



**Who are the 99%?  
Identity, inclusion and division  
in the UK Occupy movement**

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## **Abstract**

This essay is based on qualitative research into how activists in the UK Occupy movement understand their social and political identities, and those of the movement as a whole. The study found that – in contrast to the suggestions of the mainstream media – Occupy activists had a reasonably well-developed political and economic vision, combining ‘participatory democracy’ with ‘social justice’. In spite of the relative clarity of this vision, the essay argues that the Occupy movement’s approach to strategy and communication was confused and ambiguous. This ambiguity is attributed to the fact Occupy activists seemed to lack a coherent sociopolitical identity that linked their political principles with their social identities and interests. This hindered the ability of the movement to achieve unity, and the willingness of activists to embrace a leadership role. These findings are discussed in relation to Donatella Della Porta’s work on the ‘tolerant identities’ of today’s social movement activists, as well as to Jodi Dean’s arguments about the causes of the contemporary Left’s ‘melancholy’.

## **Contributor Note**

Jacob Mukherjee is a teacher and activist living in east London. He is currently studying for a PhD on subcultures of disengagement and opposition among urban working class youth. Political activity he has been involved with includes working with young people to resist the tripling of tuition fees, and campaigning for local interests to be taken into account during the build up to the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Now *we* appear to *ourselves* – we say ‘we’, even as we argue over who we are and what we want.... Because of Occupy Wall Street, we have been able to imagine and enact a new subject that is collective, engaged, if, perhaps, also manic and distractible.

Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*  
(2012: 212-213)

## Introduction

Do participants in the Occupy movement see themselves as part of a unified collective subject fighting for specific interests and goals? Do they see themselves as the leadership of an oppressed socio-political group or class? Should we instead see Occupy as a movement that unites diverse political identities in the pursuit of broad common values? Despite the battle over the meaning and legacy of Occupy, there have been very few empirical studies that try to establish what the politics of the movement consist of. This essay is therefore an attempt to map the discourses within which Occupy participants in the UK operate, and to establish the degree to which activists’ own assessments of the movement conform to Dean’s analysis. I also aim to situate the politics of Occupy within the context from which the movement arose. The purpose is to show that the political and strategic approach of social movements should not be seen purely as the result of participants’ considered political understandings. Instead, I will argue that both internal movement dynamics and broad contextual factors contribute to producing an ‘Occupy politics’ that few individual members consciously embrace.

Clearly, Occupy did establish a repertoire of recognisable slogans and practices.

These included hand gestures, general assemblies, consensus decision making, and references to ‘the 99%’. The adoption of these slogans and practices by protesters around the world seemed to show that a unified political identity was being created. At the same time, Occupy’s message was unclear. Its refusal (or inability) to articulate a single set of movement demands has made it difficult to map precisely the politics of the Occupy movement. Occupy presented something of a blank canvas, onto which assorted supporters and critics painted what they wanted to see.

Writers from a libertarian or anarchist perspective have enthusiastically claimed Occupy for their tradition. The movement’s focus on democracy is portrayed as a disavowal of a unified ideology or collective subject: participants are empowered to produce their own critique of capitalism in line with their particular political identities. The determination to create ‘utopian’ or ‘liberated’ spaces, the commitment to ‘horizontal’ methods of organising and the resolute refusal to engage with established power structures mean a line can be drawn linking sixties libertarianism, the anti-nuclear movement, radical environmentalism and the alter-globalisation movement to Occupy. Within this discourse, the ‘open source’, flexible nature of the Occupy message and the movement’s networked form are seen as strengths which allowed Occupy to translate itself into different contexts around the world (Gitlin 2012; Sitrin 2011: 7-11). The central concept within this discursive framework is ‘participatory democracy’, represented by the Occupy ‘general assembly’ and consensus decision making process. The lack of a single set of Occupy ‘demands’ and the movement’s commitment to self-

representation are also celebrated by the libertarian school (Graeber 2011).

