Territory, Identity, Enunciation: a critical ethnography of Occupy London

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Abstract

Occupy London emerged in October 2011 as the local articulation of the Occupy movement, and of a broader-still wave of popular occupation protests. This thesis is a critical ethnography of Occupy London, which interrogates three inter-related features or problems of Occupy, which were themselves the focus of commentary on the movement from early on: the practice of occupation; the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’; and the apparent aversion to demand making.

The thesis, which emerges from my own extended participation in Occupy London, uses engaged participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and key texts produced by the movement, to follow the ways in which these problems unfolded around key debates and the everyday doings of collective action and camp life. My ethnography covers three years of Occupy London’s activity, from its effervescent early days, through the long months of occupation, and more than two years following the final evictions, to trace the ongoing negotiations of these central problematics through the long period of movement breakdown and abeyance.

The ethnography is critical insofar as it seeks not only to document the complex ‘facts on the ground’, but to signal the possibilities and limitations of these for a radical politics.

The thesis draws on a range of theoretical and conceptual tools to analyse the concrete features of the movement. Rather than imposing a transcendent grand theory, these are put to work in the analysis of those dimensions they best illuminate. Of particular use is the theoretical lexicon of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987, 1977), while other conceptual tools are taken from Michel Foucault (1984, 1970), Jacques Rancière (1999), Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004), as well as diverse social movements scholars and radical thinkers.

In the first empirical chapter, the problem of occupation is framed in terms of the Deleuze-Guattarian understanding of territory, using their concept of the territorial ‘refrain’ to highlight how Occupy was locked in a defining tension between the desire to overcome fixed sites, and the tendency to establish a ‘home’ in the form of the protest camp. Signalling the polyvalence of this ‘home’, I argue that while this demonstrated the political production of space (Lefebvre 1991), the result was a ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1984), staging tensions of belonging.

The claim that ‘We Are the 99 Percent’, the centre-piece of Occupy discourse, is also discussed as the site of problematisation and tension, the subject of the second empirical chapter. I argue that while there remained a recognition that this named the condition and fact of inequality, rather than any identity, the opposing tendency for ‘the 99 percent’ to name the identity of ‘the People’ raised the problem of representation in a movement suspicious of such a dynamic. I account for the various ways in which Occupiers sought to overcome this contradiction, finally arguing that Jacques Rancière’s (1999) concept of ‘disagreement’ bridges the space between an identitarian ‘people’ and a radical critique of inequality.

Occupy’s apparent aversion to articulating demands is taken as a provocation in the third empirical chapter to address the wider problem of collective speech, and the role of speech in the constitution of collectivity. Through a discussion of the principal institutions and modes of Occupy’s movement speech (the People’s Mic, the General Assembly, representations to the media, the issuing of statements and demands), I account for the compromises and politics that produced collective speech, and consider the privileged place of speech in a movement seeking to facilitate ‘conversation’ and produce a ‘message’.

In sum the thesis offers a critical and deeply empirical engagement with this important moment of collective struggle.
Declaration

That no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the moments after the eviction, by force, of the Occupy London protest camp outside St. Paul’s Cathedral, I stood in the cold night, in the middle of a square that now felt strangely unfamiliar, wondering what on earth we were going to do next. The police lines were dispersing, as the last of the bailiffs threw the last of the tents into the backs of bin vans, and pressure washers blasted all traces of the 137-day occupation from the pavement. I joined a circle of people I knew, comparing thoughts on the evening’s events, and we all concurred that this was not the end; that Occupy London, like the wider Occupy movement, had awakened forces which still had further to go; that we would not give up; that others would join. Someone repeated the by-then common phrase that this was ‘only the end of the beginning’. Still, looking around at that scene of defeat, with people wandering through it as if lost, I couldn’t help asking myself whether our moment had passed, and whether we had used it right.

This thesis is a critical ethnography of Occupy London. This was the London-based articulation of an international social movement phenomenon that began in 2011, characterised most prominently by the occupation of city squares and the establishment of protest camps, as the bases for emerging forms of popular protest. The thesis follows the complex unfolding of a social movement phenomenon whose tactics, practices and discourses defined a significant period of radical politics and popular mobilisation. It is a movement in which I personally participated over the course of three years (October 2011 – September 2014), from the first heady moments of pitching my tent in a Central London square, through long months of occupation, and on past the eviction of all major sites to an extended period of continued organisation, countless meetings, confusion, loss and collective soul-searching. This critical ethnography is advanced along three major lines, each a defining feature of Occupy London and the wider moment of popular protest of which it was part: the territory of occupation; the concept of ‘the 99 percent’ as a problematisation of movement identity; and the production of collectivity through moments of collective enunciation. While these often appeared as straightforward features of the movement, they were underpinned by complex dynamics, fraught with contradictions, tensions and shifting intensities, whose unfurling over time
fundamentally gave shape to the movement in ways that proved both productive and limiting. The critical analysis of this complex process drives the thesis.

Occupy matters. In its successes and its failings, it presents us with an opportunity to understand the problems of collective action and radical contentious politics in the contemporary period. The movements of 2011 – a group of unevenly connected phenomena including Occupy, the ‘indignant’ movements of Spain and Greece, and to an extent the uprisings of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ – marked a surge of popular and populist indignation against establishment elites, vested interests and a political and economic system that seemed rigged to benefit the few, even in this period of recession and sharpening austerity. As a common Occupy slogan put it ‘The system’s not broken; it’s fixed’. In the years since, this generalised sentiment has been the catalyst for a litany of political upsets, such as the rise of left populist political parties in Spain and Greece, and of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK Labour Party. More recently, and possibly of more dramatic historical significance, a resurgence of right-wing populism is sweeping through Western Europe and the United States, as voters misrecognise the causes of an increasingly intolerable and cramped form of life. While it is beyond the scope and timeframe of this thesis to account for the institutionalisation and rightward drift of indignant discourse, it is imperative that we fully interrogate the possibilities and problems emerging from the 2011 moment, when a sense of possibility for dynamic, creative radical left-wing action was in the air. History is long, and there is plenty more to come. As people continue to drive future waves of protest, and attempt to constitute a forward-looking radical politics, the concrete features of Occupy London provide a series of half-solved puzzles to which we will return as participants and scholars of social movements.

1.1 Research aims and questions

The principal aim of this thesis is to develop a rich, critical account of Occupy London, which interrogates this particular moment of social movement and dissent, and analyses its particular political, organisational and expressive features, drawing out the complexities and tensions that animated the movement. Through this close engagement with the specific, I assess the possibilities and limitations of Occupy’s tactics, discourses, and modes of collectivity. Thus I aim to clarify and map out the
major problems negotiated through Occupy, and in this way to provide a level of 
critical understanding that is useful for radical political projects going forward.

Ethnography rarely proposes hypotheses, and instead tends toward open research 
questions that are themselves open to change. Still, drafting research questions 
remains an essential structuring force. The questions that drive this thesis are the 
distillation of problems and issues I encountered in my own participation in Occupy 
London. These centre on three features which largely defined the particularity of the 
Occupy project: first the practice of occupation as the dominant mode of action, 
taking and holding space in city squares for the production of protest camp 
territories; second, the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ the central slogan of the 
movement, which also implied a larger analytical framework within which Occupiers 
understood their action and the ills against which they mobilised; third, the way that 
the circulating rhetoric against the value of making demands, in fact masked a 
tension between privileging the multivocity of the movement, and a desire to 
produce moments of collective speech.

As an ethnographic engagement with these problems brought a greater clarity 
regarding the concrete issues at hand, these were refined into specific questions 
that guided my research and the final writing and structure of the thesis. These 
research questions are as follows:

1. The problem of occupation: How did Occupy London’s practice of occupation 
navigate two conflicting modes of territory: the embedding of the movement 
in the occupation camp form and location; and the desire to extend the 
occupation and overcome the fixity of the site?
2. The problem of ‘the 99 percent’: How did Occupiers’ negotiate the different 
interpretations and understandings of the claim that ‘We Are The 99 
Percent’? How did this stage a tension between, on the one hand, a critique 
of inequality – with no necessary reference to identities or representation – 
and, on the other a claim to representing ‘the people’?
3. The problem of collective speech: How were moments of collective speech 
constituted in a movement that explicitly problematised modes of 
representation? What types of collectivity were produced through such 
moments?
There is also an additional and important temporal register to these questions, as my ethnography and the chapters that follow chart these features through the long process of Occupy London’s downswing and disappearance, asking how we can understand this process in light of the three problems at the heart of the thesis.

1.2 Occupy London

While a full, analytical discussion is developed throughout the thesis, some words of introduction to Occupy London are useful at this stage.

On Saturday 15th October 2011, around two thousand people gathered in the area along one side of Paternoster Square in Central London, the site of the London Stock Exchange. They were responding to the call to ‘Occupy the London Stock Exchange’, an attempt to produce London’s own local articulation of an emerging international occupation movement. Throughout 2011 a series of ‘square-taking movements’ (Kioupkiolis and Katsembekis 2014) had unfolded, most dramatically in the events of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ – in particular the case of revolutionary Egypt and the Tahrir Square occupation – but also in the anti-government and anti-austerity encampments of Spain (the indignados, or 15M movement) and Greece (the aganaktosmenoi of Athens’ Syntagma Square), and the Occupy Wall Street movement which began in New York on September 17th 2011, before spreading across the United States. These mobilised around particular local conditions that distinguish them considerably, but a cluster of common practices, styles and discourses, alongside their temporal coincidence, created a sense, for some at least, of a connected popular uprising. The would-be London Occupiers gathering at Paternoster Square did so as part of a ‘Global Day of Action’ called by Spain’s Plataforma ¡Democracia real YA! to mark six months since the 15th May beginning of the Spanish movement. In the event, they found that they were unable to enter the privately owned Paternoster Square, met instead by metal barricades and large number of riot police, complete with dogs and horses. Held back in the area just outside St. Paul’s Cathedral, and after a long day and night defending themselves from police incursions while holding space for collective discussion, they decided to remain, with several hundred staying that night. Over the coming days this became the site of a growing occupation and protest camp, and the central territory for an
unfolding social movement phenomenon, Occupy London, in which the occupied space became a site of protest, discussion, education, plotting, and the minutiae of everyday life.

Rallying under the iconic slogan of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ – imported from Occupy Wall Street – Occupy London took over public space to articulate a range of claims that, while linked to a longer tradition of left politics, were embedded in that specific historical moment following the financial crisis, and its handling by politicians: widening social and economic inequality; the irresponsible behaviour of banks and financial institutions; the bail-outs; the troubling connection between politicians and interests in the finance and business world; the emerging austerity policies seen by many to be motivated by an ideologically-driven opportunism. As another common Occupy slogan went, ‘They got bailed out, we got sold out’. Over the course of its highly visible early period, Occupy London consisted of a second occupation camp at Finsbury Square, Islington, as well as several significant building occupations, including: the Bank of Ideas, in the former offices of Swiss bank UBS; the School of Ideas in a nearby abandoned primary school; Occupied Justice in a former magistrates court in Old Street, East London. An intense period of occupation was accompanied by intense organisation. The camps in particular were the sites of regular General Assemblies, through which the movement and its spaces organised themselves collectively, while in addition to this, multiple ‘working groups’ were formed to cover all manner of specialisations, from specific political issues, to the various requirements of a common living space.

This produced a network of groups, friendships, debates, tactics and practices that lasted past that highly visible early period and through a long period of attempted reinvigorations, ongoing organisation, and ever-smaller ebbs and flows of activity. Working groups whose function was not explicitly related to the running of the camps continued to meet, some (not many) consistently throughout the three years of my research. Early on, there were attempts to reinvigorate the protest camp form, and when these attempts stopped, the network of Occupy London continued to mobilise against new austerity measures, the reckless banking industry, and signs of corporate hegemony from the London Olympics to the tax practices of big business. Connections were made with other corners of social movement activity, as Occupy London coordinated actions with multiple groups from the anti-austerity UK Uncut and Disabled People Against Cuts, to the anti-fracking movement and anti-
capitalists mobilising against the G8, and more besides. At times of key campaigns, activist groups and trade unions approached Occupy London, asking for assistance with space-taking tactics and with mobilising large numbers of people through its communications channels. This was a long and uneven history, through which many of the dynamics that had been established by the movement early on, played out in new contexts.

1.3 My occupation

At the time Occupy London began I was working full time at a charity research agency on the edge of the City of London. I had followed closely the emerging popular movements of 2011, taking particular interest in the case of Spain, where I had once lived and still had many friends, and that of New York’s Occupy Wall Street, implicating a place with which I felt a problematic sense of connection, based on language, popular culture and some odd idea of common entangled history. While I had participated on some level in several activist groups before, I was a recent arrival to London, and didn’t know anyone involved in the networks that were, at that time, building towards a London occupation. The first day of the occupation passed me by, but the following day I started to hear news on social media, seeing pictures of the thousands gathered and the first tents being erected.

The following Wednesday I left work early to visit the camp, wandering through the winding pathways between tents, reading the many banners, and participating, timidly, in my first General Assembly. I was immediately captivated by the sense of new possibility; by these scenes of people who arrived as strangers and were now thrashing out what felt like the great political questions of the moment and the era. The first opportunity to return was that Saturday, and I spent hours there, attending workshops and discussions, joining the General Assembly, and eating a bowl of veggie curry on the stone steps, surveying it all. I spent the next day unable to attend, but wondering what was happening at St. Paul’s. I also found out that the second occupation at Finsbury Square had just been established. Finsbury Square was where I got off the bus every day to go to work. At that point I decided that rather than walking past the Occupy camp every day only to skive off at work to read about it online, I would take my tent and contribute to the production of this emerging movement. On Monday morning, I got up two hours earlier than normal,
packed my tent and a couple of changes of clothes, and headed to St. Paul’s. In trying to fit this in before work, I arrived to find almost everyone still asleep, and the few people awake uncertain of where I could pitch my tent. They asked if I knew about Finsbury Square, and in the interest of having my tent up in time to run to my first meeting at work, I took the ten-minute walk to the second occupation, where I was met by a friendly, young Polish guy who gave me some tea and helped me get the tent up in a hurry. And just like that, there I was, part of the occupation.

From that point I participated in the ups and downs of Occupy London for three years. The details of this participation – the specific groups, actions, and disputes in which I was most active, and less active – are covered in the methodological discussion of Chapter 3, and indeed throughout this thesis. For now, I simply note that this location of myself within the occupation, and the wider network it spawned, was essential to an understanding of the complexities and nuances of the political, organisational, ideological and practical questions that run through this thesis. In his analysis of the Occupy movement, Bernard Harcourt says,

> To produce an effective normative statement about the Occupy movement – about what the movement should do – the speaker needs to be physically occupying. And not just physically present at an Occupy site, but “occupying” it, in the sense of having a self-imagination that they are part of the resistance movement. (Harcourt 2013: 53-54)

This is a problematic statement, but there is some truth to it. We should be critical of the normative and discursive assumptions of Harcourt’s claim, but it usefully signals the degree to which an immersion in the Occupy project can aid the production of particular kinds of critical reflections, developed amidst unfolding movement debates and events.

### 1.4 Contributions and interventions

In this thesis, I make a substantive contribution to knowledge through the depth of my empirical engagement, dialogue with relevant bodies of literature, and the deploying of concepts and theories that further illuminate both the empirical case
and the uses of the theory. What follows is an outline of these key contributions and interventions. Where relevant, this is located in particular bodies of work.

The high profile of Occupy meant that it was almost immediately met with attempts to understand and critique its emerging features. Aside from a frenzy of journalistic accounts, some very good (Mason 2012), this included analyses from major scholars and thinkers (Žižek 2011; Chomsky 2012; Badiou 2012; Castells 2012; Negri and Hardt 2012; Federici in Davis et al. 2012), marking this significant moment of reflection for radical politics and theory. A common feature of much early work on Occupy, and reflecting a perceived need to defend the movement from critics at that stage, was a tendency to focus on the positive features of this apparently singular event, and on the validity of its claims (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2011; Chomsky 2012; Graeber 2013). While I am keen to draw out the most progressive and interesting features of the Occupy project, I also clearly account for and analyse the many weaknesses, mis-steps and missed opportunities of Occupy London, as they emerge through the long unfolding of a process whose shortcomings must be accounted for. Indeed, as I show, these features are in part what makes this an important case and analysis.

The unique contribution of this thesis also comes in part from an unmatched depth and length of ethnographic engagement with an under-researched articulation of the Occupy movement. While it is important to note the common features of the wider occupation movements, Occupy London was its own phenomenon, and these particularities are often of more analytic interest than general statements about circulating tactics and discourses. Most major engagement with Occupy has focused on Occupy Wall Street, which launched Occupy as such (Graeber 2013; Taussig 2013; Mitchell 2013; Calhoun 2013), or the indignant squares of Southern Europe, whose scale seemed to pose a real challenge to austerity regimes (Castañeda 2012; Kaika and Karaliotas 2014; Kioupkiolis and Katsembekis 2014; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2014). Of the scholarly engagements with Occupy London, most have focused on a limited empirical foundation, usually in the very early period of the occupation (Köksal 2012; Gledhill 2012). Longer engagements with Occupy London amount to either engaged research extending not much past the major evictions (Halvorsen 2012, 2014) or a longer-term but sporadic study from a more outsider position (Burgum 2015a; 2015b). My extended and engaged ethnography contributes a uniquely broad and deep account, which also follows the complex
process of movement break down that is only touched on in the literature, and which also focuses primarily on the American movements (Crane and Ashutosh 2013; Gupta 2015).

The three features that guide the thesis have been recognised in much analysis of the movement. Developing from these, I contribute considerably to our understanding of these movement features in two main ways: first, by providing a depth of ethnographic detail that exposes and seeks to explain the complex dynamics at play within the movement; second through the use of concepts and theories that illuminate these complexities, and allow us to apprehend them in ways that are useful, politically (for locating the problems, potentials and points of tension) and methodologically (in providing tools that get at facts as I found them). The thesis works by moving between an immersion in ethnographic depth and the application of key concepts to further a critical understanding of Occupy.

The movement-defining practice of occupation has been the focus of much commentary, whether it is seen as a form of embodied critique (Arditi 2012, 2014), a Lefebvrian intervention in the production of space (Halvorsen 2012, 2014; Dhaliwal 2012) or a challenge to the notionally ‘public’ nature of the spaces they occupied (Köksal 2012; Lubin 2012). My discussion of occupation builds on these, but uses Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the refrain to emphasise social movement territory as a moving process, shaped by tensions, whose shifting intensities I document throughout. This concept is uniquely useful in advancing an understanding of the often conflictual dimensions of occupation. While this is suggested in Halvorsen’s (2014) distinction between two aspects of occupation – space-taking rupture and ongoing social reproduction – my use of Deleuze and Guattari’s refrain produces a more nuanced account, not as the tug-of-war between too distinct ‘aspects’, but rather the intensifications of territory’s process. While I am not the first to use Deleuze-Guattarian conceptions of territories and refrains to describe social movements (Chesters 2007; Thoburn 2015), my engagement with, and application of, the idea of the refrain contains a level of depth that has not occurred before, further enriched by ethnographic critique.

My analysis is also distinguished by an understanding of the occupation as a ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1984). While this concept has been sparingly applied to accounts of social movement spaces (Hetherington 1998, 1999; Feigenbaum et al.
Beckett et al. 2013; Beckett et al. 2016) these tend to focus on deliberate, tactical aspects of movement spatiality, or on the ‘positive’ effects of heterotopias. My additional focus on the ‘weird’, accidental and even harmful features of this, is a novel approach. In this vein, I also offer a critique of Kevin Hetherington’s (1997; 1998; 1999) combination of heterotopia and ‘utopics’ as missing out on the richness and ambivalence of movement heterotopias. This advances the application of this concept to understanding social movement spaces, as well as providing a richer, if more equivocal, understanding of Occupy London’s territory. This contributes to a recently growing literature on social movement spatiality (Nicholls et al 2013; Miller 2000; Martin 2015).

The slogan, ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, and the related 99 percent/one percent framework, was seized upon by many as the major claim of the Occupy movement, and even its main contribution to popular discourse. The response of scholars often reflected a desire to justify the starkness of this statement, using the slogan as a launch pad for broader comments about sharpening inequality in developed economies (Chomsky 2012; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2011;). Others focused on a different element of the slogan: its articulation that this was a movement whose constituency was everyone; that these were uprisings of ‘the people’. This included enthusiastic acceptance of such a claim, particularly early on (Bintliff 2012), but also slightly more critical reflections that noted the reality of Occupy’s relatively small numbers, but still agreed that the articulation of a ‘people’ was essential to the Occupy project. My ethnography emphasises the tension that existed between these dispositions, arguing that Occupy London was pulled in opposing directions by two distinct tendencies: the politicising insistence on the fact of inequality, with no reference to an identity of any sort, and indeed an explicit problematisation of this; and the representative claim that Occupy was, or spoke for, ‘the people’, a figure that I argue poses problems for radical projects (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 2004). This thesis is uniquely sensitive to this point of tension, the unfolding of which is revealed through a close interrogation of the ways in which Occupiers sought to find ways out of this conflict. I argue that Jacques Rancière’s (1999) concept of ‘disagreement’ provides a useful way of conceptualising this tension. This builds on previous work which has seen occupation itself as a form of ‘disagreement’ (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014; Burgum 2015a; 2015b), and points to this as a wider dynamic in Occupy.
The problem of collective speech is not formulated as such in the relevant literature. Its significance as an issue is pointed to most clearly in the critical and scholarly response to the Occupy movement’s apparent aversion to demand-making. This included those seeing this as a failure of politics (Žižek, 2012; Kioupkiolis, 2013; Katsembekis, 2013; Deseriis and Dean, 2012), and those concurring that demands would pose problems for a movement orientated toward inclusivity and an autonomous orientation away from the state (Calhoun, 2013; Mitchell, 2013; Graeber, 2013; Bray, 2013; Newman, 2013; Harcourt, 2013). I depart from this, not only to offer ethnographic detail of the dramatization of a long-rehearsed dispute over the place of demands in radical politics (Day 2009; Crimethinc 2015; Kaspar 2009; Laclau 1996; Žižek 2007; Critchley 2013), but to make a more ambitious claim connecting this with other moments in which Occupy London was called to speak with one voice. My use of the Deleuze-Guattarian (1987) concept of ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’ to emphasise the production of collectivity through quite different moments of movement speech – shouting together, deciding common statements, speaking to the press – provides a novel analytical approach to such moments, and the problems they pose for radical social movements. Furthermore, I use this framework to critically reflect on the inability of Occupy London to develop more organised forms of collectivity than those experienced in the first moments of inchoate collectivity. This is brought to bear on the wider movement climate of that time, and the features and limitations of polyvocal ‘indignation’ (Hessel 2010; Shulman 2011; Arditi 2012, 2014) as a mode of politics.

While these discussions are thick with the specifics of Occupy London, through this close engagement with the particular, I hope to reveal more general understandings of the way that territory, identity and enunciation present social movements, and anyone engaged in progressive collective projects, with a range of possibilities, constraints and traps.

Through an empirically-led, critical discussion of these features, the thesis marks the continuities and differences between Occupy and parallel and previous social movement waves. The thesis establishes various types of connection between Occupy London and the wider phenomenon of square-taking popular uprisings in 2011. The problems that drive the thesis were experienced to varying degrees across the wider Occupy movement and related movements. I draw on literature from across these to step, where fruitful, out of the ground-level engagement with
Occupy London, and into broader analyses of this moment for social movement politics.

Anti-capitalist movements of the past twenty years, in the UK and global North, loom over much of the thesis, sometimes implicitly though often explicitly. This is tied to the way in which practices and discourses have recurred or shifted in their applications and meanings between movement waves. This begins to emerge in my discussion of protest camping in Chapter 2, which locates the 2011 occupations in not just a global moment, but a longer history of space-taking in UK based direct action politics. This entails a discussion of major analyses of the anti-roads movement (Barry 1999; Routledge; 1997; McKay 1998; Butler 1996; North 1998), and the alter-globalisation movement (McCurdy 2010, 2005; Trocchi et al. 2005). The latter is especially important in this thesis, as a recurring point of comparison and contrast. This is most important analytically with reference to three concrete features: the differing dominant self-conceptions of these two movements, which I discuss with particular reference to Gerbaudo’s (2012; 2014) claim that the idea of the ‘99 percent’ reflects a significant shift from the imaginary of the alter-globalisation movement; the use of consensus decision-making, and the loss in Occupy of a sense of the constructive nature of conflict (Maeckelbergh 2009); the place of demands and common statements in these movements, as reflecting differing orientations to the point of speaking together. The argument that Occupy was the latest manifestation of the longer running alter-globalisation movement (Chesters 2013) rightly marks this important line of inheritance, but the thesis also analyses some of the most significant departures from, and re-directions of, alter-globalisation era forms of action.

As such these discussions advance the general understanding of a range of movement practices, through ethnographic engagement with this case, and through these key moments of comparison. Such comparison does not drive the overall argument of the thesis, but provides a series of smaller claims that reflect, as we must, on what is particular about Occupy, and how it illuminates recurring problems (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012).

What emerges is an ethnographically rich, problematising engagement with a contemporary movement, and indeed a wider historical moment, whose complexities we must endeavour to understand. Certainly, it is incumbent on those
of us who participated in producing that movement – who entangled ourselves with its ebbs and flows, its joys and its mistakes – to extend the moment of critical reflection, which for many of us began with the pitching of a tent in a city square, and little idea of what was to come.

1.5 Thesis structure

Following the end of this Introduction, the structure of the rest of the thesis is as follows:

In Chapter 2, Writing Radical Spaces, I locate the current thesis within the wider empirical literature on space-taking social movements, with a particular focus on ethnographies. Understanding the taking of space as the principal and initial characteristic of Occupy London and the wider movement, this chapter considers several types of movement space, but especially the protest camp. Through this I establish a range of common dynamics, features and problems addressed across the literature. This reveals how movement spaces handle other features, but also how this has been approached by ethnographers. This covers the following: the politicisation of daily life; the forms of organisation made possible in continuous sites; the impact of local features and issues; the way spaces handle the connection to wider movements; the impact on identities; the common tension between wider campaigns and maintaining sites. This provides a necessary background for considering what is particular to Occupy, and to this thesis, and how these relate to a longer history of movement practice and scholarship.

