactive' subject or an 'obscure' subject.

The reactive subject is one that denies the present established via a faithful subject's truth procedure, saying effectively 'no to the event' (Badiou 2009b, p. 55). Despite this, however, such denial is paradoxically based on accepting this present in the first place. Badiou's main practical reference here is the *nouveaux philosophes* discussed earlier in this chapter. Whilst accepting that May '68 was in some way an 'event', such 'reactive' subjectivity betrayed their own fidelity, and indeed actively encouraged others to do the same. The reactive subject, then, is one possible deviation from the present which is established by the 'faithful' subject. The second and more pernicious subject is what Badiou calls the 'obscure subject'. Beyond denying the present, an obscure subject actively negates it, and does this by appealing to an age of antiquity – a 'deleted present' that they want to see restored. Just like in the case of the reactionary subject, however, the obscure subject must at least tacitly acknowledge the present that it seeks to negate. 'In this sense', Badiou explains, 'the past is illuminated for them by the night of the present' (ibid., p. 59). A good example of such obscure subjectivity can be found in the 2007 French Presidential election. Throughout his campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy promised to reinvigorate French society on the basis of 'liquidating' or turning the page' on May '68. For him, many of France's problems could be put down to this defining moment, and hence as Power and Toscano (2009) have pointed out, by attempting to evoke the 'full body of the republic' Sarkozy was directly attempting to 'occult the present' as a consequence (Power and Toscano 2009, pp. 28, 30). Here we find a theme which we also found in Badiou's earlier work; namely his attention to the problems of deviation. In Badiou's mature theory there are thus three forms of subjectivity, each of which relates in some way to the establishment of a 'present': 'the faithful subject organises its *production*, the reactive subject its *denial* and the obscure subject is *occultation* (Badiou 2009b, p. 62).

The Communist Hypothesis

Alongside May '68 some of Badiou's most persistent examples of political events include the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions.[4] Here, I wish only to

4 For one of the most comprehensive overview of such events and their relationship to Badiou's thought, see Wright (2013), Chapter 2.

concentrate on the first and last of such examples. These events are particularly important for understanding what, according to Badiou, revolutionary subjectivity might involve today. For Badiou May '68 was a peculiar event in the sense that the truth it revealed effectively rendered all three conditions to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity historically defunct. May's 'secret truth' was that the 'classic conception' of revolutionary change was dying out (Badiou 2010a, p. 55; Wright 2013, p. 91). In a similar way to Negri (and to a lesser extent, Laclau) Badiou argues that the problematic aspects of Marx's theory are in this sense as much circumstantial as anything else, and revolutionary subjectivity today involves working through such circumstances. Here the aforementioned lessons of the Chinese Cultural Revolution become paramount. As we argued earlier, for Badiou the Chinese Cultural Revolution was an attempt to break with the inertia of the past, particularly with respect to the problem of revisionism and bureaucracy within the Party-state. Alongside Negri, Badiou accepts that Lenin had discovered the correct organisational form for instituting proletarian dictatorship. In this sense, Lenin's own fidelity was to the event of the Paris Commune, and in particular learning from its failure for not being able to sustain itself in the face of counter-revolution (Badiou 2010a, p. 274). Mao's own particular fidelity, on the other hand, was to the lessons of the Russian Revolution, especially with respect to the party form which had made it possible. As with all truth procedures however, this involved a careful analysis of how that truth related to the particularity of the Chinese context. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 3 whilst Mao accepted the necessity of the revolutionary party, in the same instance he retained an unbridled faith in the self-capacities of 'the masses'. Badiou picks up on this aspect of Mao's thought, arguing that he was always much more aware than his Russian counterparts of the need of keeping the relationship between the masses and their party as organic as possible. Hence, by Badiou's approximation the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to 'rediscover' the revolution's 'sources and basic actors in popular mass uprisings', and in so doing break the ossification in the party and continue the struggle for communism (ibid., p. 276).

According to Badiou, on this issue the Chinese Cultural Revolution failed. Yet, despite this there are important lessons to be learnt. As with Laclau and Negri, the most serious lies in severing his theory from any semblance of historicism. Interestingly, however, Badiou does not abandon all notion of historical process. In a very similar way to Negri's notion of 'cycles of struggle', Badiou retains some notion of historical process – albeit (politically, at least) one very different from Marx's. As with Laclau and Negri, then, the ultimate aim here is to 'break with history as the final tribunal of politics' (Wright 2013, p. 71). For Badiou, if Lenin's fidelity was to the Paris Commune and Mao's fidelity was to the Russian Revolution, underlying both such sequences was an underlying fidelity to both what he terms the 'Idea of Communism', and more generally the 'communist hypothesis'. Here, in philosophical terms what Badiou understands as an 'Idea' is neither a 'programme' nor something 'that is going to be achieved by concrete means'. Rather, an idea is the guiding principle behind any such change: it is

'the possibility in the name of which you act, you transform and you have a programme' (Badiou and Tarby 2013, p. 14). In this sense, for Badiou the 'idea of communism' has persisted throughout history, 'fragments' or 'invariants' of which appear in any struggle that is waged against the state and takes as its fundamental starting point axiomatic equality (Badiou 2008b, p. 35). Hence, whilst Badiou insists that 'communism' can/should be disentangled from its specifically Marxian heritage, he nevertheless accepts that its previous two 'sequences' were indeed closely connected to it.

The first sequence of the 'communist hypothesis' Badiou dates from the French Revolution up until the Paris Commune (1792–1871). It was here that the hypothesis was established. In its first instantiation the communist hypothesis was associated with popular insurrections against the state, with the aim of destroying the old order through the establishment of 'the community of equals' (ibid., p. 35). Here the revolutionary subject was the working class, and the Paris Commune was regarded as the working model for instituting its political and economic power. The second sequence of the communist hypothesis was one that attempted and – to some extent – succeeded in putting the communist hypothesis into practice. As Badiou explains, in this sequence 'it was no longer a question of formulating or testing' it … what the 19th century had dreamt, the 20th would realise' (ibid., p. 36). Importantly, as outlined above the way in which this occurred was by learning from the failures of the first sequence, specifically with respect to implementing the 'iron discipline' of Lenin's revolutionary party. For Badiou this sequence ran from 1917 to 1975, and again as I have noted, the latter years of this sequence included the 'red decade' that involved both May '68 and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. With the failure of the latter Badiou believes that just like there was a forty year interval between the first and the second sequence, we are now in a similar situation today. For him, at stake today is an attempt to open a fundamentally new political sequence independent from the models and referents of the past; including most specifically 'Marxism, the workers' movement, mass democracy, Leninism, the party of the proletariat, [and] the socialist state' (ibid., p. 37).

For Badiou, revolutionary subjectivity today involves a continued fidelity to the historical sequences that characterised the birth and implementation of the communist hypothesis. The 'current phase of revolutionary politics' must take as its starting point the failure of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, much like the failure of the Paris Commune served as the point of departure for Lenin (Badiou 2010a, p. 278). Yet, in the absence of the majority of the revolutionary referents of the past – including all three conditions which formed Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – the question remains as to exactly what such fidelity might involve in practical terms. Here the politics of Badiou's own political organisation – *L'Organisation Politique* (OP) – can serve as a useful guide. According to Hallward (2003) there are four particular elements to which we must take note.

The starting point for any revolutionary politics, firstly, is to take as its basis the fundamental axiom of equality. Being axiomatic, such equality is not something

that is either to be 'researched or verified' but is a political principle that is to unreservedly upheld (Badiou 2006b, p. 98). The way in which the OP do this is by making a series of egalitarian 'prescriptions' against the state – i.e. against a social structure that, through its 'count', invariably treats people as fundamentally unequal. Hence, against positing equality as a goal of political action, through making such prescriptions one immediately affirms the principle of equality in the present. Such prescriptions are at once direct, unmediated, and divisive in the sense that they establish a strict division between those that uphold the axiom of equality and those that do not (Hallward 2005, pp. 771, 772). Furthermore, political prescriptions should be clear and unambiguous to all. Prescriptions such as 'fight capital' or 'an end to frontiers' are quite insufficient, for as Badiou explains they state 'no real policy, because no one knows exactly what it means' (Badiou 2002b, p. 105). In practice then, the OP's prescriptions are deceptively straightforward, and involve stating what might seem to be the obvious: 'every individual counts as one individual', or 'everyone who is here is from here' etc. (Hallward 2003, p. 228). In this sense, one might argue that the key benefit to such a politics is 'its capacity to formulate simple yet deeply challenging assertions that get to the heart of urgent issues' (Wright 2013, p. 106).

Crucial here – secondly – is the 'context specific' nature of such a politics. Whilst prescriptive equality is something that 'seeks to change the situation on a whole' – and is thus addressed to all – these prescriptions must always ultimately work within a particular site. In this sense a politics of prescription assigns itself to the places which the conventional party politics of the state effectively ignores; ranging from the streets, factories, and even churches (ibid., p. 105). In this sense a politics of prescription is designed specifically to create a space between itself and the politics of the state, forcing the state to 'reveal itself' and its 'repressive dimension' – not necessarily just in terms of its capacity for physical violence but more generally in terms of its repressive counting procedures (ibid., p. 107; Badiou 2006a, p. 145). Interestingly, in more concrete terms – thirdly – one of the most recurrent sites that the OP has prescribed has been which one might assume Badiou's project would have dispensed with: the factory. More specifically, and in a move highly reminiscent of Jacques Rancière, one of the most important of the OP's political prescriptions concerns that of the 'figure of the worker'. According to Badiou (2002a) the 'figure of the worker' is a form of subjectivity that has been consistently attacked and, to a large extent, driven from the political landscape. The OP's continued reference to this figure is an attempt to stop that from happening (Badiou 2002a, p. 103). In a similar way to Rancière's understanding of the proletariat, however, the OP's understanding of the figure of the worker is equally abstract: it has nothing to do with a particular sociological identity or, for that matter, a structurally-defined social class. Rather, the figure of the worker refers essentially to its capacity for radical subjectification: to individuals 'capable of generating thought of his or her own', independent of the state's particular way of counting it (Badiou 2002b, p. 102; Read 2007, p. 125; Wright 2013, p. 106). Hence, such a figure is much more than, say, an 'employee' – which as Wright

(2013) points out is defined merely on the basis of 'salary budgets, attendance records, and productivity measures'. Here the OP's prescription of the figure of the worker is formulated in terms of a completely 'different regime of evaluation': one that takes into account their full multiplicity as a human being as opposed to being a mere worker (Wright 2013, p. 106; Badiou 2006c, pp. 174, 175). In this sense Badiou still believes that the factory remains a political 'evental-site', and as such still offers the basis for some form of 'factory event' (ibid., p. 172). As seen in his later theory which emphasises the importance of the site's intensity, prescriptions of this sort can thus be seen in terms of their role in both maintaining and/or developing it. As such, the figure of the worker 'must be upheld as alive and active in the field of politics' (Badiou 2002b, p. 103).