An alternative account frames Occupy as a failed revolutionary movement. According to this discourse, the strategy of occupation should be seen as a militant assertion of popular power in opposition to global capital, rather than an attempt to establish temporary autonomous zones. The concept of 'the 99%' against a tiny global elite drew attention to the inequality and class division upon which capitalism depends. As Jodi Dean writes, it 'transform[ed] a statistic into a crime' (Dean 2012: 218). This discourse casts Occupy activists as a reluctant vanguard, able to mobilise millions but unwilling to embrace the leadership role this implies. In this account, the failure to develop a programme and create permanent institutional forms were fatal weaknesses (229-232; 237-239). The preoccupation with consensus and horizontalism – praised within the libertarian discourse as important exercises in liberation – are criticised by the revolutionaries as evidence of self-indulgence and irresponsibility (Žižek 2012: 77). The message of Occupy's Marxist 'supporters' could be summarised as damning Occupy with faint praise. The movement is depicted as having achieved its successes despite, rather than because of, the libertarian impulses of its key activists and thinkers.

One thing writers from both perspectives seem to agree upon is that we can identify a distinctive Occupy politics. For anarchists and libertarians, this politics is strongly influenced by what Day calls the 'newest social movements': radical environmental and global justice groups that have appeared since the mid '90s (Day 2005; Gitlin 2012; Sitrin 2011: 7-11). Within this perspective, the

analytical and strategic approach of Occupy and the newest social movements is generally taken to include: a commitment to 'horizontal' democracy and consensus; an opposition to engagement with the state; a celebration of inclusion and diversity; an ambivalence on questions of ideology; and a preference for concrete action over long-term strategy (Della Porta 2005: 180-191; Day 2005; Gitlin; Sitrin 2011: 7-11). Others prefer to emphasise Occupy's invocation of class-based notions of collective identity ('the 99%') and preference for militant tactics. This, it is said, marks a clear difference between Occupy and the movements of the 90s and 00s (Dean 2012: 229-232, 237-239). Disagreements over the meaning of Occupy stem in part from competing assessments of the newest social movements and their contribution to the development of the radical Left.

### **Collective subjectivity in radical social movements**

The global Occupy movement appeared at a time when the radical Left in the developed world was generally considered to be extremely weak,<sup>1</sup> and in the place where it was perhaps weakest: the United States of America. In the passage cited above, Jodi Dean praises Occupy for creating what she previously claimed the Left lacked (Dean 2009): a collective political subject. The global justice movement of the late '90s and early '00s is either celebrated or criticised – depending on the perspective – for refusing to speak with a single, unified voice. It described itself instead as a 'movement of movements': a coalition of diverse political identities brought together by a broad commit-

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Unger (2009: 1-42).



ment to 'social justice' (Della Porta 2005: 180-191) Occupy, by contrast, seemed able to unite protesters across the world around a set of militant slogans and tactics. A new collective political identity appeared to have been formed.

In celebrating Occupy's apparently unified identity, Dean enters a decades-old debate. Some argue that the changes associated with late capitalism have made unity among radical movements impossible and undesirable. In her 1999 essay, Wendy Brown attempted to diagnose the causes of what she termed 'Left melancholy'. Borrowing Walter Benjamin's phrase, Brown accused contemporary radicals of fetishizing a particular form of analysis which presupposed a unified collective subject. Instead of attempting to come to terms with the fragmentation of identities under postmodernism, Brown argued that leftists had developed a narcissistic attachment to concepts, slogans and models of analysis that were becoming increasingly anachronistic and irrelevant. This failure to adapt to a changed social and cultural context meant the Left had 'literally render[ed] itself a conservative force in history' (Brown n.d).

Just as Brown was writing, new forms of social movement emerged that seemed to have heeded her advice. The global justice and social forum movements were characterised by an emphasis on autonomy and diversity. Solidarity was reconceived as respect for difference, and attempts to create a unified ideology and strategic approach were abandoned. Activists actively embraced the movement's political and social heterogeneity (Della Porta 2005: 180-191). Della Porta coins the phrases 'tolerant identities' and 'multiple belongings' to express the idea that

movement participants positively welcomed dialogue and engagement with those from different backgrounds and perspectives, while resisting the imposition upon the movement of any one overarching aim or conception of the good society. A commitment to 'social justice' was the 'adhesive' which bound activists from disparate perspectives and backgrounds together (180-191).