In Chapter 3, Being There: occupation and ethnography, I describe my approach to conducting an ethnography of Occupy London. This establishes the ethnographic philosophy, politics and ethics that shape the thesis. I briefly outline a Deleuze-Guattarian orientation to processes of shifting intensities, and to a pragmatic approach to theory and concepts. I offer a detailed account of my observant participation in Occupy London, clearly outlining the methods of data-gathering and analysis. The chapter considers the particular problems of engaged ethnography, offering a critique of ‘militant ethnography’.
Chapter 4, *Occupation and Beyond: the territory of Occupy London*, is the first of three empirical chapters. This considers the practice of occupation, and centres on the tension between the centrality, to the movement, of the occupation camp, and a broad desire to ‘Occupy Everywhere’, overcoming the fixity of the bounded camp. After discussing the significance of space for radical political projects, the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of the ‘refrain’ is used to emphasise the processual nature of territory, as handled by key moments of tension, as territory ‘skips’ between three moments: the marking of a centre; the stabilisation of a bounded territorial ‘home’; and the creative rupture of the boundaries. To understand the dynamics of the occupation ‘home’ I apply the concept of ‘heterotopia’ (Foucault 1984) to tease out the progressive and more troubling dimensions of the ‘other-place’ of occupation. I then turn to the struggle to overcome the fixity of the camp, signalling the major efforts to do so, and accounting for the ultimate limitations of this, as Occupy London stagnated in the moment of ‘home’.

Chapter 5, *We Are The 99 Percent*: between inequality and the people – the second empirical chapter – is an analysis of the idea of ‘the 99 percent’, a central feature of Occupy discourse. I show that the meaning of this was under ongoing negotiation, and identify a central tension between two opposing tendencies: on the one hand for this to name the fact of inequality, with no necessary reference to identity or representation; and on the other a tendency to refer to the identitarian figure of ‘the people’.

The chapter argues for the radical possibilities of this first tendency to catalyse a politicising ‘breach’ in social relations, but ultimately shows the prominence of the tendency to name a people, with a concomitant dynamic of representation. Recognising the problem of representation both in Occupy discourse and in radical politics more broadly (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004; W&TCH 2011), I then turn to the way Occupiers negotiated this contradiction (via a logic of assembly, and self-conception as ‘ordinary’), and some key theoretical orientations that allow us to recognise Occupy’s claim as more performative than representational (Puchner 2006). Finally I apply Rancière’s (1999) concept of ‘disagreement’ to suggest a bridge between the two opposing tendencies of the chapter.

assemblage of enunciation’ to interrogate how moments of collective speech constituted the collectivity of Occupy London. It considers how Occupiers negotiated between privileging the multivocity of the ‘conversation’ instantiated in the occupied square, and the desire to produce a ‘message’ through moments of consensual speech. This is oriented toward a pragmatics of speech that asks what it did, and allowed Occupy London to do. This chapter considers the distinct modes of collectivity produced in the ‘People’s Mic’, the General Assembly’s consensus process, the engagement with the mainstream media, and the articulation of statements and demands. It argues that while the affective connectivity of the People’s Mic revealed a potential for coordinated speech and action, the various attempts to extend this into a principle of organisation fell short, as the result of limited liberal features, and a desire to avoid necessary conflict and rather prolong the initial indignant moment through ‘inclusive’ forms of speech.

Chapter 7, Conclusion, clarifies the main claims of the thesis, establishing the key interventions and contributions to knowledge. It also points to potentially fruitful future lines of research and analysis which can extend the work of this thesis, but have not been possible within the parameters set.
Chapter 2 - Writing Radical Spaces

2.1 Introduction

Occupy London was a movement phenomenon handled by the space it took. This inaugural act, and defining feature, of protest camping in a city square brought with it a series of dynamics and problems, which it is important to appreciate, not only in order to more clearly mark what was particular to Occupy London, but also to consider the ways in which Occupy contained new articulations of established patterns. In what follows I delineate a field of literature which informs my work throughout: research, and especially ethnographies, on space-taking social movements. While all political action might be said to entail moments of taking space, my concern here is movements for whom the taking and holding of space – and construction of new territories – is central. Of particular importance, here is the protest camp, the defining practice, tactic, territory and aesthetic of Occupy London. The literature discussed below establishes the wider dynamics of protest camping and social movement spaces, signalling the salient features, problems and dilemmas that arise in such fields, and to which researchers must attend.

A critical application of relevant literature runs through the thesis, as it relates to the particular features under discussion in each chapter. This includes the emerging academic response to the Occupy movement, the wider literature on social movement practices, and many analytically and theoretically useful texts from radical political philosophy, cultural theory, anthropology and sociology more broadly. These are put to work when they are most useful, and their pertinence most immediate. Critical reflection emerges from the contact between particular theories and literatures and the empirical features of my research, which variously illuminates, extends or challenges established scholarship. The relative brevity of this opening literature review reflects its narrow focus, and the fact that a more critical use of literature emerges where it is most important, rather than in the general mapping of the field.

The texts discussed in this chapter are selected on the basis that they are major contributions to the research of space-taking movements. The chapter brings together the most important literature on the subject of protest camps, alongside
several other major interventions, which, taken together, cover the most pertinent and historically-significant forms of movement space. This is necessary for establishing a range of common problems, which is the aim of the chapter.

Rather than an exhaustive summary, I focus on how this literature moves between an analysis of space-taking, to an account of the wider features of the movements in question. This addresses seven concrete dynamics: the weaving together of politics with the practices of everyday life; the organisation of spatial arrangements as a reflection of ideological positions and political priorities; the way in which the movement project is affected by local conditions and issues; the located movement space’s connection to wider movement phenomena; the personal and collective transformations that take place; the tactical experimentation that can occur in prolonged sites; finally the common tension between the prioritisation of the movement space, and the wider ‘campaign’ of which it is part.

Space-taking is a common feature of contentious politics. The practice and tactics of occupation and protest camping have been applied time and again, turned to new targets and problems. A definitive and historic case is that of Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp – active 1981-2000, peaking through the 80s and early 90s – against the stationing of US cruise missiles in the UK (Roseneil 1993, 2000; Feigenbaum 2012), which mounted multiple protest camps as a base for protest actions and experiments in communal living. This, in turn was influential for the UK anti-roads movement of the 1990s (Barry 1999; Routledge; 1997; Butler 1996; North 1998), for which occupying buildings, forests and farmland on the intended site of road developments was a defining strategy. This space-taking politics was adapted through the Reclaim the Streets practice of mounting anti-car guerrilla street parties (St. John 2004; McKay 1998), which acted as temporary and expressive movement territories with a background both in the anti-roads protests and rave culture. While the alter-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s (which took inspiration in part from RTS) is typically conceived in terms of its globally networked form(lessness) (Routledge 2015), taking movement spaces remained essential, whether this was in the Social Forum events (Osterweil 2003; Juris 2008; Maeckelbergh 2009), the convergence sites for mass actions (Cockburn et al. 2000) or the less bounded but always space-taking counter-summit blockades (Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009). Furthermore, in the UK this included the use of protest camping in Gleneagles in 2005 (McCurdy 2010, 2008; Trocchi et al.)
2005), which was the launch pad for the Camp for Climate Action movement, which continued until 2011 (Frenzel 2014; Schlembach 2011). These are essential precursors to Occupy London, which emerged from this tradition and the more immediate square-taking movements of 2011, most iconically in Egypt (Kerton 2012; Kamel 2012; Gerbaudo 2012). Other important forms of political space-taking, whose influences cut through much of the above, are the squatting movement (Cattaneo and Martinez 2012; ADILKNO 1994; Kearns 1979), including squatted social centres (Yates 2012, 2015), and the use of factory and workplace occupations in the militant labour movement (Tuckman 2011; Ness and Azzelini 2011; Atzeni 2010).

2.2 The protest camp

Here, the protest camp represents a particularly significant mode of space-taking. Foregrounding the geographical element of political critique (Frenzel 2014), the protest camp has its particular emphases and tendencies. As Feigenbaum et al. state in their definitive account of protest camps,

> What makes protest camps different from other place-based or space-based social movement gatherings and actions is the substantial physical and emotional labour that goes into building and maintaining the site as simultaneously a base for political action and a space for daily life. (Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy 2013: 2)

The focus of activity of a protest camp may tend either toward the various forms of political action planned in, and emerging from, the camp – for example, road blocks against G8 summits (Trocchi et al. 2005), property damage of military targets (Roseneil 2000) and direct action against fossil fuel companies (Frenzel 2014) – or to the project of living together and organising collective life. Either way, it is the co-presence of these elements that marks the spaces I am interested in here. Not only particular to protest camps, these parallel functions remain the case in other activist spaces, such as one convergence space for the Seattle WTO demonstrations in 1999:
The Denny Street warehouse was far more than a meeting place; it was part factory, part barracks, part command and control centre, part mosh pit. Later it would become an infirmary. (Cockburn, St. Clair and Sekula, 2000: 14)

There is a common, if complex, genealogy shared by these outdoor spaces for life and politics. On the one hand, they often retain an association with the way in which camps in general stage a contrast with aspects of modernity conceived as corrupting (Frenzel 2014; Feigenbaum et al. 2013). Links can be made in this way with the Scouting movement, including Germany’s Wandervoegel Movement, and a range of outdoors cultural phenomena in the early twentieth century, the politics of which, where any was expressed, tended more to the right (Mills 2012; Smith 2006). While Hailey (2009) outlines a clear taxonomy of camps – of control, necessity and autonomy – Feigenbaum et al. (2013) warn against too readily identifying the protest camp as a camp of autonomy, as in fact these functions intersect. Frenzel (2014) suggests that the first documented protest camp may have been that of the Plebeian Secession in 494 BC Rome, an ancient case, which ‘points to the power of spatial organisation to undermine the political order of the status quo’ (Frenzel 2014: 908). While a slightly more recent history includes the English Revolution era Diggers, indigenous resistance to colonial land-grabs, and even military encampments (Feigenbaum et al. 2013), the protest camp in its contemporary form arrived with the ‘New Social Movements’ from the 1960s on (Melucci 1989; Touraine 1971), with an early example being the Resurrection City camp in Washington DC in 1968 as part of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Poor People’s Campaign.

While there is this connection between the functions, histories and materialities of such sites, the literature makes clear that we must attend to specific conditions and background. Each occupation and camp builds on particular movement relations and protest history, whether this is the way in which the Gleneagles HoriZone camp against the G8 took direct influence from the French activists’ ‘VAAAG’ camp of 2003 (McCurdy 2008) or the way in which the Tahrir Square occupation built on a longer history of square-taking Egyptian civil movements, such as that in support of the second Palestinian Intifada in 2000, or that against Mubarak’s support of the Invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Kamel 2012). Further factors mark significant differences: the temporal span of the camp or occupation not only effects what organising can
be achieved – tending either toward short- or long-termist campaigns – but also the degree to which things like the pressure of possible eviction effect the quality of life in those spaces; the principle function of the camp – to demand recognition, to blockade as an act of direct action, to act as a base for organising and action – similarly brings with it particular features and problems (Feigenbaum et al. 2013; Yates 2012).

I would now like to turn to the ways in which the literature of space-taking social movements signals the most salient dynamics, features and problems that coalesce in these particular terrains and modes of action.

### 2.3 Politics in the everyday

In persisting over time as a living space, everyday life in these places becomes the stage of political and ideological commitments. Of the anti-roads encampments of the 1990s, Merrick (1996) emphasises the degree to which these were homes (in Chapter 4, I discuss the potential pitfalls of this investment in a movement home for Occupy London). In his work on the convergence spaces of the alter-globalisation movement, Juris (2008) has picked up bell hooks’s (1990) concept of the ‘homeplace’ as a place in which alternative systems of value and dignity are conferred, disseminated and lived through daily life together. This is also referenced in Routledge’s (1997) account of the Pollok Free State against the M77 motorway development in Glasgow, which acted both as a vital centre for the local movement and a living space. This is intensified by the degree to which camps and sites seek to produce alternative, reimagined versions of the services and institutions of the wider society. The Tahrir Square camp of 2011 was ‘virtually a working city’ (Kamel 2012: 38), as protesters sought to mount an alternative vision of collective life, embodied in their approach to hospitals, libraries and even jails. This self-conscious experimentation with everyday life has long been characteristic of political squatting – admittedly a ‘very fuzzy category’ (Cattaneo and Martinez 2012: 2) – in which squatters have sought to expose and challenge the politics underpinning social relations, and to reject normative approaches to daily life in favour of living ‘artfully’ (ADILKNO 1994: 8). As such the organising of mundane tasks becomes the stage for living one’s commitments. Roseneil (2000) refers to the queering of domestic
labour – the reimagining of housework as ‘campwork’, playing on the word ‘camp’ – and the inverting of particular norms around hygiene and propriety, as essential to the queer feminism of Greenham. Yates (2012, 2015) has accounted for the self-consciously ‘micropolitical’ strategies of activists in radical social centres, who claim everyday practices are political ‘in themselves’, where a discussion over recycling, or commercial activity, quickly becomes a discussion of political means and ends. Interestingly, he finds that there is a tension between this, and a sense that the real value of such alternative arrangement is in communicating this outward, as ‘inspiration’ or ‘an example’.

As such, these can be sites that seek to foster and nurture alternative cultures. Yates’s account of Barcelona’s social centres presents them as subcultural. While he does not follow the typical cultural studies understanding of subcultures as counter-hegemonic rituals of resistance (see Cohen 1972; Hall and Jefferson 1993), Yates is critical of the otherwise depoliticised understanding of subcultures, arguing that in the case of social centres, an emphasis on ‘doing things differently’ is central to the political project. A similar note is struck in Martinez’s (2012, with Piazza and Prujit 2013) work on squatting subcultures. Despite such self-conscious reorganisations of living arrangements, many accounts point to the fact that such projects almost always have certain blind spots and limits, reproducing dominant and oppressive systems. Of Pollok Free State, Routledge states, for example

Free State residents were predominantly male and the few women who lived there complained that some of the problematic gender relations that existed in society were reinscribed within the Free State. They highlighted the ‘macho’ character of some of the ‘Free Staters’, the privileging of men’s voices at camp meetings and the fact that gender roles often followed a traditional pattern. (Routledge 1997: 368)

The occupied space of movement actors are thus caught in the tensions of elaborating alternative territories, but never in a way that is ‘liberated’ from the unequal power dynamics and exclusions that shape social arrangements ‘outside’.
2.4 Organising radical spaces

In foregrounding the spatial character of critique and tactics, the spatiality of these movements reveals a negotiation of both ideological and practical considerations. On a concrete level, the organisation of the interior space of occupied sites both reflects and reinforces certain principles of organisation. The geographical separation of the many camps of Greenham Common (Roseneil 2000) responded to the practical matter of covering all the gates of the base, but this came not only to mark a series of cultural, demographic and political differences between camps, but to reinforce a strategic orientation toward autonomy without central command. Frenzel (2014) says that this combination of antagonism – against the gates and the base – and decentralisation was a defining feature of Greenham, which influenced subsequent protest camps in which ‘spatial organisation enables protest camps to oscillate between more formal organisation and network character, seeking to combine advantages of both’ (Frenzel 2014: 903). Trocchi et al. (2005) similarly argue that the ‘barrio’ or ‘neighbourhood’ system of the HoriZone camp in Gleneagles reflected a commitment to diversity and autonomy, which in turn was then reflected in the decentralised, swarm-like road blockades against the G8 that emerged from the camp. In addition to this internal organisation, the ways in which the boundaries of these sites are marked similarly move us onto political questions. McCurdy (2010) notes how the HoriZone camp’s accessibility to all excluding journalists – who were provided with a gazebo clearly outside the camp’s borders – reflected and reproduced both a suspicion of external institutions, especially the media, ‘an adversary to be defended against’ (McCurdy 2010: 47) and a rejection of representation.

This relationship between spatiality and political forms is most enthusiastically expressed by those emphasising how the networked organisation of the alter-globalisation movement is associated with a ‘new way of doing politics’ more broadly (Juris 2008: 12). Routledge (2005: 25) quotes the slogan of the June 18th 1999 Global Day of Action, ‘our resistance will be as transnational as capital’, as illustrative of the emerging movement’s attunement to the distributed forms of contemporary power, and goes on to argue, using Taoist principles from Sun Tzu, that the movement’s organisational flexibility is a reflection of this. For Maeckelbergh (2009: 91) this led to an ethic privileging ‘non-linear connection over linear accumulation’, and an emergent tendency to pop up in different locations:
'Because the movement is not confined to fixed geographical or spatial boundaries, there is the possibility of perpetually opening up more spaces to accommodate different practices' (Maeckelbergh 2009: 106). Furthermore, others argue that this spatial distribution is associated with an openness to a ‘diversity of tactics’ and even the modes of short term action, such as the swarm-like decentralised counter-summit demonstrations (Juris 2008).

2.5 The effects of locality

Embedding its politics in concrete sites, movement spaces become entangled with the localities they have interrupted. Even the most global of movements ‘takes place […] in the historically sedimented contours of concrete places’ (Juris 2008: 63), and insofar as action needs locations, this brings a series of parochial factors to bear (Routledge 2005). This often involves challenging and exposing the systems of power that produce, and converge in, particular places, and the techniques through which this is done. Feigenbaum et al. (2012: 9) note ‘the prefigurative and perhaps antagonistic positioning of the camp toward the status quo’. It is further argued that the repurposing of ‘public’ spaces intervenes in the normal uses of that space in such a way that makes political claims tied to that locale: ‘Protest camps interrupt the way in which people move through ”public” spaces’ (Feigenbaum et al. 2013: 44) in an ‘attempt to create public spaces in order to render power visible and thus negotiable’ (Routledge 1997: 362).

These actions, and their participants, become enmeshed in local political and historical influence. While the Gleneagles HoriZone camp was a base of action against the G8 summit, its location so near the ongoing Faslane anti-nuclear protest camp, and the participation of people from Faslane, meant issues of nuclear weapons and militarism, and the place of war in the global power order, became increasingly important features of the discourse surrounding the G8 mobilisation (Trocchi et al. 2005). In the mobilisations against the Newbury Bypass, the geographical proximity to Aldermaston – the site of iconic anti-nuclear actions in the 1960s – and Greenham Common, also bore an influence, not only reinforcing this as a territory of collective action and rebellion, but in the case of Greenham, producing direct, concrete links with women who brought an education in politics and outdoor
living gained at Greenham to the Newbury camps (Barry 1999). In that movement, Barry (ibid) says that an awareness of the two Civil War era Battles of Newbury figured in activists’ conception of that site as a battleground, even referring to this as the Third Battle of Newbury. This entanglement with local matters comes up throughout my discussion of the movement ‘home’ in Chapter 4, and is also considered as an influence on the demands and claims emerging from Occupy London, in Chapter 6.

Particularly in the case of urban protest camps, where one has neighbours, relations with the locality and its residents can become an important feature. In the case of social centres, which tend to seek long-term sustainability in a local community, this is more marked. Yates (2012) discusses the importance of the ‘barrio’ or ‘neighbourhood’ to social centre activists in Barcelona, as the social centre seeks to open up connections to other local spaces. Interestingly, he notes how ‘barrio’ connections are a source of moral legitimacy for the social centre radicals, but also how the ‘barrio’ is conceived of as fundamentally distinct to the centre, providing a problem which must be negotiated again and again. Taking a case where relations with other locals was not the initial plan, Routledge documents how Pollok Free State sparked the interest of people in the nearby housing estates, leading to unexpected cooperation and friendships, in addition to problems due to ‘anti-social elements from the surrounding communities’ (Routledge 1997: 368). David Harvey (2012) has warned of the ‘militant particularism’ and limited parochial demands that can emerge from place-based movements.

2.6 Wider movements

As a located articulation of wider social movements and political forces, these sites are where the relationship with the wider movement plays out in particular ways, through both tension and complementarity. This often involves the relationship with other corners of the movement. In her work on Greenham Common, Feigenbaum (2013: 3) discusses how the camp was always connected to ‘the growing Greenham support network […] raising funds, mobilizing participants, hosting talks, setting up screenings and generally getting the word out’, and how maintaining these connections was important for the broad campaign and the survival of the
Greenham camp. In the case of HoriZone, the direct action tactics and anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist ideological positions of the camp and its organising Dissent! Network (McCurdy 2008, 2010) placed it in particular relations with other mobilisations against the G8: the Make Poverty History campaign; various NGOs; the Socialist Workers Party (Trocchi et al. 2005). Routledge (1997) and Barry (1999) discuss the way in which the radical campers’ approach led to both common ground and disputes with environmental NGOs supporting the anti-roads movement, especially Friends of the Earth.

These concrete sites are where wider politics materialise, such that a dispersed movement is produced through localised articulation. For example Juris (2008: 28) offers a personal account of how, despite his prior participation in isolated moments of activism against corporate power and so on, his sense of ‘belonging to a grassroots movement against globalisation’ came only with the embodied and located experience of the Seattle convergence. Trocchi et al. (2005) similarly argue for the importance of the HoriZone camp for bringing together disparate potential corners of mobilisation, saying it made possible a coordinated challenge to the G8 summit that turned a scattered and divided activist scene into a well-organised network of resistance. While this may at times be articulated as a ‘shared collective identity’ (Diani 1992), Maeckelbergh (2009: 7) insists that a movement might be considered as such, not on the basis of collective identity but because located action ‘tied them together through a series of overlapping unities’. Navigating this tension between the wider movement and its local articulation sometimes entails an ongoing desire to overcome the fixity of the site. In the case of Greenham Common, where the slogan ‘Carry Greenham Home’ named a sense of a Greenham beyond its boundaries (Feigenbaum et al. 2013), Roseneil (2000: 68) neatly outlines this dynamic: ‘There existed a passion to transcend the physical location, to make links across the globe, at the same time always resisting efforts to forcibly remove its presence from the Common’. The way in which this tension played out in Occupy London runs through Chapter 4.

Occupied movement spaces become the sites of the confluence of different people, politics and forces and the dynamism this produces is important to the literature. Routledge (2005) provides an image of the ‘convergence space’ that is in fact the abstract common ground of disaggregated networks, but in taking space, this takes on a concrete, embedded character. These are ‘places where people and ideas
converge’ (Feigenbaum et al. 2013: 17), producing ‘a space of facilitation, solidarity, communication, coordination and information sharing’ (Routledge 2005: 25). In Tahrir Square, Kamel (2012: 37) documents the breadth of groups and claims that came together, ‘a rich network of formal, rights-based civic organizations […] alongside many less formal groups that focused on specific issues, or that were workplace-based’. The result was a highly dynamic movement that multiplied its connections, maintained considerable internal diversity, while articulating a conditional common project against the Mubarak regime; in large part this was made possible by the common terrain of the square. For activists committed to this mode of diversity within common action, such as the Dissent! Network who mobilised against the Gleneagles G8, sites are opened with the explicit goal of fostering creative connectivity (Trocchi et al. 2005; McCurdy 2010). Of the anti-roads protests, Barry (1999) points to how this can bring both increased potency and potential problems, as the occupations against the A30 trunk road and Newbury Bypass brought together a mix of internationalist environmentalists, and nationalistic elements of the British National Party and Pagan groups, and included people claiming inspiration from Celtic religion as well as Foucault or the Situationists. In several of the cases under discussion here, the authors identify an either explicit or implicit anarchist orientation to this emphasis on non-hierarchical and diversity-seeking convergence. The way in which this brings both a dynamism and problems, including ideological differences, is a central theme of Chapter 5, as the idea of the 99 percent, and the understanding of inequality, are negotiated by the very different groups brought together in the occupation. The problem of ideological difference also recurs through Chapter 6, especially in the dispute over how to represent Occupy in the press, and the articulation of demands and statements.

2.7 Collective and individual identities

While even short term occupations, camps and movement spaces contain experiences of heightened collectivity – especially in the case of intense conflict with the police and so on – this tendency escalates in longer term sites, where there is a tendency to develop as a community. This is bound up in the very immediate experience of the concrete, material features of life in these places. Butler (1996)
offers an anthropological account of the material culture shared by those involved in the movements against the M11 road development, but perhaps the best example of this is the very long-running Greenham Common camp. As Roseneil states, 'While the imagined community of Greenham stretched across Britain and beyond, the material community of Greenham was composed of the women who made their daily lives together outside the base at Greenham Common' (Roseneil 2000: 71). This was also reinforced by the circulating stories around camp fires, where campers built up a discursive genealogy, connecting the Greenham women with the Suffragettes, Diggers and medieval witches. Acting collectively in places together, and producing common myths and discourses accentuates a sense of the 'we' at the centre of action. While sites may be taken and established by pre-existing collectivities with their own sense of community – as with the Dissent! groups at Gleneagles – this reciprocal contamination in the site itself can generate novel formations, in common between those gathered there. The political implications of a bounded movement community for a politics seeking to extend itself, and trouble its boundaries, is discussed in Chapter 4. I return to this question of the nature of collectivity in Chapter 6, arguing that this is in part constituted by moments of collective speech, and signalling the types of collectivity that are produced in this way. Internal differentiation and moments of hierarchy are common to all collective action, but in space-taking movements, this can be tied very concretely to place. Again turning to Roseneil’s account of Greenham Common, a particularly stark example, this manifested in the concentration of influence and prestige in those whose connections to the camp were deeper, longer-running, or even geographically privileged. Roseneil (2000) argues that emerging hierarchies were often based on length of involvement, and that this mapped onto the varying prestige of the different camps, based at each gate, where Yellow Gate was considered the most dominant camp, in part as this was the base of many ‘originals’, or those who had come to Greenham early on. Similarly, in a movement produced by those living at the camps as well as a wider network of women who often came to the site without living there, a certain relative prestige was available to those staying on site, as the hardships of camp life came with certain ‘rights and privileges’.

Alongside the intensification of collectivity, space-taking movements are also the sites of personal transformations, and stories of this run through the literature.
Roseneil’s Greenham was a ‘a place of change’ where many different intense personal journeys took place. This is often associated with the intoxication that accompanies this combination of an alternative community and a newfound sense of political empowerment and agency. Kamel quotes a young Egyptian revolutionary reflecting on his eighteen days in Tahrir Square:

Despite police violence, [and] the blood, not knowing what may happen next, these eighteen days were the best days of my life... young and old, poor and rich, the veiled woman and the young girl in tight jeans, Muslim and Christian, we were all equals, brothers and sisters, we ate, laughed, fought and cried together, we protected each other with our lives without having ever met before... I never felt so alive [...] It was utopia. (Kamel 2012: 38)

In a different context, oriented more to the personal, ADILKNO’s account of the Dutch squatting movement also emphasises the sense of personal transformation that accompanies a new sense of the possible: squatters discovered that ‘you don’t have to go against your mapped-out life path; another way of life turns out to exist parallel to it’ (ADILKNO 1994: 230). Another important dimension of this is the political education, and even radicalisation, that comes with life in such politicised terrains, whether this is learning about the history of feminist struggle at Greenham (Roseneil 2000), or coming into contact with direct action anarchists in the alterglobalisation movement (Graeber 2009; Juris 2009). In some cases this could be accompanied by the articulation of a named individual identity, as with the denomination of ‘Greenham woman’.