Despite this, it is clear that the figure of the worker is not what it once was, and for Badiou its decline has coincided with the emergence of another form of the state's repressive nominations: the *sans papiers* (or undocumented) immigrant workers in France. The plight of such workers has been something of a continued issue in French politics, particularly with respect to the series of discriminatory measures placed upon them since the 1980s (Hallward 2003, p. 233). For Badiou the need for reinvigorating the figure of the worker connects directly to this issue, for according to him – in France at least – the rise of the very terms 'immigrant', 'alien' or 'foreigner' coincided directly with the state's campaign to eliminate it (Badiou 2002b, p. 103). The OP's prescriptions in this respect are, once again, powerful and yet straightforward: if individuals live and work within a given geographical space, then they should be recognised as free and equal subjects within that space (Badiou 2008c, p. 44). Furthermore, not only should they be counted properly, but there should be no conditions placed on this count. Put very simply, if immigrants live and work in a given country that should be more than sufficient in securing their legitimacy, regardless of where they have come from or the beliefs and culture they bring might with them (ibid., p. 66). As stated earlier, then, Badiou's recourse to ontology plays a very similar role to Laclau's and Negri's. In a similar way to Laclau, Badiou's focus lies with those at the margins of the social count – and his ontology allows him to do this with particular rigour. Yet unlike Laclau we have also seen that Badiou is quite unwilling to dispense with the 'figure of the worker'; despite the latter being quite different from its more traditional referents. This figure is no longer either primarily economic or sociological: the figure of the worker is 'the generic name for all who can withdraw themselves, in an organised way, from the realised hegemony of financial capital and its servants' (Badiou 2008c, p. 44).

Badiou's Post-Marxism: An Assessment

Despite Badiou's (2002b, p. 114) rejection of 'post-Marxism' on the basis that it signifies a politics which resigns itself to the continued hegemony of capitalist society, his theory of revolutionary subjectivity is quite clearly significantly

different from Marx's, and from the perspective adopted in this book should be considered a form of post-Marxism. For Badiou, revolutionary subjectivity is not defined through the prism of productive activity, it emerges only partially immanently to that which it comes to revolutionize, and it must not involve the seizure of state power. In the final part of this chapter I will turn my attention to outlining the usefulness of Badiou's theory, concentrating predominantly on his notion of the event, subject, and the general effectiveness of the sort of politics Badiou suggests revolutionary subjectivity must or might involve today. Due to the on-going evolution of Badiou's ideas this will also involve outlining the ways in which his theory has responded to past critiques. Before doing this, however, I will start by reiterating the nature of Badiou's post-Marxism.

Confirming the argument presented in this book, for Nina Power (2012) Badiou's relationship to Marx can only be understood through his relationship to Mao (Power 2012, p. 160). As with the case of Laclau in relation to Gramsci, and Negri in relation to Lenin, Badiou's attempts to move beyond Marx's theory of revolutionary is effectively governed (using his own terms) by his enduring fidelity to Mao, and according to Bruno Bosteels (2011) this 'loyalty' or 'lingering debt' is evident in at least two senses. Firstly, there is clearly a link between Mao's emphasis on the primacy of political praxis – evidenced through his emphasis on the necessity of 'enquiries' – and Badiou's conception of what a post-evental faithful (revolutionary)subjectivity must entail. If we recall, for Badiou such subjectivity involves a sustained engagement which carefully relates a particular event to a particular situation. In this first sense, then, this 'dialectical rapport between truth and knowledge is precisely the place of inscription' for Badiou's 'debts to Maoism' (Bosteels 2011, p. 115). The second way in which Badiou's enduring relationship to Mao forms the basis to his post-Marxism is, once again, visible through the way he would rethink one of Mao's famous dictums; this time in relation to the latter's faith in the self-capacity of 'the masses'. However, as established earlier, in Mao's thought such faith was combined with an acceptance as to the necessity of the revolutionary party. Whilst the latter was essential for raising the masses' 'perceptual' knowledge to its higher 'rational' form, the relationship between the party and such ideas needed to be as organic as possible: 'from the masses to the masses'. For Bosteels, this dictum remains operative in Badiou's thought but is re-conceptualised in terms of the relationship between philosophy and truth – the latter of which we have seen can only emerge periodically – 'event-ally' – either in the realms politics, love, art or science. Hence, in this respect Badiou moves from 'serving the masses' to 'serving the truths' (ibid., p. 118).

Event, History, and Ontology

For Bosteels (2011), Badiou's lingering debt to Mao goes hand-in-hand with his attempts to continually re-think both the dialectic and the concept of the subject. For him, 'Badiou was and still is a Maoist, even though … he no longer is the same

Maoist that he once was' (ibid., p. 111). Because of this, however, for the purposes of this study one might argue the same about Badiou's relationship to Marx. To some extent, then, there is an interesting debate as to the nature of the break in Badiou's earlier and later periods, particularly given how his *Logic of Worlds* quite explicitly revives many of the themes outlined some decades earlier in his *Theory of the Subject*. What cannot be denied with respect to Badiou's relationship to Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, however, is that there is indeed a break, and this break is governed largely by Badiou's enduring relationship to Mao. As with both Laclau and Negri, however, the core of Badiou's post-Marxism can be identified as his hostility to Marx's philosophy of history, or more specifically, the extent to which that theory could properly theorise radical political novelty. Here Badiou (2013) is adamant: 'Marx subordinated politics to history' (Badiou and Tarby 2013, p. 17).

If, as we saw, Badiou's earlier theory clung to some underlying notion of historical necessity, his later theory – centred on the notion of the 'event' – was designed to sever this link. For some, such as the late Daniel Bensaïd (2006), this shows that Badiou has effectively given up on all notion of historical process. 'In the wake of Althusser's process without a subject', he argued, 'Badiou presents us with a subject without history' (Bensaïd 2006, p. 98). As a response to the relationship established between the event and history in *Being and Event*, this criticism had some force. However, as Wright (2013) points out, the primary target of Badiou's notion of the event was not history, but rather historicism (Wright 2013, p. 87). Indeed, in a similar way to how Negri conceives the history of capitalist development in terms of particular 'cycles of struggle', we have seen that via Badiou's sequential understanding of the 'communist hypothesis' he certainly doesn't abandon all notion of historical process.[5] Despite this, some commentators remain relatively unconvinced at Badiou's attempts to rethink history. According to Hewlett (2012), for example, Badiou's sequential notion of history renders it 'curiously immobile' (Hewlett 2012, p. 51). Ultimately, however, this is a criticism which Badiou effectively shares with both Laclau and Negri, and it is surely preferable to rethink the notion of historical process rather than simply abandon it all together.

The force of Badiou's notion of 'the event' is established via ontology, and there can be no doubt that Badiou's 'turn' in this respect has been as strategically significant as Laclau's and Negri's. As stated earlier, the appeal to his theory of the event lies very much in its mysteriousness; the fact that, from within a given situation, what it brings is something completely novel – something which, as we will stress below, absolutely cannot be 'forced' by a pre-existing 'subject'. Interestingly, whilst some commentators (Hewlett 2012) have praised the emancipatory nature of Badiou's theory, and in particular his attempts to rethink

5 This being said, however, there are clearly differences between Negri's theory and Badiou's theory; the most obvious of which lies in how these two theorists conceptualise the significance of (new forms of) labour (Power 2012, p. 162).

(and not completely abandon) questions which have been central to revolutionary discourses of the past, other are nevertheless sceptical of the theory's ontological underpinnings. There are two inter-linked issues here. Firstly, one could question the actual necessity of Badiou's ontological turn. Whilst accepting that Badiou's thought has been central for theorising radical change on the basis of 'the event', Alex Callinicos (2006) has questioned the extent to which this must also involve the assimilation of 'its attendant metaphysical baggage'. Of particular concern here is Badiou's tendency for 'ontologizing politics' – a charge Callinicos also essentially levels against Negri (Callinicos 2006, pp. 108, 151). Hence, whilst accepting that some find the Marxist theory of the state problematic, Callinicos bluntly states that it is 'slightly ridiculous' to think that an alternative formulation can be gleaned from the principles of set theory, or more generally 'some alleged "theorem of Being"' (ibid., p. 109). Callinicos' point here is important, and reiterates claims I made earlier with respect to the political consequences of choosing a given ontology. Yet, in a second sense there are a series of potentially more serious problems. One such issue is the general effectiveness of Badiou's politics. I will return to discuss this in more detail later. For now, I want to consider the extent to which Badiou's ontology successfully permits his claims regarding how revolutionary subjectivity emerges.