It is precisely this rejection of the notion of a single collective subject that Dean criticises. She inverts Brown's interpretation of Benjamin, arguing that the Left's 'melancholy' stems instead from the suppression of its revolutionary desires and betrayal of the cause of the 'proletariat'. Dean applauds Occupy for resurrecting the revolutionary subject and leaving behind the 'micro' politics of the last twenty years. She hopes that the remarkable growth of the Occupy movement reflects a growing awareness that the deliberate class war waged by the rich requires an equally unified response. The movement's name, slogans and tactics invoked the image of a united people asserting its power (Dean 2012). Is Jodi Dean right to argue that Occupy has 'enabled us to imagine and enact' a new collective subject; or is it more accurate to describe the movement as a continuation of the politics of global justice activism? My research aimed to shed light on this question.

## **Methodology**

My research project was concerned with establishing how participants in the UK Occupy movement understood their roles and identities, and how these related to their broader approach to activism, politics and social change. I

aimed to examine how participants situated and understood a number of related concepts which recur in journalistic reportage, political propaganda and academic analysis of the Occupy movement. As such, my aim conforms to what Hammersley calls 'documenting constitutive practices': an examination of how groups construct and maintain systems of meaning, or discourses (Hammersley 2013: 59-63). This implies a focus on processes rather than an attempt to fix and isolate variables through quantitative measurement. I aimed to establish *verstehen* in both the senses Weber intended: an understanding of the way in which a group of individuals subjectively interprets the world, as well as an understanding of deeper structural factors behind these subjective interpretations (Bryman 2001: 57).

My chosen research method was to conduct semi-structured interviews with Occupy participants. This method allowed me to probe participants' understandings and interpretations of certain concepts and their location within discourses. The flexibility provided by a non-directive interview format enabled me to establish a relatively 'democratic' relationship with interviewees. There was significant scope for interviewees to direct the discussion towards those issues and concepts they thought were important. This had benefits in terms of both of enhancing the validity of my data and establishing rapport with interviewees. My interview process was carefully designed to avoid artificially channelling responses in a particular direction – something which is harder to achieve through more structured interviewees and surveys (Bryman 2001: 46-47).

To avoid my interviews being 'flooded with social science agendas (Hammersley 2013: 71), they began with a phase where interviewees chose the concepts for discussion. This allowed respondents to direct discussion from the outset. To further ensure that my own agenda did not dominate during interviews, I carried out a pilot interview (with 'Ashok'). The interview technique and approach to data coding in my pilot was checked by a fellow social science researcher, and adjusted as necessary. Finally, as a means of respondent validation, I organised a group discussion of five interviewees at the end of the research process. I presented some initial interpretations of the data and asked for the views of my research participants.

Since I sought 'intensive', rather than 'extensive' data, I interviewed a relatively small number of Occupy participants (Deacon et al. 2010: 45). For my sampling method, I used a combination of strong convenience and snowball sampling (*Open Source* n.d.). The only demographic control I applied is to ensure a roughly equal gender split. I ultimately interviewed twelve activists in total; this also happens to be the number of interviews by which Deacon et al report that 'saturation' can occur (Gitlin 2012: 28).

## Findings

Della Porta's research into anti-war and global justice mobilisations suggests these movements were characterised by new forms of collective identity based on the celebration of diversity. Social movement theory had previously held that the degree of 'catnetness' in a movement (the extent to which participants belong to the same social

categories, combined with the number of networks they are part of] was a good predictor of the strength of collective identities. According to Della Porta, the global justice movement broke this rule, since it featured plenty of 'net' but little 'cat': the presence of dense, overlapping networks, but few shared social or political characteristics. Her phrase 'tolerant identities' is designed to express the idea that participants felt a strong sense of shared collective identity alongside a positive respect for the movement's diversity.<sup>2</sup> My own research leads me to different conclusions with regard to those I interviewed. While activists could be said to have shared a broad political identity, this did not seem to produce a strong sense of belonging to the movement. Several, including Pasha, Paula and Titus, distinguished sharply between their own politics and that of the movement as a whole.