2.8 Political creativity

Much of the literature points to how the experimental character of these movement spaces has meant that they act as ‘laboratories of insurrectionary imagination’ (Feigenbaum et al. 2013: 116). With the possibility of extended contact between activists, the result is a dynamic and creative environment, and new political possibilities can emerge. Frenzel (2014) has stated that the protest camp form is ‘best conceived as a series of experiments with alternative, anarchist organisation, where different innovative elements of organisation are invented, modified and
adapted to locally specific needs’ (Frenzel 2014: 901), and Maeckelbergh’s (2009) account of the primacy of consensus decision making and horizontal organising in the alter-globalisation movement makes clear that these are elaborated as a cultural and political orientation in the various convergence spaces of that movement. Further, the collective capacities of people gathered together means that movement sites often act also as places for alternative knowledge production. Feigenbaum (2012) is particularly interested in the alternative media of Greenham, but this is a common feature, visible also for example in HoriZone’s exclusion of mainstream journalists and support for ‘internal’ media action. The articulation and dissemination of alternative values and ideas affects both movement participants and potentially wider discourse (though this is not straightforward).

Relatively stable – if only short-term – movement spaces act as a vital base for organisation and planning protest actions and direct actions, though the nature of the space, and the collective it houses, can constrain those actions as well as render them possible. I have noted how the HoriZone was an essential space for planning the blockades against the 2005 G8 summit, and also how the organisation of the camp reinforced a decentralised, swarm-like way of doing this (McCurdy 2010; Trocchi et al. 2005). Roseneil’s (2000) account of Greenham Common reveals it to have been the base for a prolonged campaign of road-blocks, trespassing, and small acts of sabotage, the confidence for which depended on the long term-nature of the camp and the bonds between the women. Whether it is social centre activists mobilising to support local campaigns (Yates 2012), or Climate Camp, organising direct action training for various forms of action against the fossil fuel industry (Frenzel 2014), this is a recurring feature. In addition, such ‘outings’ extend the territory of the otherwise more bounded movement, in interesting ways, such that we must attend to this ongoing relocation of the movement’s centre(s) (see Osterweil 2003).

Protest camps and occupied movement sites often function not only as the base from which to organise protest actions, but as protest actions in themselves, intervening in either a material process or in the discourse surrounding particular places and issues. In his work on anti-roads camps and protests, Barry mobilises the dual meaning of the word ‘demonstration’ to argue that protesters demonstrate – that is, they render visible – ‘a truth which it has been otherwise impossible to demonstrate in public by other means’ (Barry 1999: 77): ‘the likelihood that
environmental destruction would occur’ (ibid: 81). In Chapter 5, I address the way in which the London occupation sought to demonstrate in a different way, staging a representation of the people in the occupied square (and the problems and limits of this).

The symbolic nature of protest camps in particular is frequently seen as an important matter. Couldry (1999) has argued that camps move the normative frame of debate from the interior spaces of policy makers to the politicising environment of the camp, which Creswell (1996) sees as a move from the ‘legitimate’ inside to a heretical outside, always symbolic. Similarly, the often mediagenic stunts and actions emerging from these sights are laden with struggles over meaning-making.

Of the road blocks mounted by Greenham women, Roseneil argues that,

In a cultural context which constructs women’s bodies as more fragile than men’s and which regards men as women’s natural protectors, for women en masse to lie down in roads... and then to be confronted by ranks of policemen in riot gear, produced potent images of the gendered contest at stake. (Roseneil 2000: 202)

Routledge (1997) has referred to these communicative media-conscious forms of action as the ‘imagineering of resistance’ (an example he draws on is the ‘Carhenge’ anti-car sculpture at Pollok Free State), part of a ‘postmodern politics’, in which, following Melucci (1989), collective action is especially oriented toward challenging cultural codes, in such a way that movements ‘are themselves messages, operating as signs, representing a symbolic challenge to dominant codes’ (1997: 362).

Feigenbaum et al. (2013: 116) have noted this tendency across the protest camp form, stating that these are often ‘infused with art’, with areas designated for this symbolic, communicative function. Juris (2008) even recognises the importance of this aesthetic dimension, for the inspiration to further mobilisation elsewhere, as these images, spread through the media, create the possibility of imitative action elsewhere. I address this question of the inherently political nature of space-taking throughout Chapter 4. I also develop this focus on the heightened media-awareness of movements to consider the ways in which the presence of heightened media interest created internal problems and conflicts in Occupy London (Chapter 6).
2.9 Camp or campaign?

In fulfilling multiple functions, movement spaces can be the site of conflict between these. Many of the studies under discussion here emphasise this fact. Framing this in what is probably an excessively dualistic manner, McCurdy (2010) notes the tension between being an ‘activist space’ and a ‘media space’, while Schelmbach (2011) and Frenzel (2014) count four functions of the Climate Camps: enabling action; sustainable, democratic living; movement-buidling; education. These can clearly lead to conflicting priorities, which may be managed for a while, but emerge in moments where decisions must be made, or other forms of dispute emerge. Noting perhaps the most marked tension, between the camp as a project of everyday life and as a base for action, Roseneil quotes one of her respondents saying “I thought we were creating a model of how people could live differently in society and that was ... much more important than the actions’ (2000: 188). Picking up McCurdy’s distinction between activist and media elements, Feigenbaum et al. say that this leads to tensions between its “front” or “media stage”, and “backstage” components’ (2013: 75), which plays out in terms of ideological disputes, geographical partition, and challenges to how to represent the camp. North (1998) even notes how in the case of the anti-roads movement, these tensions led to related challenges to how we theorise and talk about such movements. He argues that the more protest- and campaigning-oriented side of the movement is often best approached using Resource Mobilisation Theories (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977) – a model of social movement theory that emphasises how movement success and failure is best understood in terms of the ways in which rational actors access and use particular resources – and that the more counter-cultural elements, challenging ‘car culture’ and interested in the prefigurative modes of collective living, could be best approached with New Social Movements theories, that emphasise this symbolic, cultural feature of contemporary movements.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated a field of study which informs the conception and execution of the thesis. The focus has been literature on space-taking social movements, and especially ethnographies of these. This has provided a series of reference points from which the thesis proceeds, clarifying a particular range of
dynamics which the literature demonstrates to be common across movements for whom occupations, protest camping, squatting and so on are a primary feature, tactic and terrain. These dynamics and problems have often manifested in profoundly different ways, but they reveal the way in which the taking of space brings a movement into a series of other relations.

In producing new territories for, among other things, everyday life, movement spaces often enact a politicisation of the routines of the everyday. At the same time, the very organisation of the space – materially, geometrically – becomes a stage for particular ideological orientations that combine these expressive and liveable elements. My discussion of occupation in Chapter 4 develops from this sense of the space as expressive and liveable. I address the home, that was produced by occupation, and emphasise the quality of liveability to any radical space. This is advanced with reference to the Deleuze-Guattarian (1987) ‘refrain’. Furthermore, rather than focusing on the staging of self-consciously ‘alternative’ political ideologies, I present the more equivocal sides to this. Chapter 4 also considers the ways in which Occupy was shaped by local relations (another concern of the current chapter), as revealed through its movement between different movement spaces, each with their own embedded relations.

The way in which the organisation of space connects to overt political projects is also important in Chapter 5, which addresses how the camp became a space for staging the convergence of ‘the 99 percent’.

I have also addressed the way concrete sites handle the relationship with wider movements. This is a concern that runs through this thesis as I mark Occupy’s connections to the wider occupation movements of 2011 onward, (in my accounts of occupation, the ‘99 percent’ discourse, the apparent rejection of demands) as well as a longer trajectory back through other recent waves of protest, in particular the alter-globalisation movement. This includes two key moments of comparison, first regarding the kinds of self-understandings of these movements, revealed in my discussion of the 99 percent, and then in a detailed discussion of Occupy’s application of the consensus decision making methods which have been best analysed in relation to the alter-globalsation movement. I show how these connections, and indeed bifurcation, are enacted by the particular located practices that give shape to the movement.
The tension that space-taking movements can create between maintaining territory and extending the notional project of the movement – which I have tentatively called a conflict between camp and campaign, above – is a problem that similarly runs through the thesis. It emerges explicitly in Chapter 4, in the tension which defines that chapter, between the investment in the home of the occupation, and the desire to extend Occupy into new spaces. This is also an important strand in Chapter 5 as the camp became a space for the concentration of claims to represent the wider ‘99 percent’ outside. That this emerged in a movement that, at first at least, explicitly rejected formed of representation, further marks the way in which holding spaces over time can bring movements into certain arrangements that are unforeseen, and alter the trajectory of the movement.

The appreciation of these dynamics often comes from a deep ethnographic engagement with the field, which also informs the kinds of problems that this thesis is able to follow and tease out in its engagement with Occupy London.
Chapter 3 - Being There: occupation and ethnography

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the practicalities of developing the aims, methods and approaches that underpin the thesis. These are outlined progressively, addressing the details of how this project unfolded and was undertaken, as well as considering the philosophical, methodological and political issues I faced and how these were tackled.

I begin by briefly restating the research aims and questions that guided the research and shape the thesis that follows. I then briefly outline a philosophical orientation taken, which has shaped each stage of the project, and my understanding of the kind of knowledge produced. I then outline, in some detail, my use of ethnography, addressing some broad characteristics and issues for this approach to research – which is far more than a mere data-gathering method – and then bear down on what it means to produce a critical and politically committed ethnography. This entails a considered reflection on my own position and place within the research. I then move on to clarifying the ‘field’ of this research, beginning with an account of the problems I found with clearly delineating such a field in the shifting terrain of a social movement on the downswing. I then offer a detailed account of the data gathering methods I employed, highlighting any problems and gaps, before moving onto a discussion of my approach to analysis. I conclude with a note on some specific ethical issues which were not addressed in the previous sections.

3.2 Aims and questions restated

A full discussion of the aims and research questions that guide this thesis has already been provided at the very start of Chapter 1. It is useful though to briefly restate the questions themselves as they are an important feature of the way in which this research was undertaken. These were the distillation of concrete problems I found through my participation, as clarified through the research
process. The broader aim of the research, as I have stated, is a depth of critical ethnographic engagement which exceeds the strict parameters of these questions, but they provide an ordering structure for my research and the thesis. These questions are as follows:

1. The problem of occupation: How did Occupy London’s practice of occupation navigate two conflicting modes of territory: the embedding of the movement in the occupation camp form and location; and the desire to extend the occupation and overcome the fixity of the site?

2. The problem of ‘the 99 percent’: How did Occupiers’ negotiate the different interpretations and understandings of the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’? How did this stage a tension between, on the one hand, a critique of inequality – with no necessary reference to identities or representation – and, on the other a claim to representing ‘the people’?

3. The problem of collective speech: How were moments of collective speech constituted in a movement that explicitly problematised modes of representation? What types of collectivity were produced through such moments?

I also note that these entailed a temporal register, as I sought to follow these features through the long process of Occupy London’s breakdown and disappearance.

3.3 Research philosophy

Any piece of social science research is informed by particular epistemological and ontological understandings, which the researcher must address (Berger and Luckmann 1986; Mason 2007). The epistemological foundation of this thesis is inseparable from the practice and theory of ethnography, which I discuss in detail below. In addition to this, my understanding of the social world, and its relationship to theory and theorisation is informed by the following three ideas, derived from Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault.
First is the orientation, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), away from the apparent self-identical and stable *being* of things, and toward the flows, bifurcations and de/re-territorialisations of their *becomings*. This attends to the processes of change, flight and movement within particular formations, and the ways in which the properties of the whole are redistributed through such processes. Such an orientation is not only more able to describe the complex unfurling of the many elements of Occupy London, but it also implies an ongoing critical reflection on the ways in which the movement did or did not open up new possibilities of extending its most progressive elements. My account of Occupy London reveals a movement in motion, shaped by the tensions and shifting intensities of particular tendencies. This in turn complements an ethnographic method, which contends that ‘cultures do not hold still for their portraits’ (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus 1986: 386) and seeks to follow particular features and debates as they surface across a complex field (Marcus 2008).

Second is a focus on problems, which bears the influence of Foucault’s (1991 [1984]) concept of problematisation. Foucault argues that problematisation is that which is particular to thought – not representative *ideas* or moral *attitudes*, but *thinking* itself – stating that this ‘allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals’ (1991: 388). Foucault insists on the importance of problematisation for apprehending political matters, where productive thought means reflecting on the world in terms of the problems it poses, and indeed on the way in which social formations themselves reflect possible solutions. As Foucault states ‘To one single set of difficulties [or problems], several responses can be made’ (1991: 389); the role of critical thought is, in part, to clarify these problems.

Third is the Deleuze-Guattarian understanding of the relationship between concepts and the material world. In *What is Philosophy?* (1994) they outline their understanding of the concept:

> The concept is not given, it is created; it is to be created. It is not formed but posits itself in itself – it is self-positing. Creation and self-positing mutually imply each other because what is truly created, from the living being to the work of art, thereby enjoys a self-positing of itself, or an
autopoetic characteristic by which it is recognized. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 11)

Concepts are only created as a function of problems which are thought to be badly understood. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 16)

Concepts and theories do not represent the world, but operate on a plane of their own. They are creations that can advance our understanding insofar as they apprehend and respond to a problem, framing it in a way that is useful. This is a practical pragmatics, concerned with what concepts do, and allow us to do. This in turn informs my use of theory throughout. Rather than having an overarching, consistent theoretical framework, I apply this pragmatic approach, using particular theories as they help me to illuminate and interrogate problems, and consider them in ways that are interesting or useful. I take seriously the words of Deleuze and Foucault that theories and concepts are a tool-box for tackling practical matters (Deleuze in Foucault and Deleuze 1980; Foucault 1991).

Forms of political action are also theorised responses to the concrete problems – of organisation, of language, of collectivity, and so on – encountered by those seeking to extend a political challenge or project. I have endeavoured to understand the problems and solutions that have undergirded Occupy, and developed an account that can move our engagement with these problems forward.

3.4 Ethnography: method, philosophy, politics

The method and philosophy of ethnography was well suited to my desire to provide a rich and theoretically informed ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of Occupy London, as a means of considering wider political questions. It was also an approach which could extend somewhat naturally from the fact of my own ongoing participation in the movement. Rather than suggesting some dramatic – and false – rupture from participant to researcher, this allowed me to intensify the critical and analytical mode of my participation. The emphasis on allowing questions to develop in the terrain, and the complementary use of extended participation alongside minute, systematic observation, gave me the framework for deepening my critique, in an iterative process of learning episodes (Whitehead 2005), that could always move
between what was done and what was said. Concerned with the collective project of Occupy – the spaces and meanings produced by and in between the assembling participants – ethnography was my means to account not for the inner workings of subjectivity, for which it is less suited (Nagel 1979), but for an intersubjective social reality (Schutz 1953), as well as the concrete materialities and affects of the movement.

Its particular strengths and sensitivities made ethnography especially apt for a project seeking to follow the emergent process of a movement as it moved through different phases and spaces, along the complex and uneven course of breaking down and disbanding. Occupiers famously insisted ‘This is not a protest; this is a process’, and ethnography emphasised an ethic of co-presence that could draw out this process, while sticking close to a notionally ‘prefigurative’ project whose politics were embedded in the rhythms of daily life. In this way ethnography’s insistence on ‘being there’ (Geertz 1988; Hammersley 1992) seemed particularly compatible with a project of occupation, of assembling bodies in space. Critically engaging with my own body as it moved through Occupy’s diverse territories was a vital means of watching, feeling, and asking questions of, the constitution of this movement. Geertz (1988: 236) expresses this ethic of presence when he says that good ethnographers ‘convince us that what they say is the result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having one way or another, truly “been there”’. While mine is not so clearly an account of a previously external Other, the strength of my thesis similarly rests on conveying a deep familiarity.

I am conscious throughout that ethnographic accounts are interpretive and constructivist (Whitehead 2005). Anthropologists have long concerned themselves with this matter. One position is exemplified in the claim that ethnographers are ‘always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures’ (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 2). This is ethnography as poetic fiction. While I recognise that my position of observation necessarily constructs the object of observation to some degree (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009) I insist on something closer to Martyn Hammersley’s ‘subtle realism’, which recognises the partial and constructed nature of any account, but does not give up on producing anything other than fiction: ‘the redefinition of ethnography as a form of imaginative literature amounts to an abandonment of the task of inquiry’ (Hammersley 2006: 10). Additionally, the
construction of reality does not begin with research, but is already being undertaken by the people being researched (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). An extended ethnographic engagement with those people’s practices and conversations can provide a rich account of that constructed context alongside a developing analytical sensibility where the ethnographer can see things they cannot (Hammersley 2006).

This is a politically committed ethnography which emerges from my own participation, and seeks to extend a process of critical problematisation of the movement that began in that movement. Clifford and Marcus (1986) argue that the construction of ‘cultural descriptions’ are always political and ethical: inclusion, exclusion, emphasis, and choice of language always have ideological underpinnings and political implications, and this is certainly the case in explicitly political field-sites. There is a solid history of engaged ethnographies from social movement participants (Maecckelbergh 2009; Graeber 2009; Roseneil 2000; Juris 2008; Burdick, 1995; Auyero 2001). This ethnographic tradition has provided an incredibly rich resource in understanding the practicalities of conducting excellent political ethnography, as well as the specific problems that emerge from the researcher’s own activism.

A popular mode of such work is an approach that has been referred to as ‘militant ethnography’ (Juris 2007; Muller 2012), from which I take certain cues, while remaining somewhat critical of the self-imagination of the researcher as a militant. Militant ethnographers, frequently engaged, like me, in researching mobilisations of which they are already part, ask ‘What is the relationship between ethnography and political action? How can we make our work relevant to those with whom we study?’ (Juris 2007: 164). The proposed answer is to produce work that can ‘facilitate ongoing activist (self-) reflection regarding movement goals, tactics, strategies and organizational forms’ (Juris 2007: 165), to be achieved in large part through the researcher’s ‘active and committed participation in the political movement of their subjects’ (Ross 2013: 8). Militant ethnographers distinguish themselves from the ‘circumstantial activist’ (Marcus 2008), insisting that the researcher be genuinely ‘committed’ to a common enterprise.

In terms of the fieldwork process, this involves an acceptance of the necessary compromises of partisanship: ‘Classic objectivist paradigms fail to grasp the concrete logic of activist practice, leading to accounts and models that are not only
inadequate but are of little use to activists themselves’ (Juris 2007:164-5). If ethnography is always concerned with ‘being there’, militant ethnography demands that one really be there, not only present, but implicated. This entails picking sides (Muller 2012) and using one’s own body as vital research tool, sharing the ‘alternating sensations of tension, anxiety, fear, terror, collective solidarity, celebration, and joy’ (Juris 2007: 166) that comprise activist life. In keeping with its wider ethic, it is argued that this be the result of genuine commitment rather than an instrumentally useful way to get at data, though its utility for the latter is recognised. Finally, militant ethnography reiterates Gouldner’s (2004) reminder that the researched are themselves students of human relations, developing theories and understandings; activists do their own theorising, which must be taken seriously.

I have been inspired by much of this emphasis on embodied practice and political commitment, and it provided me with an outlook that valued the unavoidable fact of my own already-existing participation in Occupy London. My reluctance to call mine a work of militant ethnography is in part the result of a critique of militancy, which sees the researcher’s investment in such an identity as itself problematic for a radical politics. In his critique of the identity of the militant, Thoburn (2010) highlights the historical association of militancy with an ethic of sacrificial martyrdom; as Sergei Nechaev (1869), the archetypal anarchist militant, puts it in his Catechism of the Revolutionist ‘the revolutionary is a doomed man’. Thoburn argues that the militant – reconstructing him/herself in orientation to ‘the cause’ and ultimately the group – necessarily drifts towards dogmatism and an intensified identification with the collective, which in turn ‘functions as a cut with the social’ (Thoburn 2010: 128), the proper field of political intervention and change. This is echoed in the concern of Andrew X regarding the ‘activist’ orientation of the emerging alter-globalisation movement at the time of the J18 Carnival Against Capital in 1999. In his ‘Give Up Activism’ (2000), he similarly problematises the militant (termed ‘activist’), whose role as heroic specialist in social change reinforces the alienation and division of labour which underpin class society under capitalism. Indeed, this problematisation was itself an important feature of the Occupy movement. The specialist role of the activist/militant was explicitly rejected early on, in keeping with a desire to extend the project of occupation as wide as the imagined constituency of ‘the 99 percent’ with which Occupy was to be coextensive. This was reflected in people’s self-presentation as ‘ordinary’ (discussed in Chapter 5) and in
comments at interview: ‘The very notion of being an activist is alienating’ (Amit); ‘At Occupy I very rarely met anyone who was an activist or identified as an activist, and that’s what was so exciting’ (Bernie). A wariness of an identity as militant researcher was therefore important in remaining attuned to the particularities of Occupy’s moment.

Mine is a critical ethnography insofar as I apply critical theories in order to ask not just what is, but what could be. Analysis is ultimately oriented to clarifying and explaining the pitfalls and possibilities (lost and taken) of the Occupy project, to contribute to the ongoing organisation of radical politics today. It is critical in seeking to expose the ideological underpinnings of particular tendencies (Madison 2004) and being prepared to make political evaluations of the movement’s practices, tactics, language and so on. This is again an orientation to problems. If an intellectual distance ‘entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically’ (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 39) my intention is pragmatic, endeavouring to be the basis for informed problem solving going forward. Brown’s plea for greater sympathy for the rocky road of contentious politics – ‘Yes, most of the time we are failing, but it’s not because we are not trying’ (Brown 2013: 31) – is my cue to sympathetically critique this attempt.

3.5 My position

The methodological and political importance of reflexivity for critical sociology is widely recognised. Reflexive sociology departs from an acceptance that ‘there is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 207), and advances a radical demand of ‘seeing ourselves as we see others’ (Gouldner 2004: 383), that is that our outlooks are themselves located and positioned, just like those we research. Furthermore, we can be repositioned by both life events and the research process (Rosaldo 1989), which we must attend to. Paula Saukko’s Foucault-inspired call for reflexivity insists that the researcher’s selections and framings are ‘always underpinned by historically sedimented discourse’ (Saukko 2003: 85), calling for a ‘critical ontology of the self’ that does not mean liberation from discourse, but a heightened awareness of it. Skeggs’ call for
interrogating ‘one’s location, position and cultural resources’ (2002: 357) emphasises that this is not an existential obsession with the self of the researcher, but an attention to the researcher’s position in relation to the researched and wider society.

Fundamental to my position as a researcher was my insider status in Occupy London, and an awareness of the internal lines of differentiation within the movement, within which I was positioned by my actions and statements both before the course of my research and once it had begun. From the start, I was part of the group I was researching. This was therefore not the classical ethnographic encounter with the Other, in the mode of Malinowski’s expeditionary anthropology (1922), where ethnographers sought ‘to grasp the native’s point of view… to realize his vision of the world’ (1922: 25). Rather, my own prior knowledge of the field meant both that I was already ‘native’ and that I was very aware of the profound differences, conflicts and lines of tension that cut through it; there was no singular ‘vision of the world’ in common, and I set out to interrogate this difference to consider the possibilities and limitations these represented for an autonomous, radical politics. James Clifford is surely right that ‘indigenous ethnography’ is ‘empowered and restricted in unique ways’ (1986: 386), and this research demanded a high degree of reflexivity to be conscious of what was made more and less possible by my position.

One immediate methodological problem was what it meant for me to ‘enter the field’, and indeed to leave it. There is a wider discussion to be had about whether we are ever really out of the field in so connected a world where anthropological locations cut across and overlap one another, but this is clearly intensified when we research a social field of which we are already explicitly a part. For Maeckelbergh’s (2009: 27) research of her own social movement spaces, ‘turning this interconnectedness I already had into a “field” was enacted by a shift in perspective’, and I have followed this. It began slowly at first. Certainly, as soon as I was drafting PhD proposals in February 2012 (five months into my participation) I was increasingly oriented toward the problems and issues that now drive this thesis. My notes became richer and more analytical, which only intensified when my studies began properly. This shift in perspective was, then, somewhat gradual. My participation, like that of my fellow participants, was already analytical.
One effect of ‘native’ ethnography is that participants assume certain knowledge (Narayan 1993). In my case this was definitely true, which cut both ways. On the one hand, I was less able to play the role of the humble learner, new to the field in question, whose naivety (real or feigned) is used to extract didactic explanations. While this neophyte act can rarely last very long, it can be a useful beginning. Instead, some people I spoke to and interviewed were inclined to offer a shorthand, which I, as an insider, was expected to understand. The laughter followed by a statement like ‘Someone suggested having the meeting in the tea tent,’ would be assumed to be clear enough, as one was to know that the camp’s tea tent had become the congregation point for a group of mostly men who drank all day, and developed a very antagonistic relationship with the organising spaces of the camp, making a meeting there almost impossible at a certain stage. ‘Tea tent’ was synonymous with this for those in the know, but for a less familiar researcher, the way in which this statement expressed particular lines of division might not be clear. In such moments, I tried to be aware and push for clarity: ‘Why is that so funny?’.

On the odd occasion, participants would begin an answer by saying something like ‘You were there…’, further signalling my need to push past what they thought I should know. Sometimes, I genuinely wasn’t sure exactly what they referred to, or the interpretation I was supposed to take. Always conscious of this I tried to show my uncertainty and confusion, as a foil for better explanation. Overall though, I second Sasha Roseneil’s (2000) assertion that the net effect of insider status is increased access – to people and information – and an ability to get more out of the limited time of an interview. While shorthand can be problematic, the ability to mention dates, events, or names without the need for explanation meant that, on a very simple level, much more data could come out of interview. Perhaps more importantly, the people I spoke to rarely bothered giving the kinds of statements they would give to journalists or researchers as a means to promote Occupy. My insider status meant I could largely by-pass this desire to talk up positive elements, and pontificate on political matters, making it far easier to get to the problems and contradictions of the movement.