In one of the very few instances where he has commented on Badiou's work in detail, Laclau (2004) takes up this point in a way which, according to him, provides a useful contrast to his own approach. Whilst describing Badiou's ontology as 'complex' and 'in many ways fascinating', the main problem Laclau identifies with Badiou's approach is its failure to properly theorise the emergence of – or better construction of – revolutionary subjectivity. If we recall, for Badiou revolutionary subjectivity always emerges from the 'void' of a situation, or in more general terms, from the margins of the social count. For Badiou at the heart of this subjectivity is the axiom of equality – i.e. demands to be counted equally amongst others within a given situation. For Laclau, the problem with Badiou's approach is that he does not account for the way in which one particular demand must necessarily become the 'surface of inscription' for others: i.e. Badiou effectively has no theory of hegemony, and for Laclau 'a hegemonic universality is the only one that any society can achieve' (Laclau 2006, p. 121). Put another way, whilst Badiou certainly emphasises the particularity of every 'site' and hence the idea that universality cannot be aprioristically inscribed, what is nevertheless lacking is a theory of how universality is constructed in the first place. For Laclau the closest Badiou comes in this respect is through the investigative fidelity of the faithful subject. However, as Laclau explains this remains a rather 'limited' process: 'it is not conceived by him as the construction of a wider evental site through the expansion of equivalential chains, but as a process of total conversion in which there is either a 'connection' or 'disconnection' without possibility of any middle' (ibid., p. 132). Hence, Laclau's conclusions are clear: what his own theory provides via his notion of 'empty signifiers' cannot 'be properly thought within the framework of Badiou's mathematical ontology' (ibid., p. 136).

From this perspective there are clear limits to what Badiou's ontology is able to provide *vis-à-vis* his theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Despite this, one of the strongest aspects to his theory – one which could also be argued stems from his underlying ontology – lies in its capacity for accounting for a range of different forms of subjectivity; not all of which are revolutionary. This is crucially important, for as Toscano (2006) notes, if a theory of revolutionary subjectivity avoids such possibilities, 'we run the risk of producing political theories that differ little from plain wishful thinking or self-satisfied sectarianism' (Toscano 2006, p. 339). We have seen how Badiou supplemented his initial notion of the 'faithful' subject with both its 'reactionary' and 'obscure' forms. However, what Badiou's theory is also able to do is account for divergent pathways which a specifically faithful subjectivity might also take, some of which he accepts are problematic.

Badiou examines this issue through establishing what he calls a 'typology of fidelities'. If we recall, for Badiou fidelity involves a series of enquiries that seeks to establish the relationship between an event and the situation from which it emerged. What Badiou calls a 'generic fidelity' is one that basically does this properly: it seeks to establish what is connected to the event and its situation and what is not. At the same time, however, Badiou anticipates possibilities of both 'spontaneous' and 'dogmatic' forms of fidelity. For Badiou a spontaneous fidelity is one that assumes that the event is completely novel and thus has little or no connection to the situation from which it emerged. A dogmatic fidelity, on the other hand, is one that believes that the event brings nothing novel to an established situation, and hence that 'all the elements in the situation are presumed to be connected to the event as a matter of course' (Hallward 2003, p. 129; Badiou 2005b, p. 237). For Badiou, then, both of these 'deviations' are entirely possible – there is no one form of truth procedure, just like there is no one particular form of post-evental subjectivity.

Badiou's discussion of different forms of fidelity is important because it reveals something crucial with respect to how his theory of revolutionary subjectivity links to the third condition of Marx's. This condition stipulated that the object of revolutionary subjectivity was the capture of state power and, from this, the dissolution of politics through the abolition of private property and the establishment of a classless society. In Badiou's terms, this would clearly involve a complete reorganisation of an established 'situation'. What Badiou's discussion above reveals, however, is the extent to which he rejects this possibility. Badiou (2002a) reiterates this point through a discussion of what he calls the 'ethics of truths', and the way that he does this is by, once again, noting the inherent dangers of a truth process: this time in relation to the creation of a new 'subject language'. If we recall, for Badiou the occurrence of an event cannot be made intelligible from within the 'knowledge' of an established situation. Fidelity thus essentially involves abstracting oneself from that situation and, by doing this, creating a new language from it. The danger here is the possibility that this new language might attempt something too drastic; to 'claim the power, based on its own axioms, to

name the whole of the real and thus to change the world' (Badiou 2002a, p. 83). Hence, in this case a truth procedure would not just reorganise the distortions associated with the situated knowledge of an existing situation, but would in fact attempt to revolutionise everything on 'absolute authority of truthful nomination'. Thus, in a remarkably similar way to Laclau, Badiou's invocation of the Lacanian Real testifies to the fact that every situation will always be built on something excluded, and hence there will always be something to every truth that will and must remain 'unnameable'. Every truth procedure thus has its 'halting point' – there must remain 'at least one point that the truth cannot force'. Any attempt to do so will only end in 'disaster' (ibid., pp. 85, 86; Bosteels 2013, p. 107). In sum, then, and in a similar way to Laclau, by rejecting any attempt at a complete foundational revolutionary change Badiou breaks decisively with the third condition of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity.

Returning now to the relationship between Badiou's theory and the first and second conditions to Marx's, here we must start with the second in order to deal also with the first. For Marx – as stipulated by the second condition to his theory – revolutionary subjectivity emerges as a tendency through the play of both objective and subjective factors. Whilst structural (economic) crises were clearly important, we established that for Marx revolutionary subjectivity also required the educative process of class struggle; one that whilst didn't so much always cause capitalist crisis were, nevertheless, crucial for determining its form, intensity, and ultimate outcome. Crucially, in Marx's theory the candidate for revolutionary subjectivity pre-exists such structural crises; albeit in its pre-revolutionary form of being a 'class against capital'. In a sense, then, in Marx's theory the identity of the revolutionary subject is known before its actual revolutionary subjectification. In Badiou's theory it is quite the opposite: whilst anyone can become a subject, before an event there are only 'individuals' (Badiou 2002a, p. 43).[6] Hence, as McGowan (2010) puts it, 'there is no subjectivity that does not ultimately derive from identification with a revolutionary social group committed to the evental rupture' (McGowan 2010, p. 24). Furthermore, whilst Badiou's ontology might allow some speculation as to whom such subjects might be (i.e. those at the margins of the social count), this ontology certainly doesn't permit the sort of underlying historical narrative that Marx's does.

It is at this point that many commentators identify a potentially significant weakness to Badiou's theory, and this essentially concerns the extent to which revolutionary subjectivity lies at the mercy of the event – something which cannot be predicted and cannot wilfully be brought into being. For our purposes one of the most significant critiques here is advanced by Hardt and Negri (2009). For them, whilst Badiou's theory has indeed been significant for posing the event as

6 For an interesting suggestion of how one could establish in Badiou's work a closer connection between pre-evental individuals and post-evental subjects, see Wright (2013, pp. 178–185).

the 'central question in contemporary philosophy', what is required is not simply an ontology of their chance-like occurrence but rather one which allows us to conceive of their production. In other words, 'a retrospective approach to the event in fact does not give us access to the rationality of insurrectionary activity … Without the internal logic of masking events, one can only affirm them from the outside as a matter of faith' (Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 61; Johnson 2009, p. 114). To some extent one could argue that the modifications Badiou made from *Being and Event* to *Logic of Worlds* might soften the force of this charge. In other words, by revising the relationship between the event and the 'intensity' of the site from which it occurs Badiou was at least able to establish the importance of some degree of pre-evental activity. Indeed, it seems to me that via his notion of the communist hypothesis what Badiou establishes is not so much a theory that restricts individuals to waiting for events in the future, but rather a theory that encourages individuals to learn from the events of the past. In a recent interview Badiou indeed makes this very point. 'The political subject is, then, the interval between the past event and the coming event' (Badiou and Tarby 2013, p. 13).

One example of how such a process could be understood is suggested through Wright's (2013) notion of an 'evental culture'. From Badiou we learn that revolutionary subjectivity today involves a sustained enquiry into the lessons learnt from the past sequences of the communist hypothesis. We will return to the specifics of what this subjectivity entails below. Here Wright's (2013) notion of an 'evental culture' reminds us of the complex and protracted nature of such a process; something which is undoubtedly made more precarious in the absence of the organisational forms deemed saturated by the past. The issue as to why revolutionary subjectivity deviates has been something Badiou's work has always sought to understand, and is unquestionably one of the strongest aspects to his theory taken as a whole. Indeed, Badiou himself is said to have stated that 'all of his work' has been one that 'stems from the need to answer how and why many of his generational peers could betray their revolutionary convictions' (Power and Toscano 2009, p. 34). In this sense Wright's (2013) notion of an eventual culture is an interesting supplement to Badiou's theory, particularly with respect to deepening our understanding of the internal dynamics of fidelity. He defines evental culture as 'the ongoing, open and immanent creation of an alternative way of life that sustains the militant subjectivity required to force a truth on the dominant way of life' (Wright 2013, p. 288). This process entails two aspects. Firstly, an evental culture requires some form of cultural 'glue'; one which helps those engaged in a truth process to 'cohere and consist' in the face of not only uncertainty, but also the charges – levelled by an existing state of the situation – that no event has in fact taken place. Secondly, from this comes the importance of how faithful subjects come to articulate their truth in aesthetic terms. Again, this aspect is vitally important because as we have seen, from within the established situation (or 'world') there effectively are no pre-existing resources to do this properly (ibid., p. 288). I will expand on Wright's notion of eventual culture in my conclusion.