## Identity

There were a number of different understandings of who constituted the 'we' of radical social movements, and how that collective identity should be defined. Some activists, like Paula, felt that movements should adopt a clearly left-wing political identity (Deacon et al 2010: 54-57). Lucy argued instead that they should seek to position themselves as representing 'informed', 'sensible', 'mainstream' opinion (45). Although they are in some ways opposed, these views both conceptualise identity in terms of political rather than social position. Ashok seemed to combine both social and political identities in his attempt to describe the 'we' of 'the global justice

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<sup>2</sup> Some of my activists no longer identified with the movement, but had identified during its peak.

movement'. He listed the social components of the movement as 'diverse interest groups to do with gender, race, class, the trade unions, environment', but ultimately ascribed to them a political identity when he argued 'what they all have in common is their critique of capitalism' (Della Porta 2005: 180-191). Titus was the activist who, by referring to the 'the class' and arguing that movements should engage in 'political class struggle', drew most clearly on social identities in his discussions.<sup>3</sup> Maria did discuss social identities relating to gender, race and class, but expected that groups would initially define themselves autonomously rather than adopt a unified socio-political identity. A greater sense of unity, she felt, might begin to appear during the course of struggle (224-267).

Activists tended to define themselves primarily in terms of their politics, rather than in terms of any social identity. Brian, the one activist who selected the term 'identity' as central, discussed it in relation to personal autonomy rather than group belonging (80-82). Many respondents referred to being a 'revolutionary', 'an activist' or someone on 'the Left' as an identity in itself. Alison's comment on the make-up of Occupy – 'some were anti-capitalists, some were social workers, some were artists' – makes this clear (295-336). Discussions of 'solidarity' (the term chosen for discussion most frequently) reflected the ambiguous nature of 'identity' in activists' discourses. Some spoke of solidarity as important at the micro level in building confidence and supporting others. As Lucy argued:

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<sup>3</sup> Paula interview transcript, lines 187; 201-204 (all names changed to protect anonymity)

*Whether you approve of someone wholly or not, if someone puts themselves in jeopardy they deserve your solidarity, otherwise the obvious consequence of that is to make it much more difficult for people to step forwards. (117-120)*

This is similar to Ashok's discussion of solidarity between the 'diverse interest groups' that make up the 'global justice movement' (26-30), in that solidarity is interpreted as support for allies whose identity one does not share.

Among our activists, a broad shared political identity did not seem to compensate for the absence of a common socio-political identity. My sample of Occupy participants featured significant political and social diversity. What almost all had in common, however, is that they generally referred to themselves using political or ideological categories such as 'revolutionary' or 'Left', rather than any social identities. Most seemed to view themselves as thinkers or analysts, rather than as people whose politics emerged from their social identities and grievances. Pam was the only activist who drew substantially upon her own experiences and social identity as a 'pissed off woman' in attempting to explain her politics (48-49). Other activists felt that the Left had suffered because activists' political identities did not seem to be rooted in social identity and experience. Pasha felt that the politics expressed by working class teenagers at an event she attended was more authentic and intense than the views articulated by seasoned left-wing activists (40-44). Maria bemoaned the fact that many 'revolutionaries' were not active in 'grassroots struggle', arguing that we should all entrench ourselves in 'a community that resonates with us in some way' (79-82).

This points to an awareness of the differences between social and political identities. Della Porta argues that global justice activists' commitment to 'social justice' might be able to perform a similar 'adhesive' function to the 'class conscious' identity that sustained the labour movements of the past (230-243, 294-295). A preference for social justice and membership of a particular class constitute two very different bases for the formation of collective identity, however. The former is based on common political or ethical commitments, while the latter comes from perceived shared interests. Solidarity among people who feel they have common interests may be a stronger 'adhesive' than solidarity between those who merely share the same political outlook. Perhaps this thought motivated Paula's attack on Occupy for 'lacking an understanding that our liberation, the liberation of Tamils, the liberation of women, depends on the liberation of humanity' (240-252).

## **Inclusion**

Della Porta highlights inclusivity as a key feature of the global justice movement. The inclusion of a range of social and political identities within the umbrella of 'social justice' enabled a strong sense of belonging, she claims (403-406). In opposition to this, Dean identifies the inclusivity of the Left as its greatest weakness. She argues that contemporary radical movements have failed sufficiently to highlight division and exacerbate social antagonisms, producing a politics of 'inclusion' that reflects liberal fantasies about the common good (Della Porta 2005: 200). My findings partly substantiate Dean's claims.