The kind of access I could get was partially affected by how I was perceived, and in particular how participants located me within the internal relations of Occupy London. Both prior to my research and during my fieldwork, my statements, actions and personal associations positioned me in the ways that positioned all Occupiers:
whether I had camped at the occupation, and for how long; what Working Groups I joined, and my roles in these; whether I advocated more radical or more reformist position; what issues I was interested in; what tactics I was open to and had been seen to undertake; whether I was present for key events. That I had been based at the second camp at Finsbury Square undoubtedly made it easier for me to access Finsbury people (who were often eager for that camp’s story to make it into the account), and by not being there later on, when that camp was explicitly disavowed by prominent Occupiers, I avoided the possible stigma of that period. But this definitely made me an outsider to St. Paul’s campers. That I had not been present for the first day of October 15th 2011 meant I could not make a claim to having been there ‘from the beginning’ (a fairly common statement of pedigree), but my organising role in subsequent actions demonstrated commitment. That these actions were conducted with people who others would have perceived as of a certain type – politically radical or anti-capitalist, direct action oriented, politically articulate, aged around 25 to 35 – further located me as having a particular political and tactical orientation, or even friends that interviewees might be less keen to criticise (though in reality this rarely seemed the case). Broadly this was to the good, as proper integrated participation (and good ethnography) would not be helped by an indeterminate tactic of fence-sitting (Maeckelbergh 2009; Roseneil 2000). These did not forbid me from other spaces – I was very active in the reformist Economics Working Group, hung out with young squatters, and sought out interviews with people across Occupy – but I was aware of these ways in which Occupiers read one another.

Trust was important. The culture of Occupy London tended toward open meetings and organising spaces, even in the case of some arrestable direct action. People therefore behaved in a way that shows high levels of trust, in part in keeping with a desire for inclusive politics, not closed meetings of vetted militants. At the same time, a degree of suspicion was often present, as in other social movement spaces, in keeping with an awareness of the possibility of infiltration by police or private spies (in no way an unreasonable concern). I never felt under suspicion in this way. At one meeting, toward the end of my fieldwork, one person made two jokes about me being a police officer, which felt as though they weren’t entirely joking, but by this point my relationships were strong enough, and I had been open enough about my life, that this wasn’t a concern. There was one moment that worried me. During
the Occupy vs The Arms Fair demonstration, I was in an affinity group of eight. We were all walking toward a road block, blocking deliveries from the arms fair, when I got a phone call. Answering the call, I lost my group, and five minutes later all seven of them were arrested for obstructing the highway. I worried this might look suspicious. In the event, nobody mentioned it, and they seemed satisfied with my explanation, and I supported them in the court case.

Connected to this was my role as researcher. My role in Occupy grew during my research, and therefore brought me into contact with new people at a time when I was doing research, which I revealed. As such, a good number of participants may even have thought of me principally as a researcher, though my actions revealed a high level of participation. On the odd occasion people commented on it. After a long day of activity for the Occupy vs the BBC action, which I had also helped organise, I was left at a pub table with two participants, Matt and Anna, while others were at the bar. Matt asked ‘Jamie, what are you?... Are you a social scientist?’ They both seemed keen for me to define this. When I was speaking to Rosa ten minutes later, Matt interrupted: ‘Jamie’s on the meta level’. I was certainly aware that my position was somewhat mediated by what informants thought my research can do for them, and a few people in interview mentioned how good it was that my research would clarify the topics we were discussing. The real effect of this cannot be certain, but I feel that this was not a major consideration due to enough interactions outside of explicit research moments.

All this was mediated by other forms of positionality. I am white, male, heterosexual, cisgender, university educated, a British citizen, with no serious disabilities. All of this places me in particular relational positions in the wider society (Loftsdottir, 2002; Abu-Lughod 1986), as well as the internal culture of Occupy London. These lines of differentiation distribute power unevenly, and on every register stated, I am in a position of relative privilege. There was ultimately no mitigating these things, but I was always aware of them, largely through the explicit foregrounding of such issues in social movement practice. In this sense being a good activist made me a better researcher. I tried wherever possible to reach out of those corners of Occupy London populated by people like me.
3.6 A shifting role

Given the length of my fieldwork, it is clear that my own participation, and my role in the Occupy London milieu, changed over time. This presents a series of methodological problems of which I was conscious, and which I account for now.

Over the course of my research I went from arriving in the Occupy camp alone, with no strong connection to the networks producing the movement, to a regular organising role, planning actions and facilitating major meetings. This was an uneven and staggered process, through which I variously drifted in and out of different organising centres. Early on, while staying in the occupation, my full-time employment kept me away from much of the organising life of the camp. At the time, I felt that my early participation in the kitchen working group, info desk, and various discussion groups, was based on an assessment of where my time-limited energies could best be used, but it later became clear to me that this also reflected a lack of clarity regarding the organisational centres of Occupy London. The personal relationships I began to develop in this period, and my connection to the camp, proved important in a deepening of my role after eviction. I attended open meetings and answered the call-out to join organising working groups for the wave of post-eviction protests, thus cementing experience and personal relationships. My involvement in key projects over the summer of 2012, and my attendance at the Agora99 activist convergence in Spain, strengthened my standing in the more direct-action spaces of Occupy, though my relocation to Manchester for my studies weakened some of those connections. During the more intensive periods of my fieldwork, now far more aware of the workings of Occupy London and unhindered by full-time work, I was able to become involved in Occupy’s most active centres, and participate more. In particular, my skills as a facilitator were often sought for contentious and potentially unwieldy meetings. Importantly, I felt that my voice was listened to more and more.

One methodological concern regarding my deepening participation is the possibility of distorting my own perspective of the phenomenon around me; after all my role was broadly intensifying over a period when Occupy London was, in an uneven but general way, on the decline. This also meant that most of my high-level participation centred on those groups and spaces that, to some degree, lasted. In certain moments I undoubtedly had a distorted perspective on Occupy’s general
trajectory or the significance of actions I was involved in. The length of my research mitigated against these temporary distortions, though they provided a vital understanding of the sentiments and impressions that handle internal movement dynamics.

More significantly, the deepening of my involvement coincided with the ongoing process of my research: my wide reading of social movements literature; the interviews and obsessive note-taking after meetings and encounters; strengthening the analytical and theoretical reflections that now shape the thesis. It would be naïve to suggest that this did not colour my participation more and more over time. In certain moments I explicitly fed back things I had gathered from interviews, for example, and was on the very odd occasion approached with questions that positioned me as a researcher, though these tended to elicit information about other social movements (rather than Occupy) to discuss persisting dilemmas of activist practice. In the more overtly strategic conversations I was aware that I had developed a strong holistic overview of Occupy and a clear vocabulary for articulating my thoughts. This informed my contribution to debates and decisions whose effects appear in the events covered throughout the thesis.

This raises the question of the ‘observer effects’ (LeCompte and Preissle Goetz 1982) that often haunt ethnography’s claims, such that ethnographers must go to pains to justify how their interventions do not excessively ‘contaminate’ the practices of their field site (Agar 1980). This concern is, in turn countered by the common ethnographic claim that, with time, informants get used to researchers and act ‘normally’ (Geertz 1973), and the more general insistence that the search for ‘authentic’ sites free from performance and certain observer effects is futile (Monahan and Fisher 2011).

Further to these, my specific case entails two major factors that assuage the concern surrounding such effects, and in particular the effect of my research-informed interventions in debates and collective decisions. First, I maintain that my level of study did not set me apart dramatically from my peers, given the fact that social movement actors are also themselves engaged in processes of (less formalised) study, research and theorisation. Participants in this research had often read popular and academic analyses of social movement practice, and were also engaged in developing frameworks for interpreting and directing the Occupy project, which informed their own interventions. The suggestion that my level of
research and study meant that my contributions and interventions were qualitatively different is not borne out by my understanding of the often highly educated and informed participants. A second factor was the fact that Occupy London was often characterised by a particular disregard for expertise. This was often articulated in terms of a rejection of ‘activist’ identities, or even the sense that illegitimate economic and political experts had been responsible for tanking the economy and hijacking political life. When experienced academics and activists came to speak at the Occupy camp, their planned lectures were often disrupted by interruptions from the crowd, which were allowed to redirect discussion in a spirit that no particular voice should be privileged (often to the considerable frustration of those coming to speak). While this became less prominent in the latter part of my fieldwork, as the reduced band of Occupiers sought to understand their place in a longer trajectory of unfolding movement, I never felt that my privileged voice determined major decisions, mixed as it was amongst the other critical, probing (and often more stubborn) voices of the collective.

3.7 Delineating ‘the field’

Occupy has ebbed and flowed, taken on a wide range of political and social issues, emerged through local and global struggles, and popped up in beautiful, but difficult to pinpoint, rhizomatic forms in which the roots are not visible, yet are nevertheless interconnected deep beneath the surface [...] Because Occupy is not so much a thing but a way, it can shift in ways that are frustratingly hard to grasp. (Brown 2013: 30)

While Pamela Brown’s quote here refers to the wider global assemblage of the Occupy movement, it indicates a phenomenon whose form and character presents a problem for locating a field site. The problem of delineating the field of my research was a major consideration early on. First off, I began from a position of taking seriously the expansive self-understanding and emphasis on permeability that characterised Occupy’s discourse. If as the quote above indicates, Occupy was a process of rhizomatic extension, there are methodological and political problems with too clearly marking the boundaries of a movement. From my long participation, I was also aware that in some ways the drift of ‘Occupy’ from verb to noun – from
command to brand – was itself problematic and needn’t be reproduced in my conception of a phenomenon that was at the same time a movement, a moment, a place, many places, an aesthetic, a network, and even as some said a ‘feeling’.

The eviction of the camps intensified this question, as the territory that had largely gathered London’s Occupy movement in one place was lost. In continuing to research Occupy past this moment I could have followed the practices, tactics, and individuals as they dispersed in multiple directions, and there is good precedent for this in movement ethnography (Maeckelbergh 2009; Juris 2007) and anthropology more broadly (Marcus 2008). Ultimately though, I decided to focus on the spaces, groups and actions that continued to identify themselves as Occupy London, rather than the many lines of escape that moved into the anti-fracking movement, squatting, the debt movement, or personal life. On the one hand this was a more manageable task. But it also meant that I could follow the discussions, debates and practices of a generally consistent network, with common history, frames of understanding and so on, and how these played out in the explicit negotiation of how to extend the Occupy project. I wanted to document and understand the identitarian turn in Occupy, as past practices, statements and framings came to place limits on future action. Understanding the possibilities and limitations of Occupy meant sticking close to it. As such, I offer an account of one – the most prominent, and only explicit – articulation of the Occupy phenomenon in London.

Not that this made for a simple field-site. As James Clifford (1986: 386) says ‘cultures do not hold still for their portraits’, and over the course of my involvement in Occupy London, the loss of occupation camps, shedding of activists, and abandonment of key organisational forms sometimes meant, as with Jeffrey Juris’s research on a disbanding movement network in Barcelona, that ‘my primary object of analysis was seemingly coming undone’ (2008: 4). It never quite disappeared, but the field was changing all the time.

3.8 The shifting field of Occupy London

During the period of occupation, the field of research centred on these concrete territories and the actions that emerged from them. The principal site was the Occupy the London Stock Exchange camp outside St. Paul’s Cathedral. The camp
itself was an arresting interruption in the concrete city square. It consisted of around a hundred and fifty small tents for sleeping, and a series of larger tents that fulfilled particular functions: the 'Info Tent', facing a common point of arrival, functioned as a welcome desk, with timetables outlining the day’s workshops and events, piles of leaflets, and someone to point you in the right direction; next to that the white Tent City University tent, a site for 'teach-ins' and discussion; the library tent next to this, with shelves of donated books and a large sign reading 'Star-Books'; the large white kitchen tent, a site of frenzied activity for much of the day, preparing meals and taking deliveries. As the central territory, the St. Paul’s camp was the first place most people came, whether visiting to take a look or hoping to join. Early on it was always busy, with meetings large and small going on in multiple locations inside and outside tents. One wandered around and overheard countless discussions, the like of which strangers rarely share: of serious political questions, and personal experience of hardship. This was the site of twice daily General Assemblies, large open meetings, run by consensus, where the emerging movement discussed and made decisions on both the internal affairs of the camp, and its emerging political programme.

A second occupation was established at Finsbury Square, about a twenty-minute walk North, a week in, on Saturday 22nd October 2011, to accommodate the new arrivals who would not fit in St. Paul’s. This is where I turned up with my tent on the following Monday. The Finsbury Square occupation differed not only in its setting – a grassy square, with trees and flower beds – but in its place in the movement, which effected the character of the camp. Functioning as a secondary space, it operated at a slower pace than St. Paul’s, and over time came to be increasingly focused on the prefigurative project of building an alternative community. It too included tents for sleeping (up to one hundred) as well as a large kitchen tent, and media tent. In addition to this, during the occupation phase, Occupy London opened two building occupations. The Bank of Ideas, was a squatted building near Finsbury Square in a building belonging to Swiss bank UBS. This was predominantly non-residential site for meetings, lectures, workshops and so on. The School of Ideas, a squatted former primary school, had a similar function, and was short-lived.

This period was characterised by regular Assemblies, working group meetings, and the many direct actions and protests organised from within the camps. It came to
an end on 28th February 2012, when St. Paul’s and the School of Ideas were evicted, the camp being destroyed and the school building bulldozed. The Bank of Ideas had been evicted in December. In fact, Finsbury Square remained occupied until June that year, but Occupy’s organisational capacities no longer happened on site, marking a transition.

In the period following eviction, Occupy London tried to retain some organisational consistency through regular General Assemblies, at first returning to St. Paul’s and later ‘roaming’ to different locations (for example outside the Goldman Sachs office, or New Scotland Yard). A series of squats were opened, which provided sleeping space and organising space for short periods, as did a handful of small ‘Nomad’ camps around North and East London. The network remained active and Occupiers sought to reinvigorate the movement either by starting new occupations or extending Occupy’s campaign in other directions. Most prominent here were demonstrations like the Occupy May actions (marking one year since the start of Spain’s 15M movement), the Global Noise demonstration for OL’s first anniversary, and the linking of Occupy with the resistance to the upcoming London Olympics, most notably in the Save Leighton Marsh campaign (and camp) and Counter-Olympics Network. While several people previously living in the camps dispersed in this period, one contingent began the occupation of Friern Barnet library, in response to a failed local community campaign to keep it open against council cuts. This became an important organising centre, and resulted in success of sorts, with the council handing it over to community management. During this period the Working Groups not oriented to camp life (for example Economics Working Group, Energy, Environment and Equity Working Group) continued to meet and organise talks and actions. The Economics Working Group organised the New Putney Debates in November 2012, as a space to revisit questions of finance and democracy.

In the first half of 2013, activity declined, with online activity (always important) keeping people connected in thinking about possible directions. The Friern Barnet library crew had moved into opening other squatted community spaces in Barnet, GAs had ceased and Working Group activity dropped. In the Summer of 2013, Occupiers were active in the anti-fracking protection camp at Balcombe in West Sussex, and in the Reclaim the Power short-term action camp there, alongside people from the Climate Camp movement, UK Uncut and others. This invigorating
moment was followed by a return to Occupy London meetings, as a Future of Occupy meeting sought to reassess and extend the Occupy project. This continued from October 2013 to March 2014, at which point a monthly General Assembly was reinitiated, but did not last past a second date. During this time the Economics Working Group still met every week, and there were attempts to re-start older ones, such as the International Working Group. Several protest actions were organised as Occupy (Occupy vs the Arms Fair, Occupy vs the BBC), and Occupiers also contributed to other activities like the Cops Off Campus student demonstrations (December 2013-January 2014) and Disabled People Against Cuts actions. This however seriously slowed down throughout mid 2014.

My fieldwork ended in September 2014, as I needed to leave London, and had at this point completed all planned interviews and three years of fieldwork. By this time, the period of attempted reinvigoration seemed to be over. Even the Economics Working Group – by far the most consistent and organised of the Working Groups – was dwindling, with the key organisers taking a step back and meeting schedules being reduced. Many of the driving forces of Occupy London for the previous two years also took a step back, either taking a break from activism, or redirecting their energies. In October 2014, just after I had left London, the Occupy Democracy demonstrations momentarily seemed like a considerable reinvigoration of Occupy. This did not last long, and furthermore, it marked a formal separation from Occupy London, as this new group did not feel bound to the practices and agreements of Occupy London.

3.9 Data collection

3.9.1 Participant observation

I conducted participant observation of Occupy London for three years from October 2011 to September 2014. My tent was pitched at the Finsbury Square camp from 24th October 2011 until Christmas that year. During that time, I slept on average three nights a week at the camp, while working full-time four days a week. I would hurry back from my job, a fifteen minute walk away, to participate in GAs at both camps, attend talks at the Bank of Ideas, and help at the Info desk. I cooked meals.
in the kitchen, washed endless mountains of dishes, and joined late night sessions of drinking and music, talking until late. I took facilitation training and facilitated a few small meetings, and attending several Working Group meetings, though none regularly as they met during my working hours. I was part of the large team that set up the Bank of Ideas to open. I went on every demonstration and teach-out I could, often shifting my one day off a week to not miss key actions. I spent a lot of time hanging about, waiting for things, talking with people, smoking roll-ups. I went out on late night missions to find food in bins and building materials in skips.

From early 2012, no longer sleeping on site, I went to General Assemblies several nights a week, and attending events at the newly opened School of Ideas. Finsbury Square had become a rather dilapidated spot, but I swung by after work to chat with people, and see how things were going. As the eviction of St Paul’s approached I attended meetings almost nightly, and when eviction came I rushed from my flat in Holloway to be there, joining the crowds just outside the police line, chanting in solidarity with our friends and comrades inside. When the camp was gone, I wandered the streets aimlessly with everyone, wondering what on earth to do.

I took on a more organisational role in the build-up to the ‘Meet the 1%’ action on 12th May 2012. I met more people at the organising core of OL, and attended secretive meetings in squats and parks and pubs across London, plotting an ultimately unsuccessful resurgence of the occupation. With this same group of direct action-oriented friends, I helped organise the Bread and Circuses squatted social centre against the Olympics, and these became a core of friends and co-operators. I attended many more meetings and actions I had no role in organising. From September 2012 to September 2013, while living in Manchester, I participated in several key events. I went with a contingent of nine London Occupiers to the Agora 99 convergence in Madrid, in November 2012, participating and translating from Spanish. I visited Friern Barnet library when I could, particularly for parties and organising meetings (using it as the base for planning the ‘Capitalism’s Last Christmas’ carol singing event). I participated in a series of Occupy-related actions around the G8 summit in June 2013, especially a day event in Canary Wharf called ‘Shift the Debt’. I also went on the week-long anti-fracking direct action camp, ‘Reclaim the Power’, in Balcombe West Sussex.
From September 2013 to March 2014, I relocated to London, and began attending Working Groups properly, particularly the Economics Working Group, International Working Group and Democracy Action Working Group. I became especially involved in the Economics Working Group, eventually taking on a regular role as facilitator of meetings. Showing a skill – or at least willingness – for this, I was asked by other Working Groups to do this, especially at times when they were struggling with internal difficulty. I also facilitated the resurgent GA in March 2014. I was a regular attender of the Future of Occupy meetings, also organising some of its workshops to assist the (self-) reflection of Occupy London. During this period I also spent many evenings in the squats connected to Occupy London, especially the Our Bohemia pub occupation in Barnet. Returning to Manchester in April 2014, I maintained involvement in key actions, and online discussions. I returned to London occasionally, to help prepare and execute a planned occupation in Parliament Square in July 2014, and to facilitate meetings and an Occupy assembly at a demonstration against the bombardment of Gaza in August 2014. In September, I drew my data gathering to a close.

Throughout this I took notes. These began as my own attempts to think through the phenomenon I was witnessing and producing. With no plan to study Occupy, this was a personal diary, made up of brief sketch-like notes, the occasional long paragraph, and snippets of snatched conversations or interesting slogans. By early 2012 I was writing PhD proposals and my notes became richer, as I began to be conscious of not losing the data from this key moment. I also used this time to go back to my earlier notes and embellish these while my memory was fresh. Conscious of the risk of misrepresenting this (Lofland 1971) I was very clear what was an unaltered note from that time, and what was subsequently added to. Once based in Manchester, my fieldwork consisted of regular visits to London. I wrote detailed field notes for every meeting, assembly and action I attended. During my period of extended field-work and interviewing (September 2013 – April 2014) I kept notes every day. My fieldwork diary runs to around 100,000 words. I also collected any documents or texts produced by Occupy London during this time, for later analysis.

My participation was necessarily limited. Occupy London was produced through many Working Groups, events, actions and casual meetings and conversation. From the start my full-time job meant I missed much of the daytime life of the
occupation, on at least four days a week. My participation was tempered, as much activism and research is, by the relationships I developed and the spaces I came to frequent. This necessarily meant the prevalence of some over others. I was conscious of trying to ensure my observant participation covered many different phases of Occupy London’s history, as well as different Working Groups, organisation spaces, meetings, friendship groups and roles. My participation began organically enough, but I developed an ethic of seeking out those parts of the movement that I was unfamiliar with, to better understand them, and their place in the whole. This could never be entirely comprehensive, but I was always seeking to make it as broad as I could.

3.9.2 Interviews

The use of interviews reflects a commitment to taking seriously people’s knowledge and understandings, and to considering how social structures are embodied in behaviour (Silverman 1985). Semi-structured interviews were a vital source of data for several reasons: they were the way into seeing how participants framed the practices and events I had witnessed; they allowed for a longer, probing engagement with key questions; they provided a vital means of challenging my own situated understandings. They also provided some detail on moments or spaces of the movement which I had not been present for. I recognised the methodological problems of this (Becker and Geer 1969), and used such new information for developing my general understanding, rather than for presentation as ‘true’ accounts that could not be held up against my own observations. By the time my interviews began I was clear on the issues that would drive the thesis, and these provided the structure for discussion. Even later in my interview schedule, with my focus becoming sharper, I tried to remain open to the possibly interesting deviations of this, and these frequently led in interesting or useful directions.

Accessing interviewees was done progressively. I did not require a ‘gatekeeper’ in the conventional sense. I began with a small group I had recently done an action with, and with whom I felt familiar. Expanding the meetings and actions I attended, I expanded too my list of interviewees. After a first wave of interviews between September and December 2013, I reviewed my interviews that far, and tried to be
clear about what was lacking or unrepresented. I did not have anyone from Finsbury Square or Bank of Ideas. My interviewees were disproportionately young, and Occupy was for many of them their first experiences of activism. From January to March I set about correcting this where possible, asking previous interviewees for leads.

I conducted interviews with twenty-five participants. Taking my promise of anonymity seriously I offer the following overview of the interviewees. These were eleven women and fourteen men, aged 22-55. Twenty were white (British and not). Of the five non-white, two were South Asian, and one black (all British born), one was North African Arab and one was mixed race from Latin America. Seventeen were from the UK, with the others mostly Western European and North American. Nineteen were still London based when my fieldwork ended, including four of the seven who relocated to London for Occupy. Twenty-two were involved in Occupy London more or less from the start, no later than early November 2011. Seventeen were still involved in some way at the time of interview. Their primary centres of organising in Occupy London included: Direct Action Working Group; Economics Working Group; International Working Group; Occupied Times; Press Team; Tent City University; Welfare Working Group; several action groups. Between them they have been based at St. Paul’s, Finsbury Square, the Bank of Ideas, the School of Ideas, and a variety of Occupy-connected squats. Prior to Occupy, twelve had experience of activism beyond attending a demonstration (i.e. organising and active campaigning). Aside from Occupy they have been active with trade unions and workplace organising, Palestine solidarity, Disabled People Against Cuts, drug reform activism, various student campaign groups, the Labour Party, the Socialist Workers Party, UK Uncut, and squatter networks. Some share great friendships, some would not acknowledge one another in the street.

The interviews took between fifty minutes and two and a half hours, with the majority lasting around ninety minutes. They took pace in private homes, including several squats, as well as pubs, cafes, houseboats and Friends House in Euston, a popular activist meeting spot. I had to be quite flexible with the interruptions and reschedulings that came from interviewing in environments so close to the bustle of activist life. Amit’s interview was planned to follow a demonstration, but after spending an intense afternoon of aggressive policing, followed by several friends being arrested, we rescheduled. Matt missed his first interview as he was in court,
and when we finally did it he was hurriedly packing his bags as his squat was being evicted that night. Maria’s interview in a South London squat was interrupted by news that they were being evicted that night and would have to start readying to resist the bailiffs. Squats in general were hard places to find privacy, given the tendency toward unrestricted sharing of spaces. When interviews were interrupted by people wanting to sleep in a corner or do some DIY, I continued as long as the interviewee was prepared to. One exception was when an interview was interrupted by the arrival of the interviewee’s partner, who was also active in Occupy. I felt this could compromise the interview and relocated. In Friends House too, I always sought a table where we could not be overheard by other Occupiers, which was often a possibility.

Conducted at a relatively late date in Occupy London’s history, much – though by no means all – of the interview material covered things participants had to remember. I was conscious of the issues this brings up. Becker and Geer (1969) state that changes in social environment and personal life over time can result in transformations of perspective, and this is only further troubled by the dialogic story-telling that takes place between the interviewer and interviewee (Auyero 2002). Aside from this, there was the simple problem of remembering at all. Participants were conscious of this, Bernie saying ‘I wish you asked me this ages ago; I barely remember’, and Rob saying ‘You’re really testing my memory now’. While some forgetfulness is unavoidable given the fact that I was not ready to do interviews until this stage, my deep familiarity with Occupy London mitigated against this considerably. I could prompt people with events I had witnessed, or comments that came from my other interviews and conversations. This proved very useful. Also, trying to extend the length of interviews I made time for people to access their memories. Rosa’s statement ‘Okay… it’s coming back now’ was not uncommon. Where people entirely failed to remember things that I had thought significant, this was a useful reminder to critically reflect on my own biases and tendencies. The time of my interviews was a very reflexive time for Occupy London, indicated by the start of the Future of Occupy meetings, that sought to revisit and extend Occupy’s project. The result was a group of interviewees who were already analytically reflecting on their practices and history. While this necessarily brings certain refractions, the net effect was a very rich environment for collectively considering the questions at hand.
Interviewing was a process of improvement and self-criticism for me. I listened back to interviews immediately, taking notes on how to improve. In particular I noticed early on that my personal tendency to make people comfortable and fill awkward silences meant that I didn't always leave space for participants to say everything they might. I was very conscious of not doing this from then on, and I was much happier with the results. Similarly as I came to realise certain questions were not getting at the information I wanted I adapted these, trying out new formulations and adopting them when they seemed better.

3.9.3 Texts

Throughout the entire period of my research I gathered key texts produced by Occupy London. This primarily involved keeping a record of all major documents and statements that emerged from the General Assembly – which were often provided in paper copy at the camp, and published online on the Occupy London website. I also compiled all press releases that accompanied these, as well as the press releases for major actions, demonstrations, and the eviction of the camps. I kept copies of every issue of the Occupied Times newspaper produced during the occupation period, and saved copies of their online PDFs from March 2012 onward.

I also gathered any document distributed to help the running of Occupy London, such as the facilitator training handbook, guides to safer spaces, and recycling plans.