In relation to the second condition of Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity, then, in a very similar way to Laclau, for Badiou revolutionary subjectivity emerges only partially immanent to that which it comes to revolutionise. Whilst we have seen that Badiou retains some notion of historical process, what becomes apparent is the extent to which his theory also diverges from the first condition of Marx's. For Badiou revolutionary subjectivity is defined by nothing else than the particularity of the truth procedure that it comes to define itself through. Despite this, we saw earlier that, unlike Laclau, Badiou is unwilling to completely dispense with references to what he called 'the figure of the worker'. To be sure, however, his references to such a figure are more metaphorical than sociological; seeking merely to reiterate his insistence that human beings are always substantially more than the particular identity a state gives them. In passing I noted earlier the similarities here with Rancière's retention of the notion of the 'proletariat', and at this point it is interesting to pursue this connection a little closer. In many ways their respective theories are strikingly similar, particularly with respect to the way they demarcate two radically incommensurable social logics and the possibility of sudden egalitarian moments of revolutionary rupture. Indeed, for both Badiou and Rancière it is this interruption – from the margins – that acts to reveal the false universality of a particular order, and hence for both thinkers it is dissensus and not consensus that lies at the heart of all collective revolutionary politics. Finally, whilst both thinkers retain some emphasis on the figure of the worker, both also accept the necessity of developing a politics 'without a party' (Read 2007).

Interestingly, Badiou and Rancière have both noted their respective affinities and have also commented on each other's work. For his part Badiou has praised Rancière's theory, particularly with respect to his retention of the possibilities of political emancipation (Badiou 2009b, p. 561). Despite this, Badiou claims that Rancière does not sufficiently theorise political militancy, especially in relation to the struggle against the state. The figure of the 'political militant', he claims, is 'totally absent from Rancière's system' (Badiou 2006e, pp. 121, 122). For Badiou, Rancière's politics remains too anarchistic and avoids properly rethinking the discipline associated with organisational practice that he still believes is necessary for revolutionary politics today. According to Love and May (2008) however, here Badiou's comments reveal the deficiencies of his own approach, particularly with respect to his continued fidelity to the 'discredited' politics of Maoism. For them, Badiou's claim that only militants are able to affirm a truth seems to contrast with Rancière's notion that, quite literally, anyone has this capacity. Once again, here they locate the problem primarily with his underlying ontology. As they explain, 'by introducing an ontological structure undergirding political activity, Badiou opens the door to the avant-guard figure, the militant who, in contrast to the masses, understands and can articulate the missing truth of a 'situation' (Love and May 2008, p. 67).

For his part Rancière (2003) has also commented on Badiou's work, although perhaps not as in such a systematic way. Whilst also accepting their respective similarities, the difference which Rancière identifies between his theory and

Badiou's reiterates an issue raised earlier; namely, the sharpness of the distinction Badiou's establishes between a situation and an event. For Rancière his own theory essentially allows for a deeper connection between 'politics' and the 'police'. According to him, the specific historical configuration of 'the social' is not 'some sort of empirical magma – from which the political act would escape from'. Rather, he adds, 'I think that the social is a complex domain … a sort of mixture where the policing logics which determine how things are to be distributed or shared out amongst social groups encounter the varying ways of configuring the common space which throw these same distributions into question' (Rancière 2003, p. 201). Hence, as Hewlett (2007) has pointed out, although Rancière's notion of 'politics' is very much as ephemeral and fleeting as Badiou's notion of the event, the major advantage that he has over Badiou is his acceptance that some form of subjectivity can be said the pre-exist the event itself (Hewlett 2007, p. 108). Once again, then, the main problem identified with Badiou's theory here is the relationship between pre-evental individuals and post-evental subjects.

To summarise things at this point, Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity breaks all three conditions to Marx's, and does so primarily on the basis of his continued fidelity to the thought of Mao. In a similar way to Negri but certainly not in the case of Laclau, however, Badiou's theory develops with continual reference to 'communism', or more specifically what he calls the 'communist hypothesis'. In other words, for Badiou revolutionary subjectivity today must be rethought on the basis of the former's previous 'sequences', particularly with respect to the lessons learnt by the failures of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and May 68'. In a similar way to Negri's theory, then, for Badiou the conditions to Marx's theory had to be rethought on the basis of its 'saturation'. In other words, whilst Marx's theory might have been instrumental for a particular historical form which the communist hypothesis assumed, today this theory must be rethought not simply on the basis of how revolutionary subjectivity emerges – i.e. via the theory of the 'event' – but, from that, in more concrete terms with respect to what this subjectivity must involve today. To finish this chapter I will now turn to assess the effectiveness of the latter.

The best place to start here is by reiterating what Badiou sees as the consequences of the second sequence of the communist hypothesis. For Badiou, in political terms revolutionary subjectivity today cannot be controlled by the party, cannot be explained merely on the basis of social or economic class, and it must necessarily keep its distance from the state. Perhaps the most contentious aspect here is the latter, and can be explained further by considering Badiou's relationship to democracy. It is Badiou's (2002a) absolute conviction that, today, democracy is just another word for what he calls 'capitalo-parliamentarianism'. As such, liberal democracy is a form of politics that will always serve the needs of capital and its functionaries, turning 'the spectacle of the economy into the object of an apathetic public consensus' (Badiou 2002a, p. 31). The consequences of this are that democracy produces a very specific form of subjectivity, one that is based not on the divisive and antagonistic nature of political truths, but rather

on the more banal consensus politics of 'public opinion'. The latter, he argues, is only ever a form of subjectivity that is inherently conservative; one that is destined to remain trapped and subdued by a bland and ultimately inactive politics of everyday life. Extricating oneself from such politics, he adds, is perhaps one of the most pressing problems today (Badiou and Tarby 2013, p. 2). Crucial here is the way that, for Badiou as in Marx, in capitalist society politics is heavily restricted – or conditioned – by the structural requirements of capital accumulation (ibid., p. 31). Real politics – a singular politics of truth – must necessarily subtract itself from such requirements and thus, at least from the perspective of an established situation, demand what is deemed the impossible. For Badiou, in practice this involves absenteeism from most if not all conventional political processes, including most specifically electoral and trade union politics. Badiou's politics thus remains one of a 'rigid anti-Statism'. Some, such as Wright (2013) however, have questioned the usefulness of such a sharp delineation from conventional political processes. After all, there can be many different forms of the capitalist state – some of which, depending on your particular point of view, are clearly more preferable than others. Thus, as he explains, 'there seems scant resources within Badiou's *philosophical* system to even pose the question of whether, say, a welfare state is preferable to a totalitarian party-state, [or] a"nanny" state to a laissez-faire state … ' (Wright 2013, p. 96).

For Badiou there can be 'no economic battle against the economy', and thus revolutionary subjectivity today must create and engage a form of political activity that is completely heterogeneous to the demands of capital: 'we have to destroy capital's domination, [and] extricate ourselves from its "democratic" propaganda' (ibid.; Badiou and Tarby 2013, p. 35; Badiou 2002b, p. 106; Badiou 2006d, p. 85). More specifically, this must involve three inter-related processes: one must uphold the possibility (or 'idea') of radical social change, not merely via intellectuals but also 'at the level of public debate'; one must experiment politically at the local level until more general strategic initiatives are created; and finally, perhaps most importantly one must confront the issue of organisational form – a form which, as yet, has yet to be found (Badiou and Tarbey 2013, pp. 36–8). Such an experimental politics is precisely what Badiou and the OP has sought to explore though the notion of a politics of prescription. Here, Badiou argues, democracy-proper – one based on axiomatic equality – can be put into action. Interestingly, Badiou claims that such action is not about numbers, either in terms of the amount of people directly involved or for that matter the amount of people won over to a particular cause. What is important, however, is that the prescriptions employed throughout this process are universal and meaningful to all. Democracy today, then, must be understood on the basis of the production of axiomatic and largely experimental political prescriptions, all of which according to Badiou (2002b) boils down to one very simple dictum: 'asking how things in society are counted, or go uncounted' (Badiou 2002b, p. 102). This new form of revolutionary politics thus shuns not only the conventional political procedures characteristic of the present, but also the 'insurrectionary' form of form of politics of the past (Pluth 2010, p. 172).

At this point we can identify two fundamental problems with Badiou's theory, as identified by various commentators. The first concerns the extent to how effective Badiou's politics actually is. Barker (2002), for example, argues that Badiou's political project seems to have abandoned the possibility of 'concrete transformation' and, instead, confines itself to the 'blind voluntarism' of mere resistance (Barker 2002, p. 7). In a similar fashion, Hallward (2003) has argued that although it might be understandable why Badiou has been so keen to theorise the singularity of political procedures – i.e. theorising politics on its own terms in abstraction from economics – this nevertheless raises real questions with respect to how effective his prescriptive politics can be. Indeed, despite its overt hostility to trade unionism, Hallward finds it difficult to see how the OP's prescriptions regarding the 'figure of the worker' actually differ from the latter, apart from perhaps being even more marginalised (Hallward 2003, p. 283). In this sense both Barker's and Hallward's critique are significant, but since the publication of *Logic of Worlds* one could argue that Badiou goes some way in addressing these issues, something which Hallward himself concedes (Hallward 2008, p. 107; Wright 2013, p. 155). By emphasising the importance of the relative intensity of the 'world' from which an event might come to disrupt, Badiou's later schema encourages a more concrete and dynamic analysis of particular historical situations. Despite this, however, for other commentators Badiou's theory does not go far enough. According to Sotiris (2011), for example, the limitation of Badiou's theory remains the fact that he is unable to provide a more 'relational theorisation of society'. For Sotiris, the heart of the problem is Badiou's revised dialectical schema; one which, as we have seen, from his very earliest works sought to rethink on the basis of the Maoist principle of 'creative scission'. The effect of this, Sotiris argues, is both the greatest appeal and yet greatest weakness of Badiou's project: his ability and willingness to theorising the 'endless possibility' of radical innovation, and yet his unwillingness in advancing 'any form of relational determination and/or historical causality' (Sotiris 2011, p. 43). From this perspective, not only does Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity overemphasise 'the transformative effects of subjective decisions', but more importantly – echoing Laclau's comments discussed above – it avoids posing the more arduous account of its hegemonic construction (ibid., pp. 48, 49).