Activists were generally united in seeing Occupy as providing inclusive spaces that could be accessed by people with a range of views, identities and political perspectives. Several activists thought an important benefit of this inclusivity was to allow Occupy to 'bring together people who've been traditionally on the Left but also broaden this to a much broader audience' (109-111) (Alison). Maria felt this enabled a productive exchange between the Left and ordinary people, in that 'diverse people from diverse backgrounds that didn't have specific analyses came together and it created space for common sense to take place' (Della Porta 2005: 200). Sean was perhaps the activist most committed to inclusivity. For him, inclusion was an important consideration in terms of the language that movements use, the identities they adopt, the processes of social change they advocate and the political views they incorporate within their analysis. He even suggested that movements consider including those thought of as the traditional enemies of the Left:

*I mean, it takes a soul more beautiful than mine will ever be to say 'well we need to bring the Tories and the police and the army and the capitalists along with us', but if we're not, then they'll still be there being pissed off at us – the Left – and saying 'give us five years and we'll overthrow you'. (cf. Dean 2009, 2012)*

The inclusion of a range of views within Occupy was seen to create some problems in relation to the clarity of the political analysis, message and demands. However, this was generally seen as unavoidable or outweighed by other benefits. Adam, for example, acknowledged that Occupy did not adopt

the anti-capitalist message he would have liked, but felt that 'if you're going to call yourselves the 99% then that has to include people who maybe want a different version of capitalism and maybe they're Liberal Democrats or they're Greens' (58-60). Lucy agreed that, within an inclusive movement 'you have to work with people whose ultimate goals may be different from you' (334-337).

Others took a much more critical approach to the question of inclusivity. For Paula, attempting to include such a broad range of views caused Occupy to accommodate itself too much to mainstream, conservative political discourses. In her view, it also prevented Occupy appealing to those who adopted explicitly radical or left-wing identities:

*...I would have liked it to become an actual radical movement. It would have appealed to many more people, if instead of trying to appeal to the right wing as well, as many of the spokespeople did, and first and foremost tried to appeal to its natural allies who have been excluded and exploited all their lives and which include not only you know your regular faces, you know... many trade unions, you know... everything ... But by trying to be so bland and so inclusive, it actually excluded the people it would have naturally attracted. (177-182)*

The implication here is that, in a society characterised by conflict and exclusion, it is impossible for a movement to include all political identities. In this sense, radical movements cannot avoid being divisive. Titus went further, arguing that the goal of movements is to divide rather than unite. For him, the aim is to 'completely polarise society in between two hegemonic blocs that are in complete competition with each other'

(61-66). When this claim was put to other activists in our focus group, they largely accepted that the creation of a common political identity relied upon a division between 'us' and 'them'. The concept of the 99% versus the 1% was proclaimed as one which both divided and united. Some, however, were reluctant to assign a specific identity to the 1%, preferring to conceptualise it as either a systemic enemy or a generic entity which could take on different forms in different contexts. Adam felt that part of the reason that the 1% were not clearly defined was due to the difficulty of producing consensus from among the diverse groups and individuals who made up Occupy London (91-92). In this sense, it was the lack of a strong social or political collective identity among Occupy participants which was responsible for producing a rather abstract message.

## **Division**

While some activists advocated including everyone, others accepted the importance and reality of division. Paula felt that Occupy's 'inclusiveness' was its most significant error (186-196). Despite his enthusiastic advocacy of maximum inclusion in our interview, Sean was one of a number of activists in our focus group who agreed that division was also important (458-459). There was, however, a general reluctance to specify the social groups that constituted either friend or enemy. 'The 99%' was widely seen as an appropriate term for the collective subject, but few seemed prepared to provide detail on the groups through which this was constituted, or on the 1% to be opposed (Focus group notes: 144-146). Inclusion and exclusion were discussed largely with reference to political views, rather than to specific

social groups. Adam, Ashok and Alison were among those who seemed to view Occupy's base as made up of all those ideologically opposed to neoliberal capitalism (including, in Adam's case, some Liberal Democrats and Greens) (186-196). Others felt that Occupy should have had a more narrowly-defined ideological character, but the question of whether to include or exclude was seen largely to depend on views rather than interests. This again highlights the way activists tended to attribute a purely political identity to the Occupy movement, and marks a fundamental difference with some social movements of the past.