The focus for my analysis was exclusively texts that were explicitly produced as part of Occupy London. While I also gathered flyers, newspapers and leaflets being handed out at Occupy spaces and actions, these were often brought by distinct organisations and campaigns, and were gathered more for context than as the object of analysis.

3.10 Analysis

Ethnographic analysis takes place at every stage of the research process. The very development of this research project was based on a certain analysis of Occupy
London, and the last moments of writing the thesis are themselves analytical. The entire period of fieldwork was a process of sharpening my ‘sense of analytic significance’ (Junker 1960), and my field-notes became very analytical with time. Nevertheless, following the end of the data gathering stage, I set about an intensification of that analysis that now turned to the entirety of my data, to extract the stories that emerge from it, and the complex answers to my research questions and aims.

My approach took inspiration from some of the sensitivities of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990), as this provided a framework for an inductive and deductive analysis that took seriously the ability of the data to generate the key ideas of the thesis, rather than having sharply delineated questions overly determine this. This is not a work of Grounded Theory. It does not make the hard realist claim of establishing the theory that lies in the data. It is perhaps closer to Charmaz’s (2008) more constructivist Grounded Theory, but, even then, does not follow the method with the requisite rigour. Also, against Grounded Theory’s injunction to delay reading relevant literature until a later stage, I wanted to use theoretical reading to inform my process from the start, just as it had informed my participation up to that point. Still, I followed the principles of data collection, open and selective coding, and memo writing.

I transcribed all interviews, remaining as faithful as possible to the actual speech of interviewees. There is always a degree of selectivity and emphasis in following the conventions of rendering verbal speech into writing (Atkinson 2004; Labov 1969), though my level of analysis meant this was not so significant. Rather these were resources for close reading.

Compiling all interview transcripts, fieldnote diaries, and key texts produced by the movement, these were uploaded to NVIVO 9 for coding. Gibbs (2002) suggests using NVIVO by closely going through documents to tease out emerging analytical ideas and establishing ‘nodes’ for these, allowing this list of nodes to build up. After setting up my first nodes based on the groupings of interview questions – hoping to thereby collate all related material – this close engagement with the data led to the production of many more nodes. These marked clearer distinctions of issues within the wider topics, and also frequently cut across the issues. This was the result of developing a greater theoretical sensitivity through immersion in the data (Glaser
and Strauss 1967). As the possible relationships between open-coded nodes became clear, these were grouped together.

When this long task was complete I approached the next analytical step – writing – by establishing which nodes were most pertinent for my account of the three questions at the centre of the thesis: occupation; ‘the 99 percent’; and collective speech. I then conducted a meticulous close reading of these to deepen my understanding of the story that emerged collectively from the interviews, texts and participant observation. At this time I returned to the literature and theory I had been reading throughout this time, to establish my argument.

3.11 Ethics and politics

A strong concern for research ethics has run throughout this chapter, as it did my research. My account of politically engaged ethnography involves close attention to ethical questions, as does my consideration of my own position in relation to the researched. I take seriously the procedural demands of university ethics boards, and insist that real ethics extend beyond this.

Gaining informed consent is especially important when dealing with people one knows from before the period of research. This meant ‘giving sufficient information about the research and ensuring that there is no explicit or implicit coercion” ensuring ‘participants can make an informed and free decision on their possible involvement’ (ESRC 2012: 28). Once my research began, I made this known in meetings and assemblies I attended, and certainly any which I refer to in this thesis. Where possible I announced this during the introduction stage at the start. Open meetings sometimes slightly changed their make-up from one meeting to the next, in which case I used my judgement as to whether the composition had changed enough to require my announcing it again. In more informal, or chaotic settings, this was not possible, but in these situations I do not identify particular people, and increase my sensitivity to anything possibly incriminating or upsetting. I gained full written consent from all interviewees, providing an information sheet explaining my project in detail, and I maintained contact after interviews in case they had questions.
Data was stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), and all data was anonymised. This always entailed the use of pseudonyms, and the removal of personal information which would identify people, and in cases of more sensitive information (for example, where people mention incidents of law-breaking that could be traced to them) I removed this from the transcripts to be extra secure. When interviewees asked to speak ‘off the record’ I always turned my recorder off, and on one occasion, when asked immediately after an interview if I would remove a section of conversation, I did so. As I have discussed, the issue of confidentiality during the interview itself was not always straightforward (in squats and cafes full of activists) but I always sought privacy and often checked with participants whether they were happy with conditions.

Conducting research in a setting about which participants are so passionate, and which is riven with conflicts and problems, brings up its own ethical concerns. Three people cried in my interviews with them, as they remembered hardships and insults they received. In these moments, being a good researcher means being a decent person, and I was always attendant to the possible effect of interviews, in particular, on others. What’s more, I shared in these emotions, both as someone who had also lived those events, and as someone sharing the moment of the interview with them.

I have already outlined my desire for an engaged and embodied ethnography, as well as my prior commitment to Occupy London. This undoubtedly resulted in ethically ambiguous moments during fieldwork: blocking busy roads; planning to break the law; breaking through police lines with human chains; scouting for buildings to squat; physically stopping police officers from arresting my friends and informants. In every case, it was because of an ethical compulsion, rather than despite one, that I participated. This is the nature of a political, side taking method.

A major concern which is not addressed by bureaucratic accounts of ethics is the matter of privatising knowledge. The knowledge that is brought together in this thesis is collectively generated by people committed to the collective nature of their project. There is a valid criticism of the way in which the researcher, claiming to be similarly committed, ultimately claims dominance over the many voices he/she has consulted, and does this for private gain (Roseneil 1993; Juris 2007; Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010). While I was a fellow participant throughout my
fieldwork, clearly in the moment of analysis I assert a certain dominance over the data, and the voices that comprise it. I remained conscious of my desire to honour the integrity of participants, and their 'knowledge about themselves' (Saukko 2003).

At the same time, I am aware of the authority I enact in the moment of authorship, and do not shy away from this. I recognise a certain truth in Sasha Roseneil’s words (1993: 204), when she says ‘In the final analysis, it has been my analysis that has triumphed; I have retained the power of authorship’. There is no easy fix to this, and while I accept that mine is just one account, I trust that the depth of fieldwork completed, the number of voices brought to bear, and the breadth of literature that informs, means that this account is an insightful and critical one.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has clearly established the approach I have taken to the research, and the way that it was conducted. Departing from a broad philosophical orientation based on Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of ‘becoming’, and understanding of the role of concepts, alongside Foucault’s ‘problematisation’, I have discussed the various methodological, philosophical and political implication of ethnographic research, showing how this was a method and ethos which aligned well with the aims of my research. This included a discussion of the major learnings taken from other high quality social movement ethnographies, and while I have argued that the current thesis is a politically engaged and committed ethnography, I have offered a critique of the idea of ‘militant ethnography’, with its commitment to militant identity. Given the difficulty of too clearly distinguishing my participation in the events of Occupy London, from my researching it, I have discussed the various opportunities and limitations that my position provided in the carrying-out of this research, as well as the problem this produced in delineating a ‘field’ in the first place. Finally, I have offered a detailed, and justified account of the specific methods used for gathering data and subsequent analysis, showing my awareness of the various strengths and weaknesses of these.

Having thereby established the foundations upon which this thesis rests, I now move onto the first of the three empirical chapters that form the heart of this thesis.
Chapter 4 - Occupation and Beyond: the territory of Occupy London

4.1 Introduction

‘For some people, occupation was a tactic to use, but for others it was embedded within the movement; with what Occupy was. There’s something very strong – empowering – about coming together and having that space. If I had just come to a march that day […] I wouldn’t now be an activist. All these people are still doing what they’re doing because of the camp, and the opportunity it gave: continuity; a base; a focus. But camps bring with them problems… big problems.’ Ian

The practice of occupation was the principal and defining feature of Occupy London. The occupation shaped and handled so much of the movement’s practices and social forms, and it was fundamental to the connection to the wider ‘movements of the squares’ (Kioupkiolis 2014; Gerbaudo 2014), characterised by the taking of space in city squares and the establishment of enduring encampments. In Occupy London, this involved the main occupation at St. Paul’s Cathedral – the principal, though by no means sole, focus of this chapter – as well as the second site at Finsbury Square, and a series of building occupations, each with their own character and place in the movement. As the quote above from Ian makes clear, the significance of occupation was multiple and contested. It contained a tactical and instrumental rationale, but also exceeded this, becoming at time the *sine qua non* of the Occupy movement. It was a site of assembly, organisation, and the becomings of newly mobilised activists and forms of action. It was a living space, and an aesthetic and material environment, whose qualities were central to the experiences of those there, and to the communicative dimension of a movement receiving media interest from the outset. It was a site of encounter, where Occupy could be found.

The territory of occupation was a process, through which the many dynamic features of occupation unfolded. This chapter takes the concept of the ‘refrain’ from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), to present an analysis of the territorial process of occupation in Occupy London, bearing down on the key points of tension that characterised this. Deleuze and Guattari’s territorial refrain emphasises the
fundamentally expressive basis of territoriality, and describes three major ‘moments’ of territory’s process: the marking of a centre; the establishment of a bounded territorial ‘home’; and the overcoming of those boundaries, as the territory extends, expands or moves along. This concept allows me to focus on the major tension that defined Occupy London’s occupying practice, between, on the one hand, the commitment to the concrete site of the St. Paul’s occupation – and the protest camp form more broadly – and, on the other, a desire to transcend the fixity of the camp, extending Occupy outward, into newer geographies and terrains of social life.

I begin the discussion by establishing the theoretical background to the chapter. This entails a statement on the important connection between spatiality and social movement politics, and then a presentation of the Deleuze-Guattarian refrain as it relates to Occupy. After this, I discuss the concrete features of the occupation in terms of the refrain’s three moments. This begins with an account of the taking of space and the first expressive moments of occupation. I then develop a longer discussion of the stabilising territorial home of occupation, developing an understanding of the occupation as ‘heterotopic’ (Foucault 1984): a space marked by otherness, with some features that advanced Occupy London’s explicit politics and others whose significance was more unclear, and even damaging. Following this, the analysis moves on to the tension surrounding the movement into the refrain’s third step: territory’s opening. I argue that Occupy London was characterised by an intense desire to move beyond the fixity of that site, giving examples of this in the discourse and actions of Occupy. Ultimately, though, these extensions outward are found to be lacking. A central analytical matter in this chapter is Occupy London’s stalling in the moment of ‘home’. The chapter shows that the event of eviction, which could have forced Occupy London to develop interesting new territorialities, instead reveals the inability to think past the moment of ‘home’, and I then go on to show how the continued significance of the St. Paul’s site and the protest camp form reveal a nostalgic and ritualistic desire to recreate the moment of home. I conclude by briefly clarifying the chapter’s main claims and arguments.

The tension at the heart of this chapter has been noted by others, though this has often been gestural, or has relied on frameworks that are insufficiently sensitive to the complexity I draw out. This has included an emphasis on the importance to Occupy of the extra-territorial injunction to ‘Occupy Everywhere!’ (Taussig 2013)
and a recognition that this made of occupation not only a concrete practice but a ‘desired state of being’ (Calhoun 2013: 4) which must expand. The problem of rendering such a mobile form as concrete and local has also been observed, seeing the command to ‘occupy’ as ‘a universal that calls for a particular’ (Clemens 2012: no pagination). Some have departed from an understanding of Occupy – and contemporary movements more broadly – as essentially networked assemblages, such that there is a tension between a hub’s localisation and either the mobile unfolding of the network (Routledge 2005, Dyer-Witherford 2012) or the redistribution back into local networks once the effervescent moment has passed (Uitermark and Nicholls 2012). Uitermark and Nicholls (2012: 298) have also signalled a certain reduction of connectivity as the natural consequence of occupation’s playing out, saying that, ‘By now, the occupiers had formed their relations and articulated their discourses fully around the encampment, closing themselves both discursively and relationally from the city’s movement milieu and the general public’. As such, the need to transcend the fixity of the camp is addressed variously in terms of a need to move into sites of production (Dyer-Witherford 2012), to move into new social spheres (Badiou 2012) or as a more generic desire to extend through ‘aggregation’ (Juris 2012). Probably the most interesting framing of this overall tension has come from Sam Halvorsen (2014), who sees this in terms of a tension between the ‘moments of rupture’ of an ever-extending Occupy movement, and the need to embed more deeply in localised relations and the ‘internal’ movement work of social reproduction.

My analysis in this chapter is much clearer not only about the processual nature of occupation territory, but about the multiple features of occupation and Occupy London that handled this process. The tripartite refrain allows me to signal the pivotal importance of those moments when one moment ‘skips’ to the next, emphasising how these are not tensions between two distinct ‘aspects’ – as other scholars present it – but rather intensifications and differentiations of territory’s process. My use of the refrain in this chapter, alongside a deep ethnographic engagement with the internal contradictions and problems of Occupy London, produces a more nuanced discussion of the progressive and more troubling aspects of each moment of the occupation than is found in any of the critical literature on Occupy. Furthermore, this account shows how occupation was itself fundamental to gathering Occupy London itself as a common project expressed through occupation,
as opposed to a pre-existing collective identity that expressed ‘itself’. My understanding of the heterotopic character of occupation entails a focus, absent in the literature, on the equivocal and compromised aspects of occupation’s aesthetics, materialities and practices, that were nonetheless important constituent features of the geography of Occupy.

4.2 The space and territory of protest

4.2.1 Space and the political

Before concentrating on the concrete features and problems of occupation, it is important to clearly address the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the chapter. I begin with a brief overview of the way in which I take spatial arrangements to be political and social in character. This section then builds on this understanding to show that social movements are themselves, at least in part, projects that must take place within, and act upon, the political arrangement of space. Having touched on the various distinction and co-implication of space, place and territory, I then turn specifically to the question of territory as the key spatial dynamic of occupation, and clearly explain the Deleuze-Guattarian conception of territory described by their work on the ‘refrain’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

The importance of space for movements is apparent if we consider the politics of how space works. The effect of the ‘spatial turn’ or ‘geographic turn’ in the social sciences is largely associated with the growing influence from the 1990s of the ‘idiosyncratic Marxism’ (Goonewardena et al 2008: 2) of Henri Lefebvre, and in particular his *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]). In that work, Lefebvre famously insists that ‘(social) space is a (social) product’ (1991: 26); that is, space is not ‘pre-existing, empty or neutral […] determined solely by geography, climate, [or] anthropology’ (ibid: 73), but is an ongoing production of relations between diverse objects, both natural and social. Crucially, this is not simply a claim about the ‘contingency’ of spatial arrangements, but an insistence that systemic forms of domination – and resistance to them – are inscribed in space. Lefebvre argues that capitalism organises space in the service of the commodity, and the proper functioning of the order of capital. This ‘abstract space’ of capital is epitomised by the flattening and depoliticising technique of the map, which attempts to
“pulverize” space into a manageable, calculable and abstract grid’ (Brenner and Elden 2009: 367). The result is the ‘illusion of transparency’ (Lefebvre 1991: 147): while ‘space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein’ (ibid: 27), in fact the economic and political relations that underpin that particular spatial arrangement are necessarily obscured. As a means of further interrogating the social and political production of space, Lefebvre developed his heuristic ‘trialectic’, a tripartite dynamic system, which he describes in two distinct ways, each with its own inflections (Schmid 2009): the phenomenological trio of ‘perceived-’, ‘conceived-’ and ‘lived space’; and the linguistics-based ‘representations of space’, ‘spaces of representation’ and ‘spatial practice’. The point of the trialectic is that all three aspects are mutually constitutive, such that the politics of space are inscribed by the ongoing interaction of understandings of space (what it is for, how it works), concrete arrangements in space (and the norms they embody), and what we do with and in that space.

In addition to this general claim about space, the political dimension of place – a specific location or site, locatable as, though not reducible to, the point on a map – affirms the importance of the particular. John Agnew (1987) defines places as the sites where political and economic processes are made manifest, and attached to particular, localised conditions. While agreeing with Lefebvre’s argument about capitalism’s ‘abstract space’, particularity of place remains, and it is significant where political events occur; places are ‘where social relations are bundled or “condensed”, regardless of the territorial extent of those relations’ (Nicholls et al 2013: 4). In terms of social movements, this is most readily associated with the politics of the neighbourhood, though the particularities of location always matter. A city centre occupation mounted by people from all over may not build on the same ‘sense of place’ (ibid) as a campaign with a base in embedded, long-term ‘local’ relationships, but a sense of how particular places reflect the problems identified and solutions sought is key to movement practices (see Martin 2003 for a discussion of ‘place frames’).

Social movements in the business of challenging forms of behaviour or political systems – and generating or promoting new ones – are necessarily implicated in the question of space. As Margaret Kohn argues,
Space is not just a tool for social control [...] spatial practices can contribute to transformative politics. All political groups – government and opposition, right and left, fascist and democratic – use space, just as they employ language, symbols, ideas and incentives. (Kohn 2003: 7)

Not only this, but a conventional understanding of collective action, certainly from within much of the field of social movement studies, focuses on how the ability to mobilise actors is based on establishing certain kinds of relationships that lower the cost of action, and increase a sense of trust, hope and possibility: 'These relationships – and all social relationships – are fundamentally, inextricably spatial' (Nicholls et al 2013: 2). And this is not just about the inert 'stage' upon which the action takes place. Auyero’s (2006: 567) assertion that 'space is sometimes the site, other times the object and usually both the site and object of contentious politics' draws too clear a line between these two. Even when the space is not the explicit focus of movement claims, it is constitutive of the action itself. As Nicholls et al (2013: 7) state, the site of the action 'empowers activists, but it also ensnares them in thousands of local traps'.

The role of spatialized politics for social movements varies. A fuller discussion of the concrete effects of space on the politics of Occupy London takes place throughout this chapter. For now I just signal the fact that the social movements literature on space tends to address three main functions of the spatial practices of social movements: the establishment of territories for the internal processes of the movement (Halvorsen 2012, 2014; Köksal 2012; Feigenbaum et al 2013); the embodied spatial expression of the politics of the movement in question (Frenzel 2014; Cockburn et al 2000; Della Porta and Mattoni 2014); taking the terrain needed for the generation of the subjectivities and collective identities that are (taken by such scholars to be) necessary for action (Juris 2008; Della Porta and Mattoni 2014; Nicholls et al 2013). This indeed builds on the reflection on protest camping and space-taking that ran through Chapter 2. While these features are certainly important – in general but also for understanding Occupy London’s practices of occupation – they all tend to emphasise the deliberate tactical and strategic application of spatial practices. This is perhaps epitomised in the chess analogy used by Miller to summarise the conclusions of a recent collection on the ‘spatialities of social movements’ (Nicholls et al 2013), which concludes: 'central to this game is the deployment of spatial technologies of power by activists attempting
to build the relationships that will advance their cause’ (Miller 2013: 296). A unique contribution of the current chapter, missing from the literature on Occupy, is in bringing together this tactical ‘deployment’ of space with the more unexpected, accidental and even damaging spatial features of occupation, as space sometimes handles the political life of the movement in ways that are as weird as they are technical.

4.2.2 Territory as ‘refrain’

This chapter is concerned with territory, a form of spatial arrangement that even in its everyday usage emphasises a certain relationship between a particular territorial entity – collective or individual – and a space over which it expresses a claim, or a certain dominion. Much academic geography focuses on territory as the domain of the nation state (Agnew 1987), emphasising a relation of control. While it is worth retaining this sense of territory as undergirded by a relationship, such accounts are lacking in the concepts necessary to apprehend the expressive modes and tensions coursing through the occupation. For this I turn to the conception of territory expressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

Territory, for Deleuze and Guattari, is a processual unfolding of relations, which throughout *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) drifts between descriptions of literal territories in space, and more metaphorical applications. At any rate, these are not distinct. Their description of territory follows a broader ontology and indeed ethic of becomings, where not only is there a recognition of the complex and multiple dynamics through which social and material forms take place, but there is a political and ethical valorisation of those moments where things are most mobile, opening up onto ever newer possibilities. In this context, territory is given its full verbal register with the term *territorialisation*, and its two main vectors, *de-* and *reterritorialization*. Territorialisation is the process of becoming bounded and static; it is an embedding into particular contexts and forms of action. While it is never entirely complete, as social and other processes persistently trouble fixed boundaries, territorialisation is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a moment of diminished capacity. Territorialisation is the constitution of an identity. This is associated with a broader Deleuzian (Deleuze, 1991) critique of identity, not in the sense of self-
identification necessarily, but rather the stabilisation of particular relations, and a tendency toward the apparently self-identical being of a thing, rather than its becoming. This always implies a reduction of connections and openness to future re-constitution. The problem of identity in this sense recurs through the thesis, not only in the stabilisation of movement spaces, but in the gathering of ‘the people’ as a unified whole in Chapter 5, and the deep investment in particular organisational forms at the expense of Occupy London’s creative extension, in Chapter 6.

Deleuze and Guattari’s description of deterritorialisation shifts somewhat throughout their work: in Anti-Oedipus (1977: 322) it is a ‘coming undone’; in A Thousand Plateaus (1987: 88), it is the cutting edge of an assemblage. We can say that deterritorialisation is the very troubling of fixity; it indicates the creative potential of a still-mobile assemblage, moving into new spaces and opening them up to connection. The tendential return to stability in those new relations represents a reterritorialisation. Importantly, these are always in process, even when imperceptible: they do not exist as finalised states, but insist, pulling at the whole.

A Deleuze-Guattarian understanding of territories is rarely the means with which scholars apprehend movement spaces, though these concepts do appear in a small, but important critical literature (Chesters 2007; Chesters & Welsh 2006; Colebrook 2015; Thoburn 2015). Of particular interest here is Chesters’ (2007) analysis of the alter-globalisation movement, its modes of action and the kinds of spaces it produced and was produced through. Expressing the deterritorialising ethic that was an important feature of that particularly nomadic movement, Chesters argues that alter-globalisation movement spaces were oriented toward the assembling of what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘war machines’: ‘a range of social actors (nomads, itinerants, artisans, warriors) who avoid assimilation within the disciplinary logic of the state and who frequently array themselves against it as a result of their resistance to normative constraints’ (Chesters 2007: 237). This is resistance by way of a certain mobility and slipperiness. For Chesters, an archetypal space for the alter-globalisation movement was the convergence space, which created the possibility for the multiple dynamic processes through which radical projects might be produced: the encounters, combinations and creative connections that extend the capacities of the assembled. Thus, convergence space, it is argued, produces opportunities for the intensification of a Deleuze-Guattarian (1987) plateau, manifesting as ‘a process of intensive networking in material and immaterial spaces.
that occurs around nodal points of contestation or deliberation, such as protest events or social fora’ (Chesters and Welsh 2006a: 4). I return to this question of movement territory as a site for connection and extension below, as Occupy London begins to reveal more limited approaches to territory. For now I note this sense of movement spaces as dynamic.

Most important to my analysis of occupation is Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) discussion of literal territories-in-space, as produced by what they term the territorial ‘refrain’. This expresses clearly how, for Deleuze and Guattari, territory is the marking of territory. It is these expressive markings which begin the territorial process of the refrain: ‘The territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative mark; it is the mark that makes the territory’ (1989: 348). The territorial refrain consists of three ‘steps’, which they illustrate with the example of a small child, toddling along (these are territories that can move, with the toddling child, or, in another example, the nomadic pack of wolves) and beginning to sing, an expressive act which gathers the space around him. Step one is the first fragile marking of a centre, beginning to order space along territorial lines: ‘The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos’ (1987: 343). This ‘skip’ from chaos to order (or indeed from one order – another’s order – to another – one’s own) is ‘in danger of breaking apart at any moment’ (343), and to last must move onto the second step of the refrain.

This second step is the ongoing marking out of a tendentially stable home: ‘Now we are home. But home does not pre-exist: it was necessary to draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre, to organize a limited space’ (1989: 343). This settling in of the territorial home is characterised by further expressive markings, and these markings become more explicitly territorial: ‘Many, very diverse, components have a part in this, landmarks and marks of all kinds. This was already true of the previous case. But now the components are used for organizing a space, not for the momentary determination of a centre’ (ibid). Deleuze and Guattari describe this fleshing out of the territorial home as one where expressive markers that were ‘directional’ in the first step become ‘dimensional’. Crucially this ‘home’ is associated with getting something done, as ‘the interior space protects the germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do’ (ibid).
Crucially this tendential bounding of territory remains incomplete, open to the potential of the refrain’s third step, *the overcoming of the boundary*: ‘Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself’ (1987: 343). This is not simply a description of the ‘permeability’ of the territory, but an affirmation of the radical potential of territory, in reorganising space in such a way that creates new possible futures. Deleuze and Guattari insist that when the circle ‘opens up a crack’ it does so not back onto the chaos from which it was marked out, ‘but in another region, one created by the circle itself’ (1987: 343). Indeed, this dynamism is a function of those expressive forces that first marked the territory.

Territory then is a process we can follow through three steps. In the case of Occupy London, we can consider this first step as the first, fragile (almost proto-territorial) moments that marked the events out as an occupation and as Occupy: the collective refusal to go home; the first assemblies, tent pitchings and banner raising; the first chanted ‘song’ of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’; the moment of rupture that announced *this* as a site of Occupy and its critique. The second step accounts for so much of Occupy’s life: the ongoing territorial practices of occupation and camping in the square, and all the forms of life this housed. The third step, always at risk of failing – and often doing so – was seen in those moments where the creative, deterritorialising desire of the call to ‘Occupy Everywhere’ led Occupy into ever newer geographical and social spaces, as Occupiers sought to extend beyond the boundaries of the camp through a variety of creative routes.

The refrain is characterised by tension, located at the nexus between each step and the next: Will the centre push on to assert a home? Will home be undone to open up to further progressive reconstitution? In posing this last problem, Deleuze and Guattari provide an extremely useful way of considering the territory of occupation in Occupy London. The tension between bounding and further opening up was fundamental to the Occupy movement. At the heart of Occupy was the command to construct an occupied territory in a particular site (a home – in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense – a political space, but with components of liveability), and alongside this the command to use that territoriality as a platform for a radically expansive desire to ‘Occupy Everywhere’. My foregrounding of this tension in this chapter is a reflection of the empirically-encountered problems facing the occupation. The concepts outlined above allow me to attend to the expressive and
other modes through which a territorial base was produced by Occupy London, while also critically reflecting on Occupiers’ desires and attempts to overcome their own situatedness.