The second major problem with Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity concerns not simply how effective it actually is, but rather the anti-programmatic nature of what it actually entails. Once again, many of the critiques at this point stem from those who advocate a politics from within the more conventional radical left. In many ways, this can come as no great surprise given how explicit Badiou has been with respect to leaving many of its traditional tactical and strategic referents behind; specifically in this case the organisational forms associated with what he regards as the second sequence of the communist hypothesis. From the Trotskyist left, then, both Alex Callinicos (2006) and Daniel Bensaïd (2006) have criticised Badiou's politics on the basis of its vague and seemingly directionless nature. 'Carried by a pure axiom of equality',

Bensaïd (2006) states, 'a politics without parties or programmes seems to have no goal to strive toward', and indeed, echoing Hallward (2003), he adds that when the OP 'ventures into the terrain of practical and constitutional proposals, it comes as no surprise that all it has to offer are banal reforms' (Bensaïd 2006, pp. 102, 103). For Callinicos (2006), 'for all its follies' the programmatic nature of Marxism-Leninism remains clearly more tactically and strategically adept for emancipatory movements today, and hence once again, at issue here is the OP's insistence on developing a form of revolutionary politics in abstraction from its traditional party-form (Callinicos 2006, p. 111). For Sotiris (2011) this deficiency in Badiou's theory stems logically from the exceptional nature of his notion of the 'event', and again, following Laclau he identifies this problem directly with Badiou's underlying ontology. For him, this 'thinking of the political event rules out the possibility of actually intervening in the balance of forces, changing the elements of the situation based on knowledge of the dynamics of the situation, and making possible the emergence of radical change as a material stake' (Sotiris 2011, p. 52). Despite the validity of this critique, however, Satiris' claim that Badiou rejects the issue of political organisation *tout court* seems unfair (ibid., p. 54). In many ways – similar to Negri – this issue has always been at the heart of Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity. The fact that Badiou cannot offer the answer as to the adequate organisational form today is something which he himself has been clear; as too has his comments regarding the absolute imperative of discovering one (Badiou and Tarbey 2013, p. 38).

From the 'Event' to the 'Act'

The discussions above reveal two inter-linked perceived limitations of Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity: its strictly post-evental nature and the inadequacies of its adherence to a 'politics without a party'. Summarising things bluntly, there is a very real danger that Badiou's post-evental theory of revolutionary subjectivity 'remains entirely defensive and local, highly limited in its impact, and in relation to the overall course of history, ironically rather minimal' (Hewlett 2007, p. 56). To bring this chapter to a close I wish now to turn to the thought of Slavoj Žižek; another key contemporary social theorist who, since around 1993 and particularly after 1999, has aligned himself very closely to the thought of Badiou. Indeed, in some senses their work has represented a 'united front', especially with respect to their shared emphasis on maintaining the possibility of radical social change (McGowan 2010, p. 8).

In much the same way as Badiou, for Žižek the dominant consensual form of politics today is based on the conviction that there is no alternative to capitalist (liberal) society, and indeed any attempt to think otherwise is quickly denounced as dogmatic and/or totalitarian. Like Badiou, he has been equally hostile to such arguments, and yet like many other post-Marxists Žižek has sought to

fundamentally rethink the theory of revolutionary subjectivity. Hence, whilst for various reasons Žižek (2008) rejects the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class – particularly as a 'single' and united agent – he nevertheless maintains the possibility of redefining 'a revolutionary perspective' in light of the various antagonisms characteristic of contemporary global capitalism (Žižek 2008, pp. 420, 421). Despite this however, and indeed his affinities to Badiou's thought, Žižek's theory departs from Badiou's in at least two significant senses, and the crux of such differences lie in Žižek's more substantial appropriation of Jacques Lacan's aforementioned theory of 'constitutive lack'.[7] More specifically, Žižek's theory of revolutionary subjectivity centres on the latter's notion of the psychoanalytic 'Act'; a theory which, as Sharp and Boucher (2010) explain, sought to articulate the process by which the analysand works through their transference between themselves and the analyst (Sharpe and Boucher 210, p. 83). For Lacan such an 'Act' a highly traumatic experience, one that involved a complete and radical overhaul of the subject and the whole symbolic framework through which it was constructed. Crucially, an act is not something rational or calculated, for as Johnson (2009) explains, 'an act cannot be anticipated and defined from with the framework of a given symbolic order, since it shatters the parameters of that same framework if and when it happens'. Crucially, furthermore, 'a subject does not actively perform an Act, since subjectivity is, as Lacan indicates, a passive after-effect of such an event' (Johnson 2009, p. 110; Dean 2006, p. 129).

From the basic outline above, it seems clear that Žižek's 'Act' is in many ways strikingly similar to Badiou's notion of an 'event'. As with the event, the Lacanian Act is highly unpredictable and cannot be completely explained merely on the basis of where or what it emerged from. Additionally, like Badiou's notion of the event an Act can only be rationalised in terms of its consequences, all of which obviously can only be determined retroactively. From this, one might argue that Žižek's notion of the Act would share the underlying problems associated with Badiou's notion of the event, especially the aforementioned issue regarding its relationship to whatever situation preceded it. Indeed, as Dean (2006) explains Žižek's notion of the Act clearly shifts attention away from 'revolutionary agency (or) revolutionary will' towards a more un-rationalistic 'urge or compulsion' (Dean 2006, p. 187; Johnson 2009, p. 111). It would thus seem that Žižek's Act is something which cannot be forced by a willing subject, due simply because it is the Act which is constitutive of the subject itself. In a similar way to Badiou's event, then, it would appear that Žižek's conception 'risks conveying a disempowering message: self- conscious, volitional activity on the part of subjects is pointless, since the event of an act transpires in the mode of the anonymous 'it happens', rather than the outcome of intentionally guided forms of praxis' (Johnson 2009, p. 111). Interestingly, however, Žižek argues against such a reading. For instance,

7 This is not to deny that Lacan is not incisive for Badiou's own approach. Rather, the differences between Žižek's and Badiou's theory – and use of Lacan – relates to Badiou's emphasis on mathematics as the core of his system (McGowan 2010, p. 19).

turning his attention directly to Badiou's notion of the event, Žižek (2002) charges Badiou with 'idealism' on account of the fact he is quite unwilling to accept the event's pre-evental production, particularly with respect to the analysis of political economy (Žižek 2002, p. 272; Johnson 2009, p. 136). There are two issues here that clearly separate Žižek's position from Badiou's. The first concerns the relationship between the conditions out of which revolutionary rupture emerges, and the rupture itself. Put simply, for Žižek more than Badiou, the rupture constitutive of an Act is an intrinsically *psychic* rupture; one which as we saw via his comments regarding Laclau and Mouffe's work in Chapter 4, whilst can indeed be considered constitutive, is nevertheless hopeless or desperate in the sense that it denies that such lack can ever truly be overcome (McGowan 2010, pp. 10, 26). In this sense, whilst Žižek's more psychoanalytic approach retains an emphasis on the unexpected nature of the political Act, it is both stripped of its absolute novelty and, mirroring Laclau's comments discussed earlier, through an increased attentiveness to the relationship between the particular and the universal attempts to understand how the miracle of an Act becomes possible (ibid., p. 14). Here, then, lies the second fundamental difference in Žižek's and Badiou's respective approaches. Whilst Badiou's *Logic of Worlds* accepted that the consequences of an event depended on the maximal intensity of its site, his system nevertheless remains unable to properly account for an event's occurrence. Here Žižek (2002) turns to Lenin, particularly with respect to the latter's insistence on both grasping the moment and his avocation of the vanguard party (Žižek 2002, pp. 6, 10). The latter point is particularly marked when compared to Badiou's own approach, discussed at length earlier. Anything less, according to Žižek is a 'politics without politics' (Žižek 2002, p. 297).

Conclusion

Through the work of various commentators, then, one can appreciate how Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity remains problematic; primarily by its strictly post-evental nature. Whilst Badiou has gone some way in attempting to address this problem, without fundamentally revising his whole system there seems little else he can do to placate such critics. Despite these problems, what remains interesting in Badiou's theory is his insistence on retaining the concept of communism, and whilst the way in which he does this shares affinities to Negri's project, there are also significant differences. Clearly, the same can be said in relation to Marx's own understanding of the term. This I will discuss in more detail in the conclusion. For now, we can reiterate our findings: whilst Badiou upholds the notion of the 'figure of the worker', revolutionary subjectivity is not defined exclusively through human productive activity. Furthermore – just like in the case of Laclau – this subjectivity emerges only partially immanent to that which it aims to revolutionise. Finally, Badiou explicitly rejects the idea that the *telos* to this subjectivity is the acquisition of political power and the establishment of a class-

less society. As with both Laclau and Negri the key here lies in Badiou's revised dialectics and, from that, revised understanding of historical process. Whilst thinkers such as Bosteels (2011) have sought to reiterate Badiou's continued relationship to Hegel, an alternative reading of this relationship is more sceptical. As McGowan (2010) bluntly puts it, 'Badiou's conception of Marxism and the basis for his philosophy depends on the exile of Hegel' (McGowan 2010, p. 22).

Chapter 7
Conclusion

Bringing their thought together systematically for the first time, this book has used Marx's theory of revolutionary subjectivity as a means of assessing the post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau, Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou. By doing this, it has also sought to problematise the extent to which these thinkers have fully left Marx behind. We have seen that all three theories remain linked to Marx's on the basis of their shared fidelity to the thought of a particular Marxist theorist, and yet despite this, the nature of their break with Marx's theory is one they ultimately share; one which could be argued is a key characteristic of post-Marxism. For the rest of this chapter my purpose is threefold. Firstly, I will discuss in more detail the political consequences associated with each thinker adopting a different ontological framework to Marx's. Here, secondly, we will begin to see not only the strengths and weaknesses of each approach but also the possibility of forging a synthesis; one that when relating to recent events/literature on revolutionary change offers interesting and important insights for understanding revolutionary subjectivity today. Finally, on the basis of the previous two tasks I will seek to make some general claims about the nature of post-Marxist theory today.