One consequence of failing to specify the groups that are included and excluded in a movement is that proposals for change can become rather abstract and vague. The best example of this was Sean's proposed demand, 'don't be mean', which is strikingly similar to Google's motto, 'don't be evil' (Focus group notes: 122, 151). Zizek argues that such attempts to produce an 'inclusive' message obscure social division and produce incoherent politics (Focus group notes, 131-151). Including everyone might be an important utopian goal; but in the present context, where social division is the most evident feature of our reality, a collective identity that includes everyone makes no sense. Dean argues that a revolutionary movement should advocate the interests of 'the people as the rest of us' (61-66). This is an attempt to incorporate an aspirational, utopian, universal identity ('the people') alongside an identity with the oppressed, exploited and excluded ('the rest of us'). The creation of a coherent political identity, then, requires the prior acknowledgement of fundamental social division: the universal

identity sought cannot be a reality in the present society.

### **The 'politics of Occupy in the UK'?**

Occupy supporters and critics tend to imply that conscious individual actors make deliberate decisions to adopt the movement's politics. Enthusiasts such as Graeber commend activists for their embrace of horizontal democracy (237-260), while more cynical voices like Dean attack Occupy members' supposed rejection of the notions of 'leadership' and 'party' (Žižek 2012: 19-23). Even Della Porta's detailed empirical account of global justice activists' political understandings assumes participants deliberately and consciously commit to a 'world of differences' (Dean: 2012: 87). The result produced is a somewhat caricatured picture of 'Occupy politics' that obscures contradiction and nuance. My research in fact suggests that only a small minority of our activists embraced 'the politics of Occupy' as outlined by both critics and supporters. If this politics is taken to include a commitment to 'horizontal' democracy and consensus, an opposition to engagement with the state, a celebration of inclusion and diversity, an ambivalence on questions of ideology and a preference for concrete action over long-term strategy, perhaps only Pam can be said to fit the model. Those whose politics depart significantly from this picture include an activist who organised Occupy demonstrations in Scotland, one who helped draft the initial London statement and others who enthusiastically participated in Occupy actions. Although all activists identified with Occupy (either currently or in the past), half expressed significant criticisms of the movement. Whereas Della Porta's research on global justice activists revealed a strong degree of unity despite

political differences, my own findings indicate a relatively divided movement (Graeber 2011).

Like the movement as a whole, some of our activists appeared to articulate a contradictory politics. This is unsurprising, given that identities are constituted through complex and contradictory social and psychological processes (Dean 2012: 229-232, 237-239). Dean herself insists that we question the apparent unity of the self and pay attention to the divisions and contradictions within individuals (Della Porta 2005: 180-191). We should see the politics of social movement actors as attempts to negotiate these contradictions, rather than as carefully formulated ideologies. Activists' politics cannot be discussed in isolation; rather, they must be understood in relation to the historical and social context in which activism takes place. This is not to deny the existence of a distinctive politics associated with Occupy and other contemporary social movements. My findings suggest activists did share some elements of a common political and strategic approach. However, rather than being consciously adopted, this approach often seemed to flow from a set of unarticulated assumptions and beliefs. These assumptions are in turn related to current social, cultural, ideological and economic trends. To borrow a phrase of Titus's, Occupy in the UK are 'a product of the conjuncture' (186-187).

The political identity of the Occupy movement can also be seen as the result of the interplay between different groups and individuals, rather than as the product of a common outlook shared by members. For example, Adam suggested in our focus group that Occupy London adopted an ambiguous

position on who exactly constituted 'the 1%' partly because there was no agreement on the issue (Ellis 1976). The failure to specify a common enemy is not, therefore, evidence of the movement's agreement that everyone should be included; rather, it can be seen as the result of a *lack* of agreement over who to exclude. The internal dynamics of the Occupy movement can be seen as producing a 'politics' that few individual members consciously adopt.