4.3 Taking space, marking a centre

I begin my discussion of Occupy London’s territorial ‘refrain’ with the first fragile step, a moment I have called proto-territorial. For Deleuze and Guattari, this is the first marking of a centre – ‘a calming and stabilising […] centre in the heart of chaos’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 343) – as exemplified by the toddling child’s sing-song. With this, they propose a vision of how territory comes about initially, even before the further stabilisation of a territorial home. They argue that it does so when new matters and forms of expression arise. As the outline of the refrain makes clear (and as I have described above) this moment is fleeting, as the directional expressive claims to a centre quickly become dimensional markers of a bounded territory as it moves toward the second step, ‘home’. As such, the current discussion aims to signal those key aspects of Occupy London’s first territorial step, as these are given further depth and substance in the subsequent sections.

Applying the refrain to the occupation, I take this first step to be the ‘moments’ of taking space; not only the first entry of bodies and tents onto the site that would become that of the occupation, but the first signs of those features that would make this a territory of occupation, and of the Occupy movement. I was not present for the events of 15th October, but this was an event of near mythical importance to almost all of the people I interviewed and got to know in Occupy London. Below I briefly describe the way in which the pre-territorial organisational forms of an inchoate Occupy London led to the concrete taking of space that would mark the movement’s centre. I then focus on two key elements of Occupy’s space-taking: the refusal to leave, and a politics of locating a geography of Occupy’s critique.

It should be noted that while Deleuze and Guattari describe a ‘skip’ from ‘chaos’ to ‘order’, the taking of occupied space wrestles a territorial order not from chaos but from another order. As Clare Colebrook states,
Deleuze and Guattari’s political theory [...] precluded any simple sense of inside/outside of political territories. It is not the case that there is something like ‘a’ territory – marked out and defined space – that is then occupied: this is the myth of nations, or the notion that space and place have some intrinsic proper being. Rather, it is by way of occupation, or by filling a zone or moving across a field, that something like ‘a’ space or territory is formed. This primary nomadism always occurs in relation (and by way of contestation). (Colebrook 2015: 130)

This was made especially clear during Occupy Wall Street, when, under the banner ‘Decolonize Wall Street’, Native American activists pointed out that the land in question was already subject to occupation (Brady and Antoine 2013).

Before the occupation, St. Paul’s Churchyard was ordered as a site of particular social practices (tourists visiting the Cathedral, busy City office workers hurrying about between buildings, the near invisible routes of the area’s homeless), materialities (hard stone paving, brick walls, any dirt or litter cleared away quickly) and location types (shop, bank, office, church, road, pavement). Following Lefebvre (1991), we can see that the particular spatiality of that site gave substance to, and further re-inscribed, the dominant ‘spatial practices’ of the capitalist city: a site of circulation between moments of work, commerce and consumption. Furthermore, its geography of major financial institutions and the shops and lunchtime eateries that serve their workers, served to affirm the site as the territory of the City of London, and of financial capital more broadly. As such, Occupy’s taking of space asserted one territorial order against or within another; this marks the deterritorialisation of a city square and its reterritorialisation as something else.

Occupy London did not come from nowhere. It is worth offering a few words on the pre-territorial coming together of the occupation, as it reveals some significant features that would intensify further down the line. On 17th September 2011, the first day of Occupy Wall Street and four weeks before the establishment of the St. Paul’s camp, a failed first attempt at occupation had been made outside the Bank of England, organised through a Facebook page started by Spyro, who also initiated the successful call-out a month later. Despite gathering a contingent of organisers, mostly connected to the Spanish 15M, and turning up on the day, they decided to give up and go home when, on arriving at the location, there were no police or
journalists. As Spyro said, ‘When you organise a direct action, the first thing you look for is whether the police and media are there. If there’s no cops or journos, that’s not a good sign’. After starting a second Facebook group following the Spanish call for a Global Day of Action on 15th October, Spyro recalls that the level of interest online remained low until the viral spread of footage of violent police repression of Occupy Wall Street, including the pepper spraying of protesters, and the aggressive mass arrests on the Brooklyn Bridge on 1st October. These two events presage the importance for Occupy London’s territoriality of two dynamics: an antagonism against which to defend and hold space; and the presence of some communicative, aesthetic dimension, in need of relay and an audience.

In addition to this, a UK Uncut action on 9th October – ‘Block the Bridge, Block the Bill’, mobilised against the Health and Social Care Bill – brought together the various groups contributing to the planning of the next week’s occupation, including UK Uncut, a 15M group, and student activists. Kettled on Westminster Bridge, they held a ‘General Assembly’, a public meeting that would become an iconic feature of the Occupy camps (discussed at length in Chapter 6). However, those who were there still clearly distinguish between that and the ‘real’ beginning a week later. Joe says ‘that assembly was great, but as many people will tell you, as soon as Occupy started you went: No, this is really different’. Certain features of Occupy were beginning to gather on the bridge, but these were only embryonic. While there is a certain territoriality to these events, from the pseudo-territories of online spaces, to the loosely networked and temporary organising spaces which gathered the various energies that would later converge, the first taking of actual space represents an authentic first moment for Occupy, as the gathering of Occupy London as any kind of formation at all was inextricably connected to that territory.

The establishment of an occupation is connected not only to the taking but to the holding of space. It is this temporal extension in one place that distinguishes occupation from the territoriality of mobile marches or day-long rallies (Feigenbaum et al 2013). I take this refusal to leave or be moved along as an essential aspect of the expressive beginning of occupation; it communicates something of the emerging modes and subjectivities of the square. This feature is highlighted in Mehmet Döşemeci’s (2013) description of occupations as ‘social arrest’ – a slightly flippant opposition to social movement – where to stop is an action imbued with radical potential given the prescriptions of the capitalist city. He refers to Rancière’s (2001)
argument that contemporary capitalist control is underpinned by the command to circulate, itself a development from Althusser’s idea of interpellation, where the authority of ideology is exemplified in the moment of halting, as the police-man calls “Hey, you there!”; and one recognises oneself as the subject of the capitalist state.

In the accounts of my respondents, this is often compared to the conventional ‘A to B’ marches, ending in the willing dispersal of the crowd, releasing any pressure built up in the course of the demonstration. Many of these referred specifically to the march, on 15th February 2003, against the impending invasion of Iraq, as a point when lessons were learned:

‘We’ve had the demo, and we’ve heard the speeches and now all that’s left for us to do is to go home, have tea and watch the war happen on TV. I think people want more.’ Eric

While the two or so thousand people who attended on 15th October were answering the call to ‘Occupy the London Stock Exchange’, the attempt to remain could have been thwarted early on, or failed like the attempt a month earlier. Indeed, being pushed back from Paternoster Square, outside the Stock Exchange, to the area outside the Cathedral represented an early challenge to Occupy’s ability to propose a centre, and start to become itself. Again, the role of the police was significant. Not only did they kettle the demonstrators in the area that would become the site of the occupation, but their incursions and assaults reinforced the holding of space as an expressive mode of resistance. This had an immediate quality; bodily and affective before it was tactical. It is worth quoting one participant at length for his colourful depiction of those tensions at the border:

‘The police were [...] just pushing in, trying to get everyone to kick off, while we were having these amazing assemblies. Luckily there were experienced people [...] instantly using the human mic to say ‘Don’t react to the police. Ignore them, turn your back and sit down. Don’t let them instigate violence’. We shouted to the people at the back who were starting to get quite pissed off at the riot police – full gear – pushing in. It was a brilliant way of using nonviolence, to turn your back. It’s brave because the hairs are going on the back of your neck because they might grab you or hit you, but it works. So the police tried to push in three times: twice in the day, once
at night. But people didn’t react and didn’t kick off, and as a result we held the space. ‘Joe

The taking of space outside St. Paul’s Cathedral was characterised not only by filling a space with bodies (Dyer Witherford 2012) but by a series of expressive forms of action. This included the first chants of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, the use of the People’s Mic as a means for group communication, the first real General Assembly. These would expand in the coming days to constitute the dimensional space of the occupation, reinforced with banners, fly-posted statements and more. Perhaps the most significant expressive – and aesthetic – feature of Occupy was the tent. While tents would come to provide the crucial technology and imagery for the ‘home’ of occupation, their use at this first moment was almost flag-like, marking a new centre and announcing this as a site of the emerging, extending Occupy phenomenon, of which the tent was already emblematic. This relied on the collective acts of all those individuals that brought tents that day, and many of the participants in this research turned up to that demonstration with their tents. Comparing this with some of the later failed occupations attempted by Occupy London (discussed later in this chapter), this stands out as a moment in which participants had a real sense of optimism regarding the potential of this occupation, or at least that day. While these arrived as the individual possessions and living quarters of particular people, once pitched on the city street, they announced a first fragile step of territory.

This act of locating particular sites as targets of a politicising claim is a second important aspect of space taking. Pickerill and Krinsky (2012: 280) have stated that a key element of Occupy’s spatial practice was ‘to identify the geography of capitalism’, articulating the symbolic significance of particular places. Developing this, they say that occupation sought to ‘[force] society to recognise that capitalist accumulation happens in certain places, and that these places can be named, located and objected to’ (ibid: 281). Martin (2003, 2012) has developed the concept of ‘place frames’ as a geographically-oriented extension of the collective action frames of social movements. Among his typology of particular types of place frame, he names ‘diagnostic place frames’ as the collective understandings of how particular places relate to the problems and ills being challenged by movements and campaigns. Occupy London – and the occupation movements more broadly – reflected a series of place-based diagnoses, pointing to the institutions,
headquarters, and territorial dominions of the ‘one percent’: the financial institutions that had overseen the crisis, the wider financial and banking sector, and the politicians whose connections to the City created a nexus of unaccountable power. This relied not only on what the assembled demonstrators said about the role of financial institutions and practices in the financial crisis (now being mobilised as an excuse for austerity cuts), but on non-verbal expressive forms that brought Occupy here.

This is not unproblematic. It is certainly true that Occupy London contained a strong anti-capitalist current that recognised the structural and disaggregated nature of contemporary capital, and the inherently hard-to-locate processes through which it operates. But Occupy’s politics-in-place was about locating the hubs of networked power, be that corporate, political or economic power (frequently all of these of course). While the ‘one percent’ might often have named something like ‘interests’ or ‘forces’ that are more of a dynamic than a set of individuals or institutions, it was also about the authorship of social injustice. As one Occupier put it in a meeting, reflecting on Occupy’s role in locating: ‘You can’t smash something unless you know where it lives [...] That’s a powerful thing. To identify what’s going wrong you need to have some authorship and ownership: Those bastards are in that building there’. This echoes another phrase heard repeatedly in the meetings and communications of Occupy: ‘these people have addresses!’. Occupy sought to highlight the very concrete presence and whereabouts of those that were the targets of its criticism. While this mode of location and exposure was an important approach for Occupy, it reveals future potential limitations. It was a potent threat, but it is unclear what kind of intervention this proposes; it was never a tactic of ongoing blockades, pickets or interruptions of production. The absence of these was an early suggestion that Occupy London’s located critique might prove especially good at casting critical light on particular institutions and social ills, but less good at directly challenging these.

The taking of space – a first territorial step – was achieved through the expressive practices of an inchoate collectivity who refused to leave, and in so doing announced a City of London square outside London’s most famous cathedral as a site of occupation, of the Occupy movement, and of its located critique of inequality and financial capitalism. I have shown this as an emerging form, to be given depth (and dimension) in the following section on the stabilising of an occupation ‘home’. I
have also highlighted the taking of space as a distinct moment in Occupy London, while also maintaining its inseparability from the longer unfolding of territory’s process.

4.4 The ‘home’ of occupation

As the protest camp form stabilised and settled into the square beneath St. Paul’s, the emerging features mentioned above, and others, gave dimensional depth to a new territoriality. Arriving for the first time at the camp, I was taken aback by what appeared to be the near total repurposing of the square. Entering from the North-East corner, by St. Paul’s Tube station, I was met with the scene of protest camp in full swing, and the brisk pace of my steps – habituated at that point to a London rhythm – were stopped by the need to take it all in. My gaze moved from one unexpected thing to the next.

The camp extended in an L-shape around two sides of the cathedral, taking up most of the open square and running along the pedestrianised side of the church. The wide walkways were pushed back into narrower thoroughfares by the advancing spread of tents, the tent being the newly dominant form in the square. Almost two hundred of them (though their numbers rose and fell with the ebb and flow of arrivals), in all colours and varying states of repair, were pitched across the site. In the absence of soft ground to peg into, the tents were duct taped to the pavement, with guy ropes pulled taut and tied to anything firmly held down. Blue tarpaulins were stretched out against the elements. Large open fronted tents - provided by Climate Camp activists and individual donors, or sourced from army goods shops – bore signs announcing their function: the ‘Information’ tent with its large whiteboard listing the day’s activities and requests for help; the ‘Star-books’ free library tent with a growing collection of donated books on rickety shelves; the ‘Tea Tent’ providing hot drinks, occasional music and a seemingly permanently ensconced retinue of tea-drinkers (and in later days heavy drinkers); the large ‘Tent City University’ marquee, with its busy schedule of talks, workshops and film screenings; the always popular kitchen tent, queues of eager diners waiting, bowl in hand. A well-organised network of short paths ran between the tents allowing for a flow of people through the camp. Then there were the banners, posters, stickers,
slogans and daubings that covered the pillars of the street’s stone colonnade, as well as tent sidings and the sheets strung between posts and trees. The clean lines and flat polished surfaces of the square were now occupied indeed by strident political statements, a new softer and tattering materiality, and a social practice that marked it out as distinct: circles of people locked in debate; large general meetings and assemblies; chants and the echo-effect of the ‘People’s Mic’; the arcane hand signals of the consensus decision making process. Alongside this, the clear evidence that this was a living space: a production line in the kitchen, peeling, chopping, washing up; a relay of recycling and bin disposal; a queue at the portable toilet. The police, journalists and now-redirected tourist cameras announced, if it wasn’t already obvious, that something was afoot.

This was the home of Occupy London. Regarding this step in the territorial refrain, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 343) state that ‘home’ is produced when we ‘draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre, to organize a limited space’, and that this contains ‘the germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do’. Importantly, then, this embedding and bounding is associated with getting something done, in this case the project of Occupy London made possible by the occupation. One example of territoriality used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 348) is that of the brown stagemaker, or bower bird, which constructs a nest that is a home in the sense of an inhabited site of liveability, but is also – even primarily – expressive, communicating the artistic project of the stagemaker’s territorial attraction of a mate. This appreciation of the intermingling of expressiveness, liveability and a purpose of action usefully clarifies the stabilising features of the occupation.

The central importance of expression to the Occupy camp is illustrated by its prominence as an issue in the movement’s early days. On my first night staying at Finsbury Square, the main discussion of its General Assembly was about how to decide which signs, placards, and banners could be put up, and where. It was agreed that any larger banners which might dominate the visual landscape would need collective consensus, while smaller placards in the interior of the camp and amongst the smaller tents were a matter of individual discretion. Meanwhile, at the St. Paul’s camp there were regular discussions about possibly removing the prominent ‘Capitalism is Crisis’ banner. In both cases, the concern was that the dominance of certain expressive surfaces – banners whose mode of expression was both communicative and more generally stylistic – might undermine the ability of
the camp to accommodate the many different claims and ideological positions gathered in occupation, and fundamental to what Occupy was at that time; this was about inhabitation. It was also about the task-at-hand of a camp seeking to attract and welcome the wide constituency of the imagined ‘99 percent’.

Deleuze and Guattari also note how home is a terrain in which particular normative customs are gathered together, or distributed: ‘The _nomos_ as customary, unwritten law is inseparable from a distribution of space, a distribution in space. By that token it is an _ethos_, but the ethos is also an Abode’ (1987: 344). This sense that a particular organisation of life is territorial – is itself a territory, even – is useful in highlighting how this second moment of Occupy London’s territoriality was also the gathering of Occupy London itself as an identifiable and particular ‘common ground’ of practices; its embedding in particular localised arrangements. In the previous step of the refrain, it barely made sense to talk about Occupy London as a coherent formation of any sort, but through the settling of home this begins to make sense.

Several participants in this research referred to the occupation as a home. On some level, this surely refers to the more conventional use of the term. This is a concept also important to some social movement literature, as a place of familiarity and stability in an unsettlingly mobile world (Duyvendak 2011), as the locus of a sentimental attachment, or as somewhere set apart from a hostile outside, for practising mutual support and developing social bonds (Juris 2008; hooks 1990). But it is significant that not one person referred to it as ‘my home’, but always as ‘our home’, an indication of the occupation’s importance for an emerging collective project. Furthermore, unlike these more conventional descriptions, the home of Occupy London was not necessarily a place of comfort and familiarity. Rather, it was a site in tension with its surroundings, and whose alterity was central to the positive features of Occupy London’s project, while at the same time producing features that were more equivocal, odd and even damaging to the movement. It is to this complex alterity of the occupation home that I now turn.

### 4.4.1 Home and heterotopia

In order to hone in on this ‘otherness’ of the occupation home, I turn to Michel Foucault’s (1984) concept of ‘heterotopia’. This is not to turn away from the central
ordering dynamic of Delueze and Guattari’s refrain, but rather to explicitly focus on the particularities of how its stabilising moment of home operated through staging a conflict over what belonged in the square. The concept of heterotopia contains particular sensitivities – to alterity, oddness and ambivalence – that are absent in the account of the refrain, but it is also broadly compatible with the features of the refrain’s second step. Foucault’s description of heterotopias that ‘presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable’ (1984: 7) could almost be referring to a Deleuze-Guattarian home, between the marking and attenuation of boundaries. The occupation ran counter to its surrounding in multiple ways. This produced frictions which mark the defining qualities of occupation space. However, as the account below shows, while these heterotopic qualities were central to the expressive dimension of the camp, the challenge to notionally ‘public’ space, and the housing of accelerated social processes – each an axis of Occupy’s critical and progressive proposal – they also produced an alterity that was more strange than productive, and at times even damaging to the explicit project of the Occupiers. It is important to retain this sense of ambivalence, which ‘heterotopia’ captures.

A term original to the field of anatomy, a heterotopia is in that sense defined by being out of place; a tissue or body part found elsewhere on the body than where it typically belongs. Foucault’s application of this concept and metaphor began in *The Order of Things* (1970) with a passing reference to linguistic heterotopias that produce a contradictory ‘unthinkable space’ (1970: xvii) – the otherwise-worlds of literature – but he gives the concept a fuller treatment in ‘Of other spaces’ (1984 [1967]) which moves this otherwiseness into matters of concrete geography and located social life. This was part a ‘cartographic’ turn in Foucault’s work, as he moved to the mapping out of the localised strategic and institutional unfolding of power and resistance (Beckett et al. 2016). In this social-geographic arena, he proposes heterotopia as an alternative to utopia, where the latter invests excessively in an impossible fantasy of liberation from inescapable power relations. Foucault insists on the need for necessarily compromised experimentation amidst the real conditions of the world; turning away from unreal utopias toward heterotopias that are *actually localisable*.

A heterotopia is an ‘elsewhere’, defined by a quality of otherness. It stages a tension of belonging. The examples Foucault gives are telling: the ‘spaces of crisis’
created in traditional societies for profanities such as menstruation or nascent adolescence; deviant spaces such as the prison and psychiatric ward; the cemetery banished to the outskirts of the modern city. The cemetery, Foucault says ‘came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place’ (1984: 6). These heterotopic spaces house, from a place interior and exterior to the wider social order, that which does not belong: the forbidden, expelled or intolerable. As such, they unsettle, confuse, and exist in a friction. Finally, the oppositional territory of the heterotopia is characterised by ambivalence and complexity, with multiple convergences and entanglements: they are ‘something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (Foucault 1984: 3). This sense that a heterotopia is ambiguous – that it advances things which are not possible in dominant socio-spatial arrangements while at the same time being compromised by its alterity – is important for my discussion of the occupation, and I return to Foucault’s words on this as they illuminate particular features.

The concept of heterotopia has had some treatment in the work on social movement spaces, including some of the academic accounts of protest camps (Feigenbaum et. al 2013; Hetherington 1998, 1999; Beckett et al. 2016). However, this has been characterised by an excessive focus on the productive, radical alterity of heterotopia. A particularly influential working of the concept comes from Kevin Hetherington (1997; 1999), whose work moves from an analysis on the significance of other-places in the development of modernity (Hetherington 1997), to the superficially quite different case of the spaces taken over, repurposed, lived in and defended by 1990s activist subcultures, from the anti-roads protests to the New Age Travellers (Hetherington 1999). While Hetherington often insists, rightly, on the complex and ambiguous alterity of heterotopias, his actual accounts reveal a recurring seduction to focusing only on the progressive, even world-historical features of heterotopia.

This is in part indicated in Expressions of Identity (Hetherington: 1998), where heterotopia is a secondary concept alongside the more prominent idea of ‘utopics’, which he develops from Louis Marin (1984). This, he says, is a ‘spatial play whereby a utopian outlook on society and the moral order that it wishes to project, are
translated into practice through the attachment of ideas about the good society onto particular places’ (Hetherington 1998: 123); it is a rendering spatial of self-consciously utopian or progressive politics. He retains a sense of the alterity of these arrangements – talking for example about how New Age Travellers reconstitute the English countryside as a social commons and mystical territory through juxtaposing this against consumer and conservative uses of the space – but the deliberate acts and agency of the activists remains centre-stage. This mis-step is enhanced by the fact that he begins with the identity of those producing the space, rather than the way that the space goes about reconstituting and redistributing the individuals and collectivities within. Hetherington’s elision of heterotopia and utopics risks missing the compromised ambiguity that heterotopia suggests. This is not to say that part of the heterotopic home of occupation did not entail vital manifestations of Occupy’s critical project. The tension staged by the camp – the articulation of an other-square – was a crucial intervention that catalysed the relay of images of the camp, the critique of public space it enacted, and the acceleration of social processes within the camp. Below these are accounted for well, but I retain an eye on even the more unappealing out-of-place features.

Beckett et al (2016) have signalled the limitations of Hetherington’s view of heterotopias as ‘counter-hegemonic’, and have instead rightly emphasised a certain ‘wrongness’ – and a related challenge to sense and sense-making – as key. However, they too go on to focus on features that have a certain utility as political communications that can be readily read as such. It is perhaps a natural tendency for scholars sympathetic to their movements to emphasise a level of harmony that is often lacking amidst the messiness of life in a protest camp. My account gives deeper ethnographic substance to this ‘wrongness’, and I develop an account of the progressive and troubling features of the other-place of occupation.

4.4.2 Heterotopic distortions

The Occupy camp’s heterotopic quality is first hinted at in one respondent’s account of the taking of Finsbury Square. Joe recalls,
I mean, I saw Finsbury Square being taken. A van turned up and they were just frisbeeing out these tents... Frisbeeing them out, and they were just popping up. It was amazing to watch, like a mould growing.’ Joe

This use of the delightfully heterotopic metaphor of blooming mould to describe the popping up of the small green tents that first marked the space of a new occupation points to an out-of-placeness, which was fundamental, not least to the tent itself. The tent, after all, is a mobile technology for living somewhere that living does not ordinarily occur. This dimension is present even in the countryside – the history of modern camping is in part about creating ‘other’ spaces, running counter to the direction of modernity (Frenzel 2014; Feigenbaum et al. 2013) – but this is intensified in a city centre square, outside a towering cathedral. This is not yet the moment of home, but shows the first taking to space to present emergent heterotopic qualities; literally directional along the trajectories of ‘frisbeeing’ tents, only to embed and become dimensional later.

This deepening of heterotopic qualities can be seen in participants’ accounts of spaces distorted by occupation:

‘It’s almost an unbelievable space. It feels smaller without the camp. Different dimensions. It’s amazing how big a space can feel if you put two hundred tents inside it! Back then there might have been very different moods in different parts of the camp: a serious meeting in one part; you walk down and there’s someone on the piano; then someone drunk out their head; then another serious conversation, people coming up with a plan; some nice talking going on; then walking past others arguing.’ Ian

Ian has a neat sense here of how ‘different dimensions’ were the result of the new moods and behaviours now distributed in the square. Several other participants refer to something like this. Walking through a post-eviction Finsbury Square with James, who had lived in the camp for several months, he suddenly stopped and exclaimed: ‘It’s amazing to think all that stuff happened here, that all those tents were piled into this tiny square... it felt huge’. Both of these statements make a similar shift between talk of scale and dimensions, to the practices taking place within, which seem to exceed the possibility of the ‘normally’ functioning city square they now faced. Described in more detail by Ian, it is clear that these are practices
which did not fit with the dominant use of the space before or after the occupation. Significantly, these are by no means all explicitly political activities. There are arguments, drunken disorder and music. Nevertheless each of these are markers of a tension surrounding what belonged in that space: they are all deviant uses of the street.

4.4.3 Progressive alterity

The wrongness of the occupation was of central importance to its explicit political project, and to its significance as a form of located critique. The first dimension of this was the communicative and aesthetic power that came from a stark tension with its surroundings. The occupation camp created a visually arresting image, which could accompany the dissemination of news of the movement. As the following quotes show, there was a high level of awareness that an aesthetic tension was significant in the relaying of images of the movement:

‘We had everything we needed at St. Paul’s in terms of symbolism. We had the London Stock Exchange... and that bloody church!’ Rosa

‘You had this amphitheatre […] And then the backdrop, the images. I think we wouldn’t have had so many photos taken of the camp if the image wasn’t so dramatic. So there are so many different dimensions to it.’ Lucy

‘I think location is super important. It’s the stage on which the action plays.’ Anna

Anna’s formulation, above, clearly delineates two sides of a diad: the ‘action’ and its ‘stage’. In truth, there was a more complex dialogical dynamic at play, within which the significance of St. Paul’s Cathedral in particular was considerable. By the time Occupy London began, images of occupation encampments from Cairo to New York were a regular presence in the news. To take a phrase first used by Paul Mason in his popular book on the 2011 uprisings, these images contributed to a sense that it was ‘kicking off everywhere’ (Mason 2012); indeed that this ‘it’ was an entanglement of connected phenomena. Asserting this London square, and St. Paul’s Cathedral, as a site of this global movement’s ‘other’ geography was
provocative and jarring. While urban protest camps always unsettle, the stark juxtaposition was all the greater in camping alongside the Baroque columns and iconic dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral, a building of impressive architecture, and a special place in English culture. The markers of the occupation — its tents, slogans, forms of gathering, and everyday life — connected the events outside St. Paul’s to those of New York, Oakland, Madrid, Athens, and even further afield.