One of the most interesting reasons for combining the work of Laclau, Negri and Badiou has been the fact that, on the basis of their shared hostility to Marx's Hegelian social ontology, all three thinkers adopted their own particular alternative. In many ways, both the advantages and disadvantages of their respective theories result primarily from this choice. Despite his turn to Spinoza as a means of bypassing Hegel, Antonio Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity stands apart from both Laclau's and Badiou's on the basis that it retains the first two principles to Marx's own theory. For Negri, revolutionary subjectivity must still be analysed in relation to the progressive development of productive activity. Negri's rationale at this point mirrors Marx's: the possibility of an alternative form of political, economic or social life must be based on the potentialities of creative, self-determining activity. If one is to seriously consider the possibility of a post-capitalist form of society one has to look for the ways in which contemporary labouring practices might offer the clues as to how this society could function. For both Marx and Negri, this analysis goes beyond utopian speculation, for it is through an exploration of the tendencies within capitalist society that one can begin to consider the ways in which a 'communist' form of society might both emerge and function. For Negri, then, the possibility of communism today must resonate with theorising its 'ontological dimension'. As he explains, 'Communism, Marx taught us, is a construction, an ontology; that is to say, it is the construction of a new society on the basis of productive man, or the collective worker, through an

action which proves effective insofar as it is orientated toward the *enlargement of being*' (Negri 2010, p. 6, *original emphasis*). For Nick Thoburn (2013), amongst those associated with reviving the concept of communism today, it is Hardt and Negri's insistence on analysing its material conditions which proves them to be perhaps the most useful, especially given their emphasis on both changing forms of property and their respective notion of 'the common' (Therborn 2013, p. 21). From this perspective, Negri continues to define revolutionary subjectivity through the prism of productive labour, and also theorises its emergence via both its historically determinate objective and subjective conditions. Revolutionary subjectivity, in other words, as in Marx's theory emerges immanently (but not *dialectically*) to capitalist development.

Badiou and Laclau do not define revolutionary subjectivity in the same way as either Marx or Negri. Firstly, revolutionary subjectivity is not defined exclusively through the prism of productive labour. More specifically, for both Laclau and Badiou revolutionary subjectivity does not emanate from the centre of capitalist society, but rather always originates from its margins. Politically, their rationale here stems logically from their underlying ontological systems. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, when combined with a post-Gramscian notion of hegemony, for Laclau the Lacanian notion of constitutive lack is the key to social ontology. Whilst his emphasis on 'the people' is the most visible figure to his theory, beneath it lies the socially heterogeneous: those excluded from the constitution of a previous people, and in consequence, those incisive for the construction of any. By establishing an internal frontier dividing the social space into two antagonistic camps, it is the revolutionary subjectivity of the 'socially heterogeneous' that establishes the ground from which a people can emerge. For Laclau there will always be a 'lack' to a people, and this lack is precisely that which he attempts to articulate through his notion of the socially heterogeneous. In the case of Badiou, whilst undoubtedly influenced by Lacan, his own ontological system is based on the mathematical principles of set theory. Whilst as we have seen this system allows him to theorise the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity in a similar way – i.e. as emanating from the margins or 'void' of a society's social count – interestingly, Badiou is unwilling to give his revolutionary subject a distinctive name. Whilst the 'figure of the worker' is continually evoked, as with Rancière's notion of the proletariat this figure remains relatively vague. Despite this, and putting Negri to one side, for both Laclau and Badiou revolutionary subjectivity – and the identity of the subject itself – cannot either be aprioristically foretold or emerge completely immanent to the structure from which it comes to disrupt.

The strongest aspects of Negri's theory of revolutionary subjectivity – his continued focus on the changing nature of productive activity and its immanent potentialities – reveal both the weaknesses and yet also the strengths to Laclau's. Laclau's theory of revolutionary subjectivity is only willing to theorise the importance of social class on the basis of being a specific form of identity politics. As noted in Chapter 4, in consequence the structural centrality of class (and its changing forms) is rejected on the basis that if this isn't discursively

articulated then it simply doesn't become a factor in the construction of a revolutionary subjectivity. This account is problematic, however, for whilst it is undoubtedly true that the revolutionary potential of 'class' must always be the result of its hegemonic construction into such, this struggle in-itself is nevertheless conditioned by the underlying structural – class – determinants of capitalist society; particularly with respect to practical issues such as knowledge, time, resources, etc. Here then, one could argue that the limitations of Laclau's approach could be supplemented fruitfully by Negri's emphasis on the changing nature of class via his notion of class composition. Yet, in the same instance, there remains a major strength to Laclau's approach lacking in Negri's; namely, a formal theory as to how revolutionary subjectivity constructs itself. Whilst we saw in Chapter 5 that, via their notion of 'revolutionary parallelism', Hardt and Negri attempted to engage this issue – and indeed did so in ways which revealed some underlying commonality with Laclau's own approach – many commentators continually question the extent to which their underlying optimism undermines this theory.

In recent times, such theoretical differences have proved practically significant. According to Prentoulis and Thomassen's (2013) analysis of the Spanish and Greek protest movements characteristic of the early stages of the 'Occupy' movement, the key tension within it lay precisely in such debates concerning the seemingly contradictory demands for 'autonomy' and 'hegemony'. Interestingly, their analysis of such events rejected the latter's mutual exclusivity, emphasising instead their 'mutual contamination'. In other words, against the temptation for emphasising their immediate post-representational nature (Tormey 2012), according to Prentoulis and Thomassen the protesters' egalitarian prescriptions could only be made within and through existing representational spaces, and thus, despite claims and attempts to conduct politics in abstraction from the former, 'traces of representation remain[ed], even if only in a minimal form' (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2013, p. 176). In this respect, not only does Laclau's and Negri's positions represent a key debate within post-Marxism itself, but perhaps also the choice between their respective approaches is too stark. Nevertheless, in general terms it seems that Laclau's hegemonic approach is much more attuned to theorising revolutionary strategy, even if – as noted in Chapter 4 – the contours to this approach left his theory relatively weak in considering questions of organisational form.

It is the latter which essentially acts to unite the approaches of Negri and Badiou; both of which have grappled with the issue throughout their whole personal and academic lives and, interestingly, did so having similar experiences with either Leninist or Maoist forms of the party. In tandem, both dismiss such forms today on the basis of rejecting their perceived usefulness for today's class composition/sequence in the communist hypothesis. Questions remain, however, as to what will replace it. Both Negri and Badiou are adamant that they themselves cannot provide the answers, and yet both are united on the necessity of finding an alternative. Until then, events such as the Occupy Movement discussed briefly above would appear to confirm the limitations of social and political movements lacking in such organisational coherence. In Dean's (2012) analysis, central to

understanding this issue lies in the very distinction we identified as prominent in all three thinkers' theories: appreciating not only the emergence of revolutionary subjectivity but also problematizing its consistency. In other words, 'Collective power isn't just about coming together. It's sticking together' (Dean 2012, p. 238). Initially, the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street Movement appeared to affirm Negri's emphasis on the horizontal and singular nature of a movement-based politics – spontaneity, inclusivity, etc. After that, however, a very different scenario emerged; one characterised by internal conflict, paranoia, and serious limitations with respect to overcoming differences and divisions and working towards a common goal (Dean 2012, pp. 209–11). In a way, at this moment once again Laclau's notion of hegemony is clearly useful, especially for appreciating the Movement's hesitancy for providing a universal demand (see McVeigh 2011). Despite this, for Dean the lessons to be learnt here could be positive, and according to her the most significant lies in rethinking the form and function of the party form itself. 'In sum', she argues, 'the Occupy movement demonstrates why … something like a party is needed insofar as a party is an explicit assertion of collectivity, a structure of accountability, an acknowledgment of differential capacities, and a vehicle for solidarity' (Dean 2012, p. 239).

Both Negri's and Badiou's theory of revolutionary subjectivity hinge on the question of organisational form, and yet as stated, both are necessarily ambivalent regarding future forms. The major strength of Badiou's theory over Negri's, however, lies in his willingness to theorise not only revolutionary subjectivity, but also its very real and continued propensity for deviation. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 6 Badiou's theory is able to do this not only within revolutionary subjectivity itself (i.e. in terms of either 'generic', 'spontaneous' or 'dogmatic' truths), but also between its twin 'reactionary' and 'obscure' derivative forms. This is clearly one of the greatest strengths to Badiou's theory. Yet as we know, any such subjectivity only ever follows the occurrence of an event. Hence, as many commentators have noted, the greatest strength of Badiou's theory is also perhaps its greatest weakness. The key point here, once again, is that this only reflects the contours of his given ontological system: the mysterious nature of the event and the subjective commitments necessary for the unravelling of its consequences are not anomalies – they stem directly from this system.