### **Identities in context**

Activists' notions of identity, inclusion and division must be understood in relation to the economic, cultural and social processes of Western, late capitalist society. Some activists saw identity primarily as a matter of choice. Brian linked identity closely with autonomy, arguing that a goal of social movements should be to allow individuals to 'freely choos[e]' their identities (Dean 2012: 225-228). This particular notion of identity can only be understood in relation to the socio-economic and cultural context in which it is produced. Sennett has noted the tendency of young people in particular to describe their identities as the product of choice rather than as linked to social or occupational position. For him, this phenomenon is related to the 'culture of the new capitalism', which promotes a focus on potential rather than past experience (Titus interview transcript, 611-616). Dean argues that contemporary capitalism encourages us to identify ourselves in terms of who we want to be, rather than partly as a product of our environment and experience. The result is an individualistic conception of identity that constitutes a barrier to the formation of a collective political subject (Focus

group notes: 144-146). If political identities are seen as the product of choice, to modify one's politics involves a violation of autonomy. This explains some activists' reluctance to compromise over the fundamentals of their politics, and their tendency to prefer loose coalitions to organisational unity (26-30).

Activists' reluctance to identify the social groups in whose interests Occupy fights is again related to a number of contextual factors. Identifying the interests of particular social groups requires what Jameson calls a 'cognitive map': the ability to conceive of the 'unrepresentable totality' of social structures beyond immediate experience. Jameson argues that post-modern culture obscures social reality and prevents us from constructing such a map (Sennett 2006). Material changes in the nature of capitalism have also affected people's understanding of social division. Sennett discusses the ways in which new forms of corporate organisation mean companies appear less like bureaucratic hierarchies and more like flexible networks. Workers in modern organisations consequently develop forms of occupational identity that rely less on a distinction between workers and bosses than in the past (Dean 2009: 63-67). This is especially so for the growing number of temporary or 'precarious' workers, who may develop atomised forms of identity (e.g., Paula: 168-174).

Activists' enthusiastic embrace of the '99%' slogan nevertheless implies a desire to identify as part of a collective socio-political subject. Indeed, the creation of the concept of the '99%' can be seen as an attempt to provide one element of a cognitive map that might allow people with diverse and



fragmented identities to see their common interests. This is precisely the function Jameson assigns to critical analysis: to enable people to look 'beyond the camera obscura' (Titus [Jameson 1991]) and see a different interpretation of the world (Sennett 2006). Such an analysis can only be constructed through an interaction between radical ideas and popular understandings, however. For Dean to insist that movements espouse 'communism' or Hallward to encourage identification as part of the 'proletariat' is to ignore the fact that political identities and understandings are not manufactured artificially, but developed organically.

## Conclusion

This aim of my research was to try and establish whether either the Marxist or libertarian interpretations of Occupy were accurate in relation to the UK movement. Did participants adopt a clear, unified political identity and analysis? My findings indicate that they did not. Nor, however, could they be said to have positively embraced the political and social diversity of the movement. Most seemed to view the lack of unity on the Left as a significant problem. Participants' reluctance to affirm a unified identity does not represent a deliberate adoption of libertarian politics; rather, the views of Occupy participants

should be seen in context – as partly the product of factors beyond their control.

I have argued that the 'Occupy politics' I identified is not consciously embraced by each individual member, but rather results from a combination of internal movement dynamics and broader contextual factors. This makes the politics of movements difficult to study satisfactorily in a project of this nature. Bryman comments that some forms of empirical research tend to take the individual as their units of analysis, since it is easier to produce evidence of individual opinions and beliefs than collective ones (Standing 2011). However, a focus on individuals prevents us seeing movement politics as collectively produced. Future studies of the 'newest social movements' should give full consideration to the social, political, ideological, cultural and economic context within which movements operate. This should include study of the social backgrounds and identities of movement participants, and the link between social and political identities. Any conclusions about the politics of such movements should distinguish between the political understandings of individual activists and the approach of the movement as a whole. All of this is needed if a model is to be developed that faithfully reflects and makes sense of the internal complexities and contradictions within both social movements and individual participants.

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