This was not necessarily about the rational arguments of the movement, but rather about images that demanded circulation. DeLuca and Peeples (2002) have argued that social reality is increasingly constituted through the intertextual play of images consumed via screens: the computer, smartphone, television and newspaper front page. Noting Habermas’s (1985) concern that technologies like television would undermine the integrity of the ‘public sphere’ — as a political space of rational deliberation between ideally equal speakers — they agree that new modes of information tend not toward words and considered, rational deliberation, but toward images, quick impressions, and emotions. Rather than lamenting this shift from public sphere to what they call the ‘public screen’ (in fact they doubt the reality of the former as anything more than a metaphorical ideal), they insist that this must be worked with: ‘the public screen is an unavoidable place of politics’ (DeLuca and Peeples 2002: 136). They propose that activists engage in ‘image events’ (also in DeLuca 1999) that use this dominant desire for arresting images and sensationalism to create initial interest, and thus a space for other, less sensational movement claims. The heterotopic friction between St. Paul’s Cathedral and the camp below was an ongoing ‘image event’ that produced interest, and the circulation of images, and that commanded those viewing it to begin asking why this movement was articulated here. This catalysed the power of an occupation that operated as an ‘auratic happening’ (Kerton 2012: 303) and a ‘machine of resonance generation’ (Gordillo 2011: 2)

The second positive effect of the camp’s heterotopic qualities was in challenging the notionally ‘public’ nature of the space, by actually using if for the collective self-managed projects of gathering people; something that the discourse of public space suggests, but in fact does not deliver, and even forbids. On being challenged regarding the significance of the camp’s location and notional ‘accessibility’, Rachel starts, ‘It was a public space…’, then pauses, thinks for a moment and clarifies, ‘well, it became a public space because of the encampment’. Leaving for now the
more complex question of occupation as ‘public’, and the wider critique of such a liberal democratic concept, Rachel’s statement neatly marks the very shift that many Occupiers mention, from considering that location a public space to the recognition that there were fundamental limits to this. That this was a privately-owned patch of land where one could not in fact assemble indefinitely and express the free will of the assembled was experienced as a genuine revelation by many participants. As one member of the short-lived Radical Mapping Working Group says, regarding the impossibility of entering the Stock Exchange site on the first day, ‘the sudden transformation of Paternoster Square from public to private reflects in fast-forward mode the creeping process of the privatization of urban space’ (Köksal 2012: 447).

There are problems with this celebration of a ‘truer’ public space. We should retain a critical awareness that contemporary ‘public space’ entails precisely such a dynamic of prohibiting certain activities while encouraging others (Harvey 2012; Newman 2013). Transforming the square into a site of political meetings and education, and the ambitious task of, in the General Assembly, producing a constituent body of the 99 percent (to which I turn in detail in the Chapter 5), was an incursion of the political into that location where politics did not apparently belong. In this sense, it is not just that it became ‘public’, but that it was \textit{politicised} in such a way that proposed another politics. The currency of the language of ‘public space’ in Occupy London is one result among many of the fact that it mobilised people with no history of involvement in radical politics. While these came to the camp with a generalised sense of the intolerability of things as they stood, they frequently articulated this, at first at least, with the dominant language of everyday liberal discourse (this dynamic is discussed in detail throughout chapter 6). Encountering the limits of this, and exposing the depoliticisation at the heart of the operation of ‘public’ space was an important politicising effect of occupation.

The third significant, productive feature of the occupation’s alterity was in housing newly dynamic forms of social organisation and interaction. Foucault says that one principle of the heterotopia is that it opens up ‘heterochronies’, that is other arrangements of time, that breaks with the otherwise given order of time: ‘The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time’ (1984: 6). The occupation was a site of acceleration: friendships and working relationships were entered into quickly; they also broke down as intensely; on arrival one could immediately enter into the kinds
of conversations that might be hard for some among old friends after a long night of drinking; within minutes one could go from a speculative “perhaps we could...” in a meeting, to forming a new working group to take the half-formed idea forward. Brock Cutler (2011) has focused on the way in which the occupation over time created the chance of encounters between people, and the possibility of serendipity, which could provide both the social dynamism that characterised Occupy, but also the personal enjoyment that could motivate this, and propel it onward. When Alain Badiou (2012: 35) says that the encampments create ‘the intensity of compact presence’, we can take that in two ways: on the one hand the immediate bodily and affective intensity that created the sense of an event for those participating; on the other, an organisational intensification of the processes of movement, as these ‘political laboratories’ (Della Porta and Mattoni 2014: 35) could intensify experimentation due to prolonged contact. This heterochrony of the occupation had another, quite different pole: the slowing down that was foundational to the occupation’s refusal to budge from a site typically given over to circulation. Indeed, this was a necessary condition of the acceleration described above; in a neatly heterotopic paradox, we stopped to speed up.

It is important to note that this social acceleration was also the acceleration of new identities, connected to one another and to the site, in such a way that would prove problematic for the desire to move past the fixity of that camp, organised like that. The role of social movement spaces in catalysing identity is noted in parts of the literature: Roseneil (2000) points to the way that women were transformed into ‘Greenham women’ through prolonged activity at the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp, deeply entangling their senses of self with a collective and its space; Della Porta and Mattoni (2014) point to the importance of movement spaces for the development of collective identities (Melucci 1989) in the alter-globalisation movement; Nicholls et al. (2013: 4) state that ‘Places shape political subjectivities of people [...] Within locales people form “epistemic communities”’. In the case of Occupy London there was a strong sense that the dynamic catalysis of the camp had over time gathered Occupy London as an increasingly identitarian form, connected to that site. The following quotes indicate as much.

‘It’s kind of our birthplace, isn’t it? It’s a really deep human thing to go back to your roots, especially when you want to do something important or difficult.’ Vicky
‘Being continuous in time, [the camp] allowed for the creation of some sort of community to sustain it and keep the space... the sense of identity with that space. It started to become our home; something we felt we belonged to, and it belonged to us.’ Lucy

‘After the eviction of St. Paul’s we wandered around for ages. Eventually we headed to Finsbury Square. That felt really surreal [...] It felt like this nomad community that was being moved away and not really knowing where to go, and going to the only place that felt like home. It was really strange.’ Lucy

Lucy’s reference to a ‘birthplace’ is particularly evocative of the production of a new and enduring sense of collectivity, while Lucy’s words, in her first quote, nicely capture the mutual belonging between a place and its people. The final quote, remembering the night of the St. Paul’s eviction, says that only another Occupy London camp ‘felt like home’, indicating a potentially concerning retreat into the now familiar oddness of the occupation (understandable as this was after a traumatic eviction). The above points to a pitfall of the territorial bounding of homes and identities, as it risks closing off the connections and openness to future rearrangements (a problem to which I return in the final section of the chapter).

This matter of spaces implicated in the entrenching of limiting patterns offers a useful reflection regarding the type of movement home that Occupy London produced. In my first discussion of a Deleuze-Guattarian conception of territory, I noted the analysis of the spaces of the alter-globalisation movement as plateaux (Chesters 2007; Chesters and Welsh 2006a; 2006b), based on their facilitation of the creative convergence and combination, taken as the lifeblood of that mobile, networked movement. In the case of the alter-globalisation movement this is a useful framing, emphasising as it does the vital role of convergences in intensifying the resources of resistance. However, it matters that these were mostly short term space-events centring on the social fora and summit protests, which acted as a sort of ‘top-up’ (as one of my interviewees, Eric, described his involvement in summit-hopping) for a movement whose dominant spatial mode was often one of disaggregation. This was less the case in Occupy London. I have shown that the occupation, particularly early on was a site of dynamism, potential and connection – a plateau – but as the empirical examples above show, this became a movement that was, to a great extent, about that space. This represented a far more limited
form of movement space, no longer intensifying but closing down the possibility of extension.

### 4.4.4 Things get weird

Heterotopias destabilise the world, but not in such a way that is itself linear and able to be directed along the lines of something like strategy or tactics. It introduces contingency into the present, producing 'intermediary spaces between that which is and that which is not, or at least “not yet”, but could be’ (Beckett at al 2016: 7). Similarly the occupation home entailed misdirections and messiness. If it was a rupture in the order of things, this did not necessarily mean a step in a progressive direction. It was a more compromised ‘elsewhere’. While this uncertain, even troubling alterity was a feature of all Occupy London spaces, I now turn my focus toward the Finsbury Square camp, where this played out in especially stark terms.

From very early on, the Finsbury Square camp was marked by difference not only from its surroundings around it but from St. Paul’s. It was smaller, and a little out of the way, compared to the tourism and consumer hub of St. Paul’s. Finsbury Square had a large lawn when the camp was first established. This lent it a certain softness (not least for plunging tent pegs in the ground) and people staying at St. Paul’s even referred to it as Occupy’s ‘country retreat’. It was quieter too. Set back from the road, it was closed on most of its perimeter by railings and trees, and had a clear point of entrance. While one could casually drift toward and through the St. Paul’s camp, never entirely sure at what moment you were ‘in’ the camp, entering Finsbury Square was more abrupt. From very early on it was a place that attracted a good deal of interest at the perimeter – office workers talking with Occupiers at the Info desk and so on – but much less of the coming and going of people that buoyed the energy of St. Paul’s.

With time, and particularly when the grass became mud, after days and weeks of rain and plodding feet, this other-space became increasingly unattractive. The ground was a bog and one could only manoeuvre through the square by teetering across precariously-placed wooden pallets and the odd cardboard sheet. Tents were spattered with mud and many of the painted signs were sodden, their colours running. This new, wet, muddy materiality came to undermine the ‘utopian’ desire
for the camp to be attractive, fulfilling the movement’s heavy valorisation of ideas of accessibility and openness, in keeping with a desire to act as a point of convergence for the amassing ‘99 percent’. Instead a slow process of neglect and decay meant that while it continued to be a home for committed activists, the dominant tone became broadly negative, by the estimation of almost everyone participating in this research. This was material and aesthetic, but it was accompanied by the increasing concentration of anti-social practices, as the square became the site of all-day drinking and arguments amidst the mess.

Several participants in this research spoke very vividly about the strangeness of that place:

‘I’ve never been in a war really - not a real war - but it felt like a warzone, didn’t it?’ Vicky

‘It was like that scene in Apocalypse Now when he’s tripping and he’s going through the trenches and there’s Jimi Hendrix music playing and it’s all dark and completely feral and insane and full on.’ Joe

‘Entering it was like going into a ghost town of ghouls and desperation and aggression. It was the last place you would want to be. It was dark.’ Anna

The allusions here are interesting in their common presentation of an alterity experienced as negative (no other-place of emancipatory democratic participation for example), but also in their common reflection of how these peoples’ experiences brought strange other worlds into the square: the warzone; the cinema and the acid trip; the haunted world of ghosts. These seem closer to articulating Foucault’s idea of the dynamic between utopias and heterotopias, which he says is epitomised by the mirror, housing both the illusory non-place of the reflections and its own concrete territoriality (Foucault 1984: 4). It is worth noting that these descriptions of Finsbury Square are among the most vivid uses of metonymy and metaphor in all the interviews in this research, perhaps an indication of the degree to which experiences of this oddly heterotopic place called for certain poetic, suggestive modes of description.

On my own arrival at Finsbury Square, I was struck by the circulating rumour that people apparently had trench foot. An early field note is already attuned to the
question of belonging and the odd juxtaposition between this ailment of the occupying body, and its surroundings.

‘I got back to camp to find Jack with his feet up, white and puffy and damp. He said he had trench foot. I’ve heard other people talking about trench foot, though others say [it’s] just bad athlete’s foot from the wet. Still, you hear ‘trench foot’ and your mind spirals off into weird trajectories, making unexpected connections in the mind between the camp and disparate times, places and contexts – the first word that comes to my mind is “attrition”.’

Field diary. 24th October 2011

One could hardly imagine trench foot more out of place than in the financial district of twenty-first century London. It seemed to have come unstuck from its time and place and emerged with so much else amidst the odd and contradictory, dynamic and slow, confluences of Occupy. Foucault states that ‘the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (1984: 6). The insistence on potentially multiple incompatibilities cautions against a focus on a simple duality between a dominant space and a sort of ‘rebel’ space.

These more negative features undermined the explicit projects of Occupy London, both as an attractant to others, and as an organising space for the already mobilised. The increasing relocation of key organising meetings to local pubs and cafes was in part down to the cold, but also responded to the harsher, stranger atmosphere that settled in the camps that winter. People increasingly refused to go to Finsbury Square altogether. This reveals a certain limit to the heterotopic home as the basis for the kind of extensive movement project Occupiers claimed to want. This was no real basis for sustained, located action, organising, or the kind of life that could include any but the most hardy and desperate. Paul Routledge (2005, 2013) has developed the concept of ‘grassrooting’, by which global networks of resistance are produced and made long-lasting through their embedding in particular locations, and somewhat sustainable local networks and institutions, that increase collective capacity and reduce the ‘cost’ of action. The city squares of central London were not a great basis for this in the first place, in the absence of any real local social or material infrastructure beyond the shops and offices that were closed every evening and most weekends. The camps sought to produce new
forms of locality in these places, but the intensification of the more concerning features of the camp revealed basic problems.

The occupation was characterised by ambiguity and polyvalence. That this is a wider truth about the Occupy movement writ large was illustrated one afternoon in early 2014, as I sat in a casual meeting between participants in Occupy London and a small contingent from Occupy Wall Street. The conversation quickly moved into a discussion of the common terrain of our respective camps and our experiences there. This went beyond the common banners and the ‘prefigurative’ practices in the square, and into a discussion of how you attach tents to the floor, how it felt to sleep in tents awaiting eviction or searches, the experience of a movement whose urban centre location meant the arrival and involvement of significant numbers of street homeless people. As one side spoke, the other nodded, laughed and rolled eyes in recognition of a common ground. The common experience of Occupy between different sites was therefore associated not just with shared decision making practices and banner discourse, but was embedded in bodily and material lived experience in the occupation.

The second step of Occupy London’s territorial refrain was about the settling-in of a home. What should have been clear throughout my discussion here is that what characterises this step of home is not comfort and familiarity, but a certain tendential stabilisation of the salient features that characterised the occupation camp. I have made use of the language of ‘heterotopias’ in order to signal the ways in which the home of Occupy was defined by juxtaposition and tension in spatial arrangements and practices. This certainly included the ways in which participants used the square to advance the political programme of Occupy and the internal strength of the movement, but it also entailed those less explicitly political aspects, such as materialities and moods. At times these could enhance the movement’s claims, at others even undermine them, but they were nonetheless the expressions of an increasingly territorialising Occupy London.

4.5 Beyond the boundary: opening up the occupation

I now turn to the third step of Deleuze and Guattari’s refrain, the opening up of the territory onto new territorialities and arrangements. This is the creative edge of a
radical territory in motion, extending the forms and forces gathered in the bounded home. This recognises a certain danger to stabilising boundaries, which close down the connections outward that extend the capacities of the territorial assemblage; the opening up of territory is an opening up of new possibilities. As I have shown above, the heterotopic moment of home was fundamental in shaping Occupy London as a critical intervention and base of radical politics, while also containing more equivocal elements. However, this was not supposed to be it. Rather, there was an ongoing desire to transcend the fixity of the camp, and move Occupy’s critique and practice into other, newer spaces, geographical and social, concordant with an expansive project seeking to engage ‘the 99 percent’. Those moments that embodied this desire mark an important creative trajectory of the movement.

Despite this, there was also a strong tendency to stagnate in the moment of home, and an ultimate failure to really move past the moment of home. Given the ethic of moving the occupation along, which I outline in a moment, the inability to really think past the site of St. Paul’s and the occupation camp form (even, ironically, after the event of eviction, which could have demanded a creative redirection) indicates the reducing capacities of the Occupy moment. It should be clear from my account of this, that this is not simply a matter of the insufficient strategising of the already-mobilised Occupiers, but rather a symptom of the limitations and contradictions of Occupy.

4.5.1 ‘Occupy Everywhere!’: Occupy as extra-territorial

Central to the Occupy movement was a circulating discourse that affirmed the aspiration to move beyond the fixed site of particular encampments. This is expressed succinctly in the common slogan of ‘Occupy Everywhere!’ which circulated in Occupy sites in many locations. In his short ethnographic account of Occupy Wall Street, Michael Taussig (2013: 3) notices a sign saying ‘Wall Street is everywhere, so we have to occupy everywhere’, indicating the sense that the distributed networks of power and domination against which Occupy mobilised necessitated a similar distribution of the occupation. The mobility of Occupy is further shown in the way the name was used. It was ‘Occupy X’, where the X could stand in for any place on the map and beyond. ‘Occupy Wall Street’ already had an
ambiguity between naming a concrete place to target and the more metaphorical use of ‘Wall Street’ to mean financial interests and even the market itself. Terms like ‘Occupy your mind’ and ‘Occupy love’, while maybe needing a bit more fleshing out, were an indication of this floating potential of Occupy and occupation. This sense that Occupy was a sort of extraterritorial force that necessarily transcended its location can be found in the reflections of London Occupiers on what Occupy was:

‘If we look in the dictionary ‘to occupy’ is to occupy a space, obviously. But the point of Occupy, and the reason that Occupy still exists […] is because Occupy is an idea – it is a concept – and if you get attached perhaps to the necessity of the singular symbol then you become inflexible.’ Bernie

‘I see Occupy as a good bug, like good bacteria. It just pops up here and there, you know, and whatever it does it’s usually good.’ Rosa

‘I see Occupy as a way of interpreting […] I guess in one way Occupy is an analysis.’ Stephanie

These words are a testament to a persistent understanding that Occupy is something mobile, emergent, and defying strict localisation: it is a concept, analysis and contagion. Another common term, found for example in the first pages of the first edition of *The Occupied Times*, was that Occupy was a ‘meme’, with its associated dynamic of viral dispersion. Taussig’s reflection on ‘Occupy Everywhere!’ echoes this sense of a movement beyond location: ‘It is a movement that seems to have come out of nowhere […] More than anything else it is an attitude, a mood, an atmosphere’ (Taussig 2013: 39). Craig Calhoun’s (2013: 6) assertion that occupation became ‘a desired state of being’ highlights participants’ internalisation of this *ethos* of occupation.

This expansive sense of what Occupy was, and what it might become, meant the problematisation, right from the start, of the occupation’s embeddedness in particular locations and situated relations. This is articulated in untypically Deleuze-Guattarian terms by one participant, whose participation in various alter-globalisation movement groupings in the early 2000s had included contact with certain Deleuzian ideas via readings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, key intellectual influences on that movement:
‘It wasn’t so much about this space, you know, being... it... In a way, the Occupy thing was deterritorialised, so actually the movement wasn’t simply in the square, but it was that mood that was around the country. What I was saying to people is that the Occupy movement isn’t simply here; it’s spread all over the place. That idea of deterritorialising it was something I was trying to pursue’ Eric.

This was part of a deeper sense that Occupy London had emerged from a moment of territorial mobility and should continue in this mode: two respondents referred to Occupy as a ‘dandelion moment’ (and another said it was a ‘daffodil moment’ but I think he was confused). In his words above, Eric fully attests to the desire to keep producing new territories, and move Occupy London into new sites, while elsewhere he confesses his frustration that ‘some people’s political horizons didn’t go beyond the camp; they thought that was it!’ Later he develops this further saying,

‘What I’d like to see is Occupy not simply being about a time and a place, but about an event which has no place, but is everywhere. You don’t have to come to the occupation. The occupation is where you work, where you study.’ Eric

This complemented the movement’s iconic slogan of ‘We are The 99 Percent’ (discussed at length in Chapter 5) and a sense that the points of antagonism from which Occupy emerged were basically everywhere. Coming good on these slogans meant not investing excessively in one or two city centre protest camps. Commenting during the first months of Occupy, Nick Dyer-Witheford rightly diagnosed this dilemma:

The press speculates on whether Occupy can last the winter. But the issue is not maintenance, it is movement – either containment as a waning signifier, slowly deserted by a briefly captured 24/7 media cycle, slipping into the various black holes yawning beneath an alternative urban lifestyle experiment, or expansion outwards. (Dyer-Witheford 2012: no pagination)

He also echoes Eric’s hope that this would entail the movement of ‘the occupation’ to workplaces, taking Occupy into the terrain of economic production, which would no doubt mark an escalation. The problem is put differently by Alain Badiou (2012)
who frames it in terms of the need to advance through different stages of the ‘riot’, a general term for localised insurrectionary activity that he understands as not yet historical or political (a longer engagement with this idea features in Chapter 6). Noting that the viral spread of the riot begins through imitation, he says ‘there must be a transition from extension by imitation to qualitative extension’ (Badiou 2012: 34), meaning the movement into not only new locations, but new institutions and types of social formation (new class groups, professions etc).

It is worth briefly pausing on these reflections regarding the value of extending the territory of occupation. Having gathered and nurtured a range of productive forces within the territorial ‘home’, the next step of boundary-breaching, to be of any use, must open up onto new possibilities that extend the emergent process and project of Occupy London in interesting, challenging directions. Eric’s suggestion of workplaces and places of education is a reminder that bringing Occupy to new terrains of economic and social life would represent a real qualitative intensification of the movement as a challenge to the neoliberal financial capitalist order against which it mobilised. These are places of economic production, work, the circulation of information and learning, and institutions associated with deeper-rooted social connections than those of a pop-up city centre protest camp. As I have shown, the camp was a vital movement territory, but it had its limits (not least in those heterotopic elements that undermined the ostensible project). Occupy London’s capacity to move into the refrain’s third step, then, is not just a matter of chasing novelty, or moving for the sake of it, but must be appraised in terms of the contribution to the extension of Occupy London’s politicising critique.

4.5.2 Attempts to transcend the camp

The ongoing desire to transcend the fixity of that camp was evidenced at various moments. In the early weeks and months of the occupation the sense of momentum and energy within the movement drove a series of activities to move the occupation, and Occupy, into new sites, opening up from the fixity of the camp, and using it as a base from which to extend. In the period immediately after the eviction of the main site at St. Paul’s the sense that Occupy’s critique was beyond
fixed territory meant that Occupiers sought to produce more mobile and nomadic forms of action to move the occupation on.

This included temporary outings that used the base of the camp for a range of demonstrations, direct actions and ‘teach outs’ where lectures, workshops and discussions moved across the city. Demonstrations frequently marched from the camp to a series of locations around central London, as Occupy articulated a constellation of institutions and forms of power which lay behind the political and economic domination of the one percent, in an extension of Occupy’s attempt to ‘identify the geography of capitalism’ (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012: 280), as discussed earlier. Common targets of marches and smaller guerrilla operations were the offices and headquarters of major financial institutions and institutions of political power on various scales, from local government and the London Assembly to the Houses of Parliament and the European Central Bank offices.

A striking example was the day of action to mark the 25th anniversary of the Big Bang, the sudden deregulation of financial markets by Margaret Thatcher’s government in 1986; an event seen by Occupy London as emblematic of the shady relationship between piratical financial practices and the neoliberal political project. On the day of the anniversary, 27th October, Occupy’s Tent City University organised a series of ‘teach-outs’ whereby the kind of educational discussion spaces that characterised so much activity in the occupation, would be produced in a series of locations connected to that event, and to the perceived inheritors of deregulated financial power. This began with around one hundred Occupiers boarding early morning trains to Canary Wharf, whose development is intimately connected to the Big Bang, to talk about the relationship between unregulated markets and the financial crisis of 2007-8. Led by a group of economists of various stripes, but opened to group discussions, this even attracted the contributions of a good number of the finance workers hurrying by. It brought the discourse, slogans, and arcane hand gestures of Occupy London into this new site, as an insistence that this place was implicated in the discussion at hand. From there, the mobile horde made it to the headquarters of Goldman Sachs for more discussion, where more people joined bringing banners and louder shouts. The final teach-out took place outside the Bank of England, and Royal Exchange, where journalist Polly Toynbee spoke to the now-several hundred people gathered. This series of events moved the practices of the occupied square into new territorialities. Following my use of the
‘refrain’ it was a moment when, having gathered the creative forces within the bounded territory of the occupation home, those forces could extend along trajectories that advanced Occupy London’s located challenge. Like this, the many teach-outs and demonstrations were brief takings of space to bring Occupy’s critique to the doorsteps of a growing and shifting network of targets. ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ banners and a couple of pop-up tents announced the temporary emergence of Occupy here.

More significant still was the opening up of further occupations. The first major occupation following St. Paul’s, and the only other lasting campsite, was that of Finsbury Square, which was as much about the need for more sleeping space as it was the self-consciously creative redirection of Occupy London’s capacities. But it marked a first, self-confident stepping-out of Occupy London onto a non-contiguous site that would nonetheless expand the occupation not through the growth of St. Paul’s (which would also have only led to escalated opposition from the Cathedral and City of London) but through the mounting of outposts, which themselves developed their own expressive modalities, functions and roles within the movement. Sam Halvorsen (2014) has noted that Occupy Finsbury Square came to focus more on questions of social reproduction, and the development of a community. In the later months there were ultimately unrealised attempts to develop the space into an eco-village, and in place of tents, wooden huts were erected across the site, for a more stable experiment in collective life. As one participant, Rob, puts it,

‘Finsbury was more of an example of “hey we can do this, we don’t need the system”, whereas St. Paul’s was more focused on fighting the system. We were more of an example and St Pauls was more of a battleground.’ Rob

All Finsbury-based Occupiers in this research say that this different focus and pace was made in large part down to Finsbury Square was the site of far less interest from journalists, visitors, and less of the dynamic protest organisation, than was St. Paul’s. As such this redirection it took was not entirely self-conscious or strategic, though it does reveal a certain flexibility to the occupation form. As I have shown above, with time Finsbury Square was the site of an intensification of many of the worst features of occupation, highlighting the fact that territorial extension also
meant unexpected redirections of Occupy, as the less useful heterotopic features also travelled along these trajectories.

The building occupations represented a substantive, self-confident territorial shift. The most significant of these was the Bank of Ideas, established in a large abandoned building belonging to Swiss investment bank UBS. I was trying to read by torch-light in my tent one night, when a friend came and tapped my tent: ‘We’ve got a building’ he said with a smile, ‘Come and help’. I spend half that night helping get the Bank of Ideas ready to open the next day: sweeping floors; boarding up stairwells; setting up computers. I was amazed to look around me as maybe one hundred people went about their many tasks, the building being transformed at a visible pace into a place fit for the activities that it would house. Organised as something of a social centre – with a busy schedule of talks and workshops and with much less emphasis placed on its role as a residence – this drew on new people who had not all been participating in Occupy up to then, but who were embedded in London’s squatter scene, with vast experience of opening buildings for collective use. This took Occupy’s language and critique inside (at least symbolically) the heart of the financial industry that was so central to Occupy London’s political claims; its occupation the subverting of its use from a den of the notional ‘problem’ to a space for critical education. Again, there were extremely pragmatic considerations at hand, with one of the instigators of the Bank of Ideas, Bernie, putting much of it down to the need for indoor space with the onset of winter. The undoubted importance of pragmatic concerns does not undermine the point, much as it does not necessarily matter that the people undertaking these territorial extensions do not narrate them in such terms. The sheer volume and variety of Occupy London’s relocations and translations reveals a generalised mode of action and capacity to extend, which is more important for the analysis here than the apparent rationale of its agents.