Like Negri, today Badiou is one of the few select contemporary social theorists that have sought to uphold the concept or 'idea' of communism. As we discussed in Chapter 6, this is crucial for understanding what, according to him, revolutionary subjectivity entails today. The limitations of this politics however, are significant, for as Wright (2013) has noted, Badiou's 'rigid' anti-statism allows very little engagement with the state – whatever its form. The same could be said regarding the form of the market, for as we have seen, for Badiou any engagement with the former is one that confines itself to the hegemony of capitalist society. Whilst in some sense this might hold true, a progressive politics cannot afford to ignore these realms. Indeed, as Wilde (2013) has argued forcefully, the continued hegemony of neo-liberalism is the principal barrier blocking the very possibility of developing

forms of global solidarity (Wilde 2013, p. 250). Indeed, reiterating comments made towards the end of Chapter 6, for Thoburn (2013) it is precisely an engagement with such social relations that, contra Badiou, is 'the very stuff of communist thought and practice' (Thoburn 2013, p. 4). From this point of view Badiou's conception of communism couldn't be further from Marx's, particularly when understood as 'the real movement which abolishes the present state of things'. Despite these perfectly valid criticisms, however, Badiou's emphasis on the subjective dynamics of fidelity as the core constituent to revolutionary subjectivity does nevertheless resonate with existing literature on revolutionary change. For example, forming part of the 'fourth generation' of attempts to grabble with this complex subject, Eric Selbin's (2010) emphasis on the power of 'stories' resonates strongly with Wright's (2013) emphasis on drawing out from Badiou's system the notion of 'evental culture', discussed briefly in Chapter 6. The importance of stories, Selbin (2010) argues, is essential for understanding not only how and why revolutionary change occurs, but also who engages themselves in such struggle. 'The right story in the right place at the right time', he explains, ' … enables and ennobles revolutionary activity and increases the likelihood that revolutionary imaginations ripen into revolutionary sentiments which lay the base for revolutionary situations and hence the possibility for revolutionary outcomes' (Selbin 2010, p. 186).

In sum, in political terms both the relative strengths and weaknesses of each thinker's theory stem from their underlying ontological framework. Before outlining in a clearer fashion my proposed synthesis of their respective ideas, let us first return to the final condition to Marx's theory, for whilst Negri is certainly the anomaly with respect to retaining (albeit in modified form) the first and two conditions, despite the fact that all three thinker's adopt a different alternative ontological framework to Marx's, they remain united in the rationale for doing so: to overcome the perceived deficiencies associated with Hegelian dialectics. The ultimate significance of this lies in each thinker definitively abandoning Marx's philosophy of history, and because of that, breaking with the third and final condition to Marx's theory. Whilst there might be important differences between the positions held by all three thinkers, what their chosen ontologies nevertheless share is the strict occlusion of the very possibility of a 'fully-sutured' or final resolutive form of the social. All three thinkers, then, break with Marx's belief in the eventual withering away of revolutionary subjectivity. Where does this leave the issue of seizing political power? Interestingly here it is Laclau's position with appears anomalous, for as we have seen there is nothing in his theory which rejects this aspect of Marx's theory. For Negri and Badiou, however, revolutionary subjectivity should not involve this strategy.

In sum, this dissatisfaction with the ontological and philosophical underpinnings to Marx's theory unites all three of the thinkers studied in this book, and in consequence one could argue that this is something vitally specific to post-Marxism. To be absolutely clear, what each thinker rejects about this theory is not simply its historicism – i.e. the inevitability of a communist society – but also the very desirability of such a form of society; based as it is on the idea that it constituted

the end of politics itself. Despite this, however, as we have seen this hasn't led to the complete abandonment of all notion of historical process. Rather, on this score post-Marxism seeks to rethink the issue through its periodisation: history is understood in terms of something discontinuous and open-ended. For Laclau this can be explained on the basis of dislocated social structures and contingent hegemonic projects; for Negri this can be explained on the basis of a series of 'cycles of struggle' each of which is driven and determined by specific forms of class composition; and for Badiou, finally, this can be explained on the basis of sudden and unpredictable change on the one hand, and yet enduring and militant forms of fidelity to successive sequences of the communist hypothesis on the other.

This study can conclude that, post-Marxist theories of revolutionary subjectivity have three fundamental tendencies: revolutionary subjectivity is located at the margins of capitalist society; revolutionary subjectivity emerges only partially immanent to dominant social structures; revolutionary subjectivity does not/should not involve the conquest of political power, and most importantly, must avoid any attempt at establishing any final or resolutive form of the social. Underlying all three of these principles, however, is perhaps the most important: revolutionary subjectivity is theorised on the basis of an abandonment of Marx's philosophy of history. Synthesising aspects of each of my thinkers' thought, for reasons already outlined above, I would suggest that we retain Negri's emphasis on the analysis of changing forms of productive activity; combine this with Laclau's formal hegemonic logic regarding the construction of revolutionary subjectivity through the production of empty signifiers; and, finally, integrate Badiou's insights regarding both the protracted and disciplined nature of revolutionary commitment, whilst also remaining cognizant as to its various possible deviations. In Chapter 1 of this book, following Lenin I argued that the 'Marxism of Karl Marx' was an amalgamation of philosophy, economics and politics. For Therborn (2008) the advent of post-Marxism has broken this 'triangle', and it looks unlikely that it will ever be combined in the way it was in the past (Therborn 2008, pp. 116, 117). Despite the potential veracity of this claim, citing Wright (2013) this book has nevertheless argued that post-Marxism should be considered in terms of its 'complex continuity', and not simply as a clear-cut abandonment of Marx's ideas. Justifying their break from Marx's theory on the basis of their own particular fidelity to a particular Marxist thinker, the post-Marxism of Laclau, Negri and Badiou has sought to reconceptualise Marx's emancipatory project, and in my opinion, taken together they have done so in a way that enriches this theory. In a world which is ever more enveloped in capitalist circuits of subsumption, contemporary radical theory has no choice but to continue to engage with *the* theorist of capitalist society. Post-Marxism, then, in whatever form will continue to be either with, against, and in some sense at least, beyond the thought of Karl Marx.

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Index

Althusser, L. 13–17, 42–5, 57, 73, 78, 112
antagonism *see* Laclau and Mouffe on; Laclau on; Negri on

Badiou, A.
  Being and Event 102, 106, 112, 116
  Logic of Worlds 105, 106, 112, 116, 120, 123
  Theory of the Subject 98, 102, 106, 112
  Chinese Cultural Revolution 100, 101, 107, 108, 118
  class 98, 99, 101, 108, 109, 118
  crisis 101, 102, 103
  democracy 108, 118, 119
  dialectic 98, 111, 120, 124
  equality 108, 109, 113, 119
  event 102–10, 112–16, 120, 122, 123, 128
  fidelity 97, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 113–18, 129, 130
  figure of the worker 109, 110, 117, 120, 123, 126
  history 99, 100, 107, 108, 112, 121, 130
  idea of communism 107, 108, 128
  identity 115, 117
  on Laclau *see* post-Marxism
  L'organisation politique (OP) 101, 108, 109, 110, 120
  Maoism 97, 111, 117
  Marxism 101, 102, 108, 124
  May '68 97, 98, 100, 106, 107, 108
  ontology 97, 102, 105, 110, 112–17, 121
  organisational form 101, 107, 116–21, 127, 128
  Paris Commune 107, 108
  party 99, 100, 101, 107, 108, 109, 117, 118, 121, 121, 127
  politics of prescription 109, 110, 119, 120
  post-Marxism 110, 111, 112
  on Rancière 117–18
  relationship to Mao 111, 112, 118
  sans papiers 110
  the state 101, 108, 109, 110, 118, 128
  the subject *see* fidelity
  theory of revolutionary subjectivity
    early 98–102
    today 103–10
    the communist hypothesis, 106–8
  truth 104–7, 111, 114–19, 128
Bensaïd, D. 112, 120, 121
Bosteels, B. 98, 99, 101, 102, 111, 124

Callinicos, A. 3, 98, 113, 120, 121
Cantorian set theory 4, 97, 102, 113, 126; *see also* Badiou on ontology
Chinese Cultural Revolution 1; *see also* Badiou on
class (continued relevance of today) 125; *see also* thinkers on
class composition *see* Hardt and Negri on
Cleaver, H. 32
communism (resurgent interest in today) 2, 126; *see also* Badiou on the idea of/communist hypothesis; Negri/Hardt and Negri on; Marx (and Engels) on
Communist League 8
crisis 1, 12, 36; *see also* thinkers on
Critical Theory 12
commodity fetishism 93, 94; *see also* Marx (and Engels) on

democracy *see* thinkers on
Derrida, J. 16, 17
dialectical materialism 9, 11
dialectics (hostility to) 13, 16
  relationship to post-Marxism 129; *see also* thinkers on

dictatorship of the proletariat 33; *see also* Marx (and Engels) on
dignity 92–4
Discourse *see* Laclau/Laclau and Mouffe on
dislocation *see* Laclau on
Dyer-Witheford, N. 88

economism 23, 32, 59
Engels, F. 1, 5, 9
equality *see* thinkers on; Rancière on, 60–62
event *see* Badiou on; Hardt and Negri on
exploitation *see* Hardt and Negri on; Marx (and Engels) on
exodus. *see* Hardt and Negri on

fidelity 5, 67, 87, 97, 107, 111, 117, 118, 125, 130; *see also* Badiou on
Financial Crisis 1
formal/real subsumption *see* Marx (and Engels) on; Negri/Hardt and Negri on
Foucault, M. 13, 15, 16, 17, 78
Frankfurt School. 12

Geras, N. 62, 63, 64, 67
Gramsci, A. 3, 5, 11–12, 17, 32, 34–9, 49; *see also* Laclau relationship to

Hallward, P. 26, 100, 108, 120, 121
Hardt and Negri
- *Commonwealth* 2, 78, 90, 91
- *Empire* 2, 78, 89
- *Multitude* 2, 78
- biopolitical production 79, 81, 83, 84, 87, 89
- crisis 81
- democracy 77; *see also* the common
- dialectics, 83; *see also* Negri on
- equality 84
- event 84
- exodus 81, 91
- exploitation 79, 81
- general intellect 81
- history 71, 74, 77, 87, 92, 129, 130
- immaterial labour 79, 81, 82, 83, 89, 90, 91
- Marxism (continued relevance of) 72, 74, 85, 86, 88
- multitude (concept of) 77, 80–85, 87–91
- needs, 83, 85, 87; *see also* Negri on self-valorisation
- on Badiou 115–16
- on Laclau 80, 82, 83.
- ontology 77, 80, 82, 88, 92, 93, 94, 125
- organisational form 82, 83, 87, 88, 128
- party 82, 88, 89
- real subsumption 78; *see also* Negri on
- revolutionary parallelism 83, 84, 127
- theory of revolutionary subjectivity 80, 82, 84–6, 88, 89, 91, 92, 95
- post-Marxism of *see* Negri on
- singularity politics 82, 83, 87
- the common 80–85, 87, 90, 91, 92, 94, 126
- the metropolis 84, 90, 91
- the people (critique of) 80, 82, 83

Hardt, M. 2, 75, 77, 78
Hegel, G.W. 7, 8, 11, 17, 67, 124, 125
hegemony 1, 3, 4, 11, 12, 34, 35, 36, 39, 76, 78, 79, 83, 90, 110, 127, 128; *see also* Laclau/Laclau and Mouffe on
historical materialism/materialist conception of history *see* Badiou on history; Hardt and Negri on history; Laclau on history; Marx (and Engels) on
historicism 23, 44, 107, 112, 129
Holloway, J. 93–4

identity 33, 109, 115, 126; *see also* Badiou on; Laclau on; Hardt and Negri on
ideology 12, 13, 28, 32, 35, 42, 43, 44, 50, 57, 59
immaterial labour *see* Hardt and Negri on
intellectuals 29, 34, 35, 37, 38, 64, 97, 119

labour 11, 12, 16, 69, 70; *see also* class composition; Laclau on class; Badiou on the figure of the worker; Marx on
Lacan, J. 4, 13, 16, 17, 49, 50, 51, 52, 59, 63, 64, 77, 92, 99, 115, 122, 126

Laclau and Mouffe
Hegemony and Socialist Strategy 2, 17, 44, 50, 51, 52, 58, 63
antagonism 46, 47, 49, 51, 57, 59
articulation 45, 51, 63, 64
class 44, 46, 48, 57; *see also* Laclau on
concept of hegemony 44, 47, 49
dialectics, 47; *see also* Laclau on
discourse 45–9
logic of difference 47, 48, 63
logic of equivalence 47, 63
Marxism 44, 49, 57, 59
post-Marxism (meaning of) 17
radical democracy 17
revolutionary subjectivity 44–6, 48, 49
subject 46, 49
Laclau, E.
On Populist Reason 52
Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory 42
antagonism 51, 54, 59; *see also* Laclau and Mouffe on
chain of difference/equivalence 52, 53, 57; *see also* Laclau and Mouffe on
class 42–6, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63
crisis 48, 50, 51, 55
democracy 41, 65, 67
dialectics 41, 47, 56, 57, 67
discourse 43–9, 50, 53, 63, 64, 65, 68
dislocation 49–52, 54, 55, 56, 62, 63
empty signifier 54, 55, 57, 58, 61, 64, 65, 66, 68, 113, 130
equality/inequality 48, 58, 64, 65
floating signifier 55
hegemony 42, 44, 47, 49, 50, 53, 67, 68, 113, 126, 127, 128
identity 42–8, 50, 51, 53, 56–61, 66, 67, 80, 83, 126
Lacan 49, 50, 51, 52, 59, 63, 64, 77, 126
Marxism 42, 44, 57
on Badiou 113
on Hardt and Negri 82
on Rancière 60–62
on Žižek 58, 62, 63, 67
ontology 41, 49, 50, 53, 57, 59, 64, 77, 82, 126
organisational form 41, 58, 64, 65
populism
early theory of 42, 43, 44
mature theory of 52, 83
post-Marxism of 49, 57, 58, 65, 66, 127, 129, 130
relationship to Gramsci 17, 36, 42, 44, 49, 66, 94, 111, 126
revolutionary subjectivity
early theory of 42, 43, 44
mature theory of 52–5, 57, 58, 59, 64–68
see also Laclau and Mouffe on
subject 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 68
the people 41, 43, 44, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59, 61, 66, 67, 80, 126
the socially heterogeneous 55, 56, 66, 67, 81, 102, 126
Lenin, V.I. 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 32–4, 36, 37, 38, 39, 107, 108, 123, 130; *see also* Negri's relationship to
Leninism 75, 89, 108, 121
Lukács, G. 11, 12, 32
Luxemburg, R. 10
Lyotard, J.F. 17

Maoism 4, 11, 97; *see also* Badiou's relationship to
Marcuse, H. 12–13
Marx, K. (and Engels)
1849 'Preface' 22–3
Capital 9, 25, 71
Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 9
Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right 8
The Communist Manifesto 7, 8, 22, 29
The German Ideology 7
The Poverty of Philosophy 7
alienation 9, 25
class 8, 22, 23, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 39, 40
class struggle 8, 22, 27, 29, 30, 32, 39, 115
commodity fetishism 28–9, 35, 93
communism 9, 27, 30
communist party 29, 33
communist society 1, 30, 31, 129

consciousness 7, 21, 22, 25, 27, 30, 74
crisis, 26
democracy, 8, 30
dialectics 7, 9, 10, 23, 29, 47, 85, 86
dictatorship of the proletariat 31, 39, 92
estrangement *see* alienation
exploitation 9, 22, 24, 25, 26, 39
First International 8, 29
freedom 23
general intellect 26
labour 9, 22–9, 31, 47
materialist conception of history/ historical materialism 10, 21–2, 31, 40, 48, 63
needs 21, 22, 25, 30, 31, 48, 91
organisational form *see* communist party
Paris Commune 8, 31, 74
permanent revolution 30, 31, 51
political power 8, 21, 30, 31, 39, 40, 92
production (forces and relations of) 7, 8, 22, 23, 24, 36, 39, 47, 48, 85, 91
proletariat 8, 17, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 61, 62, 80, 86, 90, 92
revolution (objective and subjective conditions of) 7, 8, 23, 26–30
species-being 22
trades unions 27–9
working class 24–31, 39, 40, 48, 63
multitude *see* Hardt and Negri on
Murphy, T.S. 75, 76, 77, 86

needs 13, 118; *see also* Marx on; Hardt and Negri; Negri on self-valorisation
Negri, A.
Marx beyond Marx 73–5
The Savage Anomaly 77
antagonism 76, 78, 82, 93
class composition 71–5
communism 72, 125
crisis (early theory of) 73
cycles of struggle 71, 92, 107, 112, 130
dialectics 73, 76, 77, 83, 126
law of value 73, 76
mass worker 71–3, 75
Operaismo 69, 70, 72, 89
organisational form 72, 75, 76, 128
Paris Commune 74
party 75–6, 101, 107, 127
power (constituent/constituted) 77
real subsumption 73, 86
refusal 70, 74
relationship to Lenin 72, 75, 76, 82, 86, 87, 89, 94, 127
self-valorisation 72–7, 81, 85, 89
socialised worker 73, 74, 76, 89
Spinoza 69, 76–8, 80, 82, 87, 92, 125
theory of revolutionary subjectivity
early *see* self-valorisation
today *see* Hardt and Negri on; post-Marxism of 69, 76, 85, 86, 94, 95, 127, 130
neo-liberalism 1, 90, 129
nodal point 46, 53, 58

Occupy Movement 127, 128
Ontology 4; *see also* thinkers on
Operaismo 69, 70, 72, 89
Organisational form *see* thinkers on
Orthodox Marxism 9, 11, 18, 59

Panzieri, R. 71
Paris 1968/May ’68 14, 15, 16, 97, 98, 100, 106, 107, 108; *see also* Badiou on
Paris Commune *see* Badiou on; Negri on; Marx (and Engels) on
Party 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38
continued relevance of today, 128; *see also* vanguard; thinkers on
permanent revolution 51; *see also* Marx (and Engels) on
populism 69, 83; *see also* Laclau on
post-Marxism
emergence of, 1, 17–19
nature of concept, 17, 18
today, 129; *see also* thinkers relationship to
post-structuralism 14, 15, 16, 41
Power, N. 106, 111
production *see* Hardt and Negri on biopolitical production; Marx (and Engels) on

Rancière, J. 2, 59, 60–62, 66, 94, 109, 117, 118

revolutionary subjectivity
today 1, 2, 125–30; *see also* thinkers on
Russian Revolution 10, 11, 107

Sartre, J.P. 13
Self-valorization *see* Negri/Hardt and Negri on
Socially heterogeneous *see* Laclau on
Solidarity 53, 88, 90, 91, 128, 129
Spinoza 4, 16; *see also* Negri/Hardt and Negri on
Stalin/Stalinism 1, 11, 41
structuralism 7, 13, 14, 15, 16
subject 13–17; *see also* Badiou on fidelity; Hardt and Negri on the multitude; Laclau on the people; Marx on working class/proletariat

technology 9, 24, 25, 26, 71
the common *see* Hardt and Negri on
the figure of the worker (Rancière's use of) 62,109,110; *see also* Badiou on
the people 33, 37; *see also* Laclau on; Hardt and Negri (critique of)
Thoburn, G. 18, 58, 62, 130
Thompson, E.P. 59–60
Toscano, A. 106, 114
trade unions *see* thinkers on
Tronti, M. 70, 72, 74, 85, 86
Trotsky, L. 1, 10, 11, 51
Trotskyism 41, 98, 120
Truth 16, 38, 70; *see also* Badiou on
Tse-Tung, M. 3, 32, 36–9; *see also* Badiou's relationship to

Vanguardism/vanguard party 10, 11, 29, 34, 37, 60, 75, 76, 82, 89, 123

Wealth 9, 11, 26, 73; *see also* Negri on self-valorisation; Hardt and Negri on the common
Western Marxism 11–12
Wilde, L. 128
Wright, C. 109, 112, 116, 119, 128, 129, 130
Wright, S. 89

Žižek, S. 2, 49, 50, 57, 58, 62, 63, 67, 78, 82, 84, 87, 121–3