During this period two other major building occupations are worth noting: the squatting of Old Street Magistrate’s Court and its reterritorialisation as Occupy Justice/Occupied Justice, with a programme of ‘mock trials for the 1%’ (Londonist, 20th December 2011) took Occupy to both a new site and to a new sphere of social and civic life; while the occupation of an old primary school created the School of Ideas, a space expected to act as a vital base after the coming eviction of St. Paul’s
Eviction of the major sites was an important moment for this dynamic. One effect of eviction was an immediate uprooting of Occupy London from what had become its centre and home, catalysing to some degree the desire that the Occupy ethos be dispersed, and carried out in new ways and places (though as I show below the post-eviction period ultimately revealed the fact that the moment of creative extension was largely over). Participants have mixed feelings about the Occupy May actions that followed, three days of action that amounted to Occupy London’s first moments of heightened visibility following the eviction. Some see them as manifesting the existential panic that necessarily followed the loss of the camp. However, at least some aspects of Occupy May Day (1st May 2012) and ‘Meet the 1%’ (12th May 2012) were a means of creatively extending Occupy London’s situated problematisation of the flows of City power to new sites. The production of ‘Meet the 1%’ city maps presented dozens of new ‘targets’ for action, and protesters were encouraged to use these in a creative, mobile and disaggregated fashion. This was to provide a platform for autonomous actions on those days, but also provide a resource going forward, reimagining the city as a sort of battlefield. These maps reconfigured the Square Mile as a series of targets of as-yet-unrealised occupation.

‘We had that map, which was a really important document, pinpointing the powerhouses of capitalism: banks; oil companies; and all the other stuff.’
Ian

‘May 12th was a good example, producing a map of places and raising questions about what they do there. One really good thing about Occupy was making the financial system seem more accessible [...] pointing out that these buildings on the streets of London are part of that system. It makes it so tangible.’ Jesse

This shift from the concrete site of St Pauls Churchyard to a map that might enact a dynamic and developing de/re-territorialisation of the Square Mile and beyond into the site of as-yet-unplanned social action by unknown others, is noteworthy. So too is the way in which the open-ended nature of this ‘plan’ reveals, at least in part, a reinvigoration of an optimism and sense that this was a new moment for the 99
percent, to be enacted through new forms of occupation. The maps and days of action sought to create a platform for action in the hope of a new wave of the energy and forces that had produced Occupy London in the first place. The fact that this did not materialise was evidence of an ultimately terminal downswing for these kind of large-scale Occupy activities, and also perhaps indicated a certain spontaneism among those organising it (which I turn to in detail below).

In summary, Occupy London revealed from the very start the possibility of moving beyond the fixity of the occupation camp, and advancing along creative new territorial lines. From the very ethos of ‘Occupy Everywhere!’ and ‘Occupy X’, Occupy’s very mode of action implied a desire to advance its political critique through a certain mobility and extension. This was pursued through the creative extension of the occupation territory, through the tendrils of demonstrations emanating from the camp, to the successive occupations that moved Occupy London into new spaces and areas of life. In the case of the May actions I have noted the persistence of this desire for mobility, and a certain faith in its possibility, though I have also argued that the failure of this indicated a certain limitation of post-eviction Occupy London. It is to this I now turn, as, while eviction could have been a moment that spurred the movement along, it in fact revealed the degree to which Occupy London was stalled in the moment of bounded home.

4.6 The stagnation of ‘home’

The event of eviction of the St. Paul’s camp was of existential significance to a movement largely defined not just by occupation but by that occupation. More than creating new dynamics within the movement, it revealed the underlying problems and tensions upon which the occupation was based. It exposed the degree to which Occupy London had become embedded in particular arrangements and places; the stagnation in the moment of ‘home’ and the reduction of Occupy’s capacity – and desire – to move beyond the fixity of its first iconic site. While some genuinely did not want to abandon the moment of camp for other extensions of Occupy, even those who did found themselves largely unable to do so, to imagine an Occupy London after that occupation, or an occupation like that. The first clear signs of this can be seen in Occupiers’ accounts of the difficulty they found in preparing for
eviction and planning beyond it. In the post-eviction period this found expression in the ongoing centrality of the St. Paul’s site to the continued activities of Occupy London and also, somewhat paradoxically given the discussion above, in a desire to start new occupations, but in such a way that revealed more of an attempt to continue performing the Occupy activist identity, than an intensification of spatialised critique. These developments were part of a terminal downswing for Occupy London, and a sign that it was struggling to extend its forms of organisation.

4.6.1 Thinking past eviction

The eviction of the St. Paul’s camp in the early hours of 28th February 2012 was a pivotal event. In the weeks leading up to it, and following the loss of the case at the Royal Courts of Justice, there had been regular meetings to plan for the event itself, and the aftermath. Many normal camp activities still took place, though the numbers of people in the occupation at any time was now pretty low, and disproportionately made up of people with no other residence in London. The knowledge that eviction would come soon led to a small increase in activity as people tried to make sure they were there when it happened. The mood was low. It rained a lot.

On the evening of the 27th, a build-up of police vans in adjacent streets got the rumour going that tonight was the night. Occupiers cycled around on reconnaissance trips and confirmed there were police everywhere. A tweet was sent out across the @OccupyLSX-SOS emergency account, rallying those not present to come down in support, and phone trees spread the news (this was how I found out, and I immediately jumped in a taxi to take me to St. Paul’s). At a little after midnight the police and bailiffs moved in, removing people, making arrests (twenty in total) and destroying the camp’s infrastructure. A previous promise from the Cathedral that they would not participate in any eviction was broken, as police were permitted access to climb the Cathedral for bird’s eye coordination, and to arrest people on the steps, some of whom – out of conviction or pragmatism – were kneeled in prayer. Outside the police line, on every side were crowds of people chanting their support for those inside and in defiance of the police, who alternated
between periods of calm and intermittent violence. In the centre of the occupation site, the last group of those physically resisting held their ground on a rickety wooden structure they had built, as rubbish vans moved in to collect the piles of debris. By 3am, the job was done, the police lines broke and those outside could reunite with friends inside, to talk, commiserate, and gather up anything that had been left. Meanwhile the component parts that had marked the expressive aesthetics of the territory of Occupy London were being hurled into bin vans and pressure washed off the pavement and walls.

In the *Evening Standard* the next day, Occupier and poet Pete the Temp expressed his hope that what would follow eviction would be further creative extension: ‘Occupy is like a Hydra. You can chop off one head and two will replace it’ (*Evening Standard 28th Feb 2012: 4*). This reflected a fairly common sentiment, expressed by several in this research, that eviction, although a difficult event, would provide an opportunity to overcome the built-up contradictions and strains of camp life:

‘I was in the group that was going: The camp is beginning to eat itself. Ninety percent of our energy is going into just keeping the fucking centre holding, man.’ Joe

‘People started to say we’re not only about a camp and that the camp was becoming too dominant. When the camp wasn’t there anymore, there was really this moment where we had to ask ‘What is Occupy? What are we going to do in the future?’ Lucy

Joe’s words speak for a particular cohort who were increasingly based off-site and engaged with many of the more professional and specialist tasks at hand, particularly to do with media liaison, press releases, social media accounts and so on. This was an outward-facing group who prioritised the need for the occupation to attract more people, and to play well in the images produced by the media. They wanted to find a way of advancing the explicitly productive elements of the camp, while escaping from the various elements that undermined the project: the mess; the wet; the drunks; the sense of grinding inaction that had settled in the ever-less populated camps. Joe misses the degree to which that territorial centre could not be so readily overcome. Lucy is more sensitive to the complexity of this question, moving from the fact that some considered the camp ‘too dominant’ to the
recognition that the absence of the camp would provoke an existential question: without this camp, ‘What is Occupy?’.

This context helps explain the poverty of planning for eviction, despite the countless hours spent attempting to plan. Ellie puts this clearly:

‘Well it was weird because all that planning beforehand - or supposed planning time when we knew it was going to happen - and we had loads of assemblies and we tried to plan what we’d do afterwards. But it was really difficult to get any kind of consensus - even vague consensus - on what we were going to do in the event of eviction and then afterwards [...] So despite having made big efforts to try and plan what would come after, we never managed it.’ Ellie

In fact, there was not a total breakdown of planning, as meeting points were arranged, the big donated tents made it back to their owners, and telephone trees and Twitter accounts were set up to inform everyone when the moment came. But given the many hours of meetings on the subject one is struck, as many of my research participants were, by the absence of what Jake terms an ‘exit strategy’. This failure to actually prepare for continuing Occupy London past its loss of the occupation was certainly in part due to internal, interpersonal conflicts, but it is a testament too to the apparent impossibility of agreeing on what Occupy might look like without its tents and iconic backdrop.

The level of investment in the occupation is shown by people’s personal accounts of how important it was to be there for the event of eviction. Rob recalls with some distress how he desperately phoned friends to try to get a lift to the site of the eviction, once he heard it had begun, and Jesse remembers starting to sleep in the camp for the first time in ages, so as not to miss the eviction. This need to be there found clearest expression in the action of those who, on the night of eviction, made efforts to break through the police lines to enter the kettle. Several of my research participants offer accounts of this, with at least three having participated in the same rush on the police line. As Eric, one of these, puts it ‘I managed to get evicted [...] I wanted to be physically removed’. All this was in part motivated by a desire to be there to support friends and fellow Occupiers through what was undoubtedly an intense night. However, this should also be understood in light of our awareness
that eviction was always a counterpoint to occupation itself, and one of its defining dimensions. As such, alongside the need for solidarity and support, we see in Eric’s candour an expression of his acute awareness – or sense – that Occupy London, that expansively self-understood thing imagined as global, networked, mobile and dynamic, was largely only available there.

The actions of Occupiers in these moments pointed to the degree to which that space was necessary for gathering together Occupy London into an even loosely cohesive arrangement. In Chapter 6, I discuss the difficulty of developing a common collective project in this movement that included a wide variety of sometimes conflicting ideological positions, and the internal lines of division in Occupy London cut along other planes too: Working Groups; friendship networks; those sleeping there or not. In this context the defense and maintenance of the camp remained a common affirmative project to which most at least could still commit. As the various groupuscules became more separate or specialised, the territory was vital for constituting these things as Occupy London. In all of these senses the occupation provided a literal and figurative ‘common ground’, which Occupiers often struggled to reach. This hints at a dynamic discussed at length in Chapter 6, whereby Occupy London in many ways sought to prolong the forms with which it had begun, in the absence of an ability to deepen its sense of collectivity and strength of organisation.

Eviction could have been a moment that forced Occupy London into a creative and critical extension of its territory. The loss of the camp certainly uprooted the movement’s centre, but not necessarily in a productive way. When asked ‘Where did Occupy London go after eviction?’, a provocatively ambiguous question, Rachel’s response is noteworthy: ‘Where did it go? In a million directions at once’. By this, she did not mean that this moment had catalysed multiple rhizomatic extensions in interesting directions, but rather that it left Occupy scattered and confused. In truth, eviction revealed the embeddedness of Occupy London in particular local arrangements, and the forceful draw of the occupation ‘home’ on the affections, energies and actions of those involved. This investment in the identity of that occupation home – a protest camp there, organised like that – was further shown in the post-eviction period as attempts to reinvigorate Occupy London too readily fell back into nostalgia and the limited performance of an Occupy identity through returning to St. Paul’s and, to use a common phrase, ‘getting the tents out’.
4.6.2 Returning to St. Paul’s

Following eviction, St. Paul’s Churchyard remained a location to which Occupiers felt the need to return, time and again. Meetings, actions and demonstrations were planned with it in mind. It had originally become the site of the occupation as a coincidence of its location next to the Stock Exchange. Although this did provide certain discursive and aesthetic opportunities in that early period of heightened media interest (as I have discussed above) that opportunity for using the impressive background of the Cathedral and the church’s association with matters of morality to advance Occupy’s politics had long dried up by the point of eviction. The desire to return was therefore less to do with a desire to creatively advance Occupy’s politics, and more about a desire to keep being Occupy London, and a lack of imagination as to what that might mean beyond that site. As Ellie says,

‘Why do we keep going back to St Paul’s? Well, there is an aspect of: that’s our home. We are emotionally attached to it’.

General Assemblies continued to take place there. There were attempts to organise ‘roving GAs’ that would take place around London at relevant locations, along the lines of the earlier teach-outs of a more mobile time. While some of these took place, at the Bank of England or New Scotland Yard (with numbers dwindling more each time), when it came time to reinvigorate the GA, this always meant a return to St. Paul’s. During the planning of major demonstrations and marches, it was a given that these would begin or end at the Cathedral: in the planning of ‘Occupy May’, the first big opportunity to bring new people to Occupy following eviction, the question was whether to start or end there, but its role was a given; a lot later, in October 2014, during planning meetings for Occupy Democracy, a planned occupation that would explicitly orient itself toward Parliament rather than the City, it took the strong insistence of one key organiser to make sure St. Paul’s would not be part of the plan. As Rob says of another later demonstration,

‘There was one action I recall, an action at the American embassy. It’s across the other side of London from St. Paul’s, and we basically ended up marching all the way to St. Paul’s simply because it was St Paul’s. […] I kind
of thought, while we were going there: so, remind me, why exactly are we going to St. Paul’s?’ Rob

Further marking the persistence of this essential connection to that place, the more active working groups and discussion groups continued to meet at the same indoor locations – a Café Nero and Ye Olde London Pub – they had begun to use during the occupation, to escape the rain and cold. That these continued to be meeting places for some time after, despite the fact that this now involved a long journey for many attending meetings, is an indication of the almost ritual connection to that St. Paul’s site and its surroundings.

This revealed a limited appreciation of why the site of St. Paul’s had been special in the first place. The potency of occupation was in the territory that was *produced* there. The ongoing intervention in the production of city space was both a site for the ongoing spatialisation of Occupy’s project and a heterotopic other-space whose aesthetics, materials and symbols demanded attention. This was about a tension between competing spatial arrangements made possible by the embedded camp, as well as a historical moment which had gathered the energies of significant numbers of people in the square, turning it into a dynamic place of organisation, protest and daily living. Returning to the site of St. Paul’s, one no longer found this dynamic and politically-charged territory. These attempts at ‘return’ were instead the confused attempts to recapture some past potency, which failed to recognise how this had been produced. Instead, Occupiers returned to the mere *location*. In his famous phrase Alfred Korzybski (1933: 58) affirms that ‘the map is not the territory’. Here Occupiers returned to the mapped spot, but the territory – the territory that would make them Occupy once more – was gone.

### 4.6.3 Going ‘back into occupation’

In addition to the desire to return to St. Paul’s, there was a widespread desire to return to the protest camp form. There is a clear ambiguity here: new occupations could have meant the creative extension of Occupy into new areas. However, the framing of this as ‘re-occupying’ or ‘going back into occupation’ reveals the desire to recreate the conditions in which Occupy London made sense, and an investment in
the identity of Occupy, and the protest camp form. The desire to \textit{return} was a
desire to \textit{remain} – tactically, historically – in the identity of the camp.

A clear example of this was the events of Occupy May in 2012, which I discussed
above in terms of the optimistic production of maps for a swarm-like extension of
the ethos of occupation. While I noted there that the ultimate failure of this plan
revealed the terminal downswing of Occupy London at that time, a similar sign of
reduced capacity came in the failure of planned occupations at that time. Occupy
May was planned across three different days of action (the 1\textsuperscript{st}, 12\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th}), two of
which entailed doomed occupations. On 1\textsuperscript{st} May, following a day-long chaotic and
roaming march, the hundred or so remaining demonstrators headed to Paternoster
Square, the intended site of the original camp, outside the Stock Exchange.
Someone sent out a message on the Occupy emergency Twitter account that had
so far only been used for the eviction. It said ‘Paternoster Square is now occupied.
Come down! Bring a tent! And noisemakers!’ . Receiving that message, I was
impressed and surprised that an action I didn’t expect much from had achieved this.
I dropped what I was doing and headed down, only to find a few pop-up tents
(these had been with the group from the start. No one to my knowledge had
answered the tweeted call to bring one) and around a hundred people with nothing
like the means to establish a camp, or even resist the police advances which
ultimately got rid of everyone in a couple of hours.

Eleven days later was the larger ‘Meet the 1\%’ action. This not only began with an
assembly and rally at St. Paul’s, but the plan was for it to end in a short-term
occupation camp at a location decided by the organisers but unknown to everyone
attending: the Bank of England/Royal Exchange. In planning meetings, which I was
involved with, locations were negotiable but the ultimate aim of establishing a camp
was a given. Every time it was mentioned in planning meetings an electric charge of
excitement relayed around the circle, but there was no discussion of a particular
logic behind why this was the plan. The implicit logic was to show we had not gone
away.

Though all communications included the call to ‘Bring A Tent’, very little discussion
went into the logistics of what setting up a camp would involve. Damningly, very
few of even the organising core brought a tent of their own. On the day itself, as
the crowd of a thousand or so arrived at the assigned location, Jesse and Lucy gave
the call over the megaphone that ‘if you have a tent, now might be the time to get it out’. My eyes met with theirs and other organisers across the square, smiling and anticipating. But almost no one had a tent, and suddenly our belief in some moment of spontaneous coordination was exposed as naïve and doomed. All that was left was for the energy levels to drop as confusion as to what we were there for increased. Most wandered off after a short time.

In the meeting to discuss the successes and failings of Occupy May, a common thread was that either way these had been useful lessons for next time. Certain problems with those occupation plans were exposed, but the basic assumption that occupation was the thing to do was fairly unshaken. A few months later on the first anniversary of the occupation a similar series of events took place, with poorly organised plans for an occupation (this time outside City Hall on the South Bank) which ultimately ended in failure, no tents and a confused crowd milling around, uncertain where to put themselves.

It is significant that while many new participants had brought tents on 15th October 2011, now almost nobody did, including the organisers who were calling for it. The first is a clear sign that outside of the very special context of the Occupy moment of 2011, with its sense of momentum and historic peculiarity, there was far less enthusiasm for an action of that sort. Reflecting on my own failure to take my tent with me that day, I put this down to a certain pessimism; I was holding out to see what happened on the day before carrying my belongings there. I did not get a chance to discuss the motivations of other organisers, but I wonder if it reveals a reluctant awareness that a certain moment had passed, and at the same time an unwillingness to recognise this, or an inability to conceive of an action that did not involve tents. I am certain that there remained some hope that it would indeed materialise. This in turn shows a belief in spontaneous coordination that is characteristic of those people who had their first experiences of activism in Occupy and had by this point become key organisers. They had experienced Occupy coming ‘out of nowhere’ and hoped for the same again.

These events signal not only the clear downswing of Occupy London’s capacities to generate exciting actions, but the stagnation in the moment of ‘home’, in this case manifested in the need to reproduce the familiar terrain of the protest camp.
Reflecting on this period of recurring pale imitations of the occupation camp, Rachel says,

‘I remember many actions in the months following eviction when we always had to carry that fricking floating tent... And it’s symbolic, yes, but we end up in Trafalgar Square, out come the tents, then the police have to come and say “No, you can’t do that!” The people who practice that are not taking a space. They are taking a symbol from the past that was very strong in the media, and that’s what they’re recognising, and they’re trying to recreate that dynamic between themselves and the media.’ Rachel

Rachel rightly distinguishes between the potency of certain forms of space-taking and that of falling back on symbolic ritualism. She recognises that in principle at least the establishing of new movement spaces need not have been so impotent. Her emphasis on the media element here reflects a personal evaluation of Occupy London as excessively media-chasing, which I address more fully in Chapter 6. She is not entirely right. Though the ongoing return to the tent – like the site of St. Paul’s – was certainly in part to do with the arresting and iconic images, whose circulation had at times overly determined Occupiers’ understanding of themselves, there was much more to the tents than this: their material and affective qualities; the fact that tents like these had been people’s homes for months; that their presence here again in a city square conjured the ghost of that home again. While the desire to theatrically reproduce even the most muted reminder of that time was understandable, it reflected a movement out of ideas, and a wider opportunity structure that could not produce that home again.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered an analysis of Occupy London’s defining practice, occupation. This has built on an understanding of territory as a dynamic process, such that occupation emerges as turbulent, variously moving between particular moments, with their own characteristics and implications. All of these gave shape and substance to Occupy London as a form, but it is clear that this cannot be reduced to something as clear-cut as ‘tactics’.
Having outlined an understanding of space as a fundamental constituent of political life (making use of Lefebvre’s concepts), the chapter developed a critical and ethnographic account of occupation, using the concept of the refrain, with its emphasis on expressive forms of territoriality and the inherently dynamic nature of territorial processes. Identifying three key territorial moments, this allowed me to locate the most important points of tension, as Occupy London sought to ‘skip’ from one step to the next.

I have discussed the first territorial step as the taking of space, showing that this was marked by two expressive forms that established the basis of the occupation: the temporal extension associated with not going home; and a politics of locating a particular antagonist associated with Occupy’s critique.

As these directional expressions became the dimensional features of an increasingly embedded and bounded movement ‘home’, a series of characteristics came to settle in the square, each marking a tension with the surrounding and the supposed proper uses of that space. This tension, and the aesthetics and practices which produced it, were the real substance of Occupy London’s located critique, articulated through the production of visually arresting ‘image events’, the politicisation of notionally ‘public’ space, and the fostering of dynamic internal movement relations. Meanwhile, the occupation contained an alterity, which was sometimes less than productive for the movement’s ostensible projects, becoming at times weird, and even unattractive (particularly in the case of Finsbury Square). I have teased out this ambiguity through Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, and an insistence that these less usefully political features were nonetheless part of a common Occupy territoriality.

Despite this central importance of the established camp, I have shown how Occupy was characterised by an expansive desire to ‘Occupy Everywhere’, which could have pushed Occupy in interesting directions. There was a sense that Occupy London had come from a moment of dispersion, and there was a wish to continue in this way, as manifested through a variety of attempts to move the occupation along in different ways. While this reveals the recurring desire to transcend the fixity of the camp, and make the ‘skip’ to the refrain’s next step, ultimately I argue that Occupy London was unable to do this. The response to eviction, as well as the post-eviction desire to go back to St. Paul’s and ‘back into occupation’ reflected more than
anything a desire to be Occupy again, and the investment in a certain limiting identity that this implied. Occupy stalled in this moment of home, even as it was lost, even though the problems of that form of territory had revealed themselves through the long months of occupation.

This is not simply a matter of the insufficiency of Occupy London’s plans, but a sign that the wider social and historical configuration in which the movement occurred was not producing the progressive organisational forces that could move the occupation along.
Chapter 5 - ‘We Are The 99 Percent’: between inequality and identity

5.1 Introduction

‘We Are The 99 Percent’ was the iconic slogan of the Occupy Movement. It was one of its most memorable features, and, from its very beginnings, figured as a central focus of much of the analysis that sought to understand Occupy and the claims, grievances and self-conceptions that animated it. More than simply a feature of Occupy’s discourse, however, the slogan was also central to the aesthetic and territorial practices of Occupy London. It appeared visually on placards, banners and flags across the occupation camps of St. Paul’s and Finsbury Square, and the occupied buildings of the Bank of Ideas and School of Ideas. The words were painted on the sides of tents and on the fly-posted pillars of St. Paul’s Churchyard. On demonstrations, the front banner behind which Occupiers marched was often given over to this central claim. It was a part of the visual spectacle of Occupy. As a chant too it was a key feature of the ritual performance and territory marking of Occupy London. ‘We – Are – The 99 Percent!’ The rhythmic call filled the occupied squares. It erupted from the largest assemblies in the early days of late October 2011. On marches, teach-outs and actions, the chanted slogan announced the mobile territory of Occupy emerging in new spaces. It was a term that peppered conversation in all Occupy spaces, and appeared frequently across the movement’s many textual spaces, from newspapers and blogs to social media posts.

This chapter addresses the contested and contentious meanings and applications of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ within Occupy London. In different moments, a politics of the 99 percent meant different things, and this was coloured by particular ideological commitments and political circumstances. While the chapter is structured around the key discursive elements of Occupy’s use of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, the complex of material, sonic and aesthetic aspects of its use will also be addressed, as they relate to its different discursive forms. Fundamental here is a tension between two tendencies of the discourse surrounding the idea of ‘the 99 percent’:
On the one hand ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ tended toward naming a dynamic of the economic system, and enacting a radical politicisation of capitalist social relations. In this sense ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ is not about an identity at all – though the language might suggest so – but can be conceived instead as a critique of inequality; a critique whose extension through the everyday social relations where inequality bites is potentially hampered by the homogenising gathering of an identity (a dynamic to which I turn early in the chapter). Here the mobilisation of Occupy was an expression of this critique, but this did not entail either a claim about the collective identity of the assembled, nor a claim to represent others. Connected to this we see the widespread rejection of a logic of representation, and of the kind of homogenous ‘people’ associated with certain (counter-) hegemonic projects (empirically we might think of the staging of ‘the Egyptian people’ in Tahrir Square in 2011, associated with a resurging ‘populism’, analysed most prominently by Ernesto Laclau, 2005);

On the other hand, the slogan tended precisely toward a logic of identity and representation, and the articulation of a ‘people’. This tendency to position Occupy as the embodiment of the 99 percent, conceived as a sort of social mass, was never far away, and it went hand in hand with claims to being ‘the voice of the people’. This representational tendency became stronger with time, as Occupy London became an increasingly bounded entity, and faced the reality that the self-propelling assembly of the 99 percent – real or imagined, or both – had slowed almost to a halt. The intensification of this tendency is marked by an increasingly sharp distinction, in the understanding of participants, between the ‘inside’ of the already-mobilised movement, and its ‘outside’, the body of ‘supporters’ and the wider potential constituency of the ‘public’; a distinction that was explicitly problematized in earlier, more dynamic moments.

Following a short history of the emergence of the 99/one percent formulation, and its translation to the context of Occupy London, the chapter’s analytical argument begins in section by outlining the ways in which Occupy London’s discourse of the 99 percent articulated a critique of inequality without referring to an identity, the first of the two tendencies. I then go on to show how the language of the 99 percent avoided a gathered identity by asserting a dispersive politicisation of the fact of inequality, and engage with the words of Occupiers who understood the idea of the 99 percent in such a way that focused concretely on claims about inequality.
Following this, I turn to the competing understandings of this inequality in Occupy London, noting the more progressive and more limited aspects of these. Following this the chapter turns its focus to the second tendency: the articulation of an identity – ‘the people’ – which accounts for the majority of the chapter, as this was the more prominent of the two tendencies. I separate this into two discrete parts to clearly distinguish between, on the one hand, the ways in which Occupy reproduced the problems associated with the figure of the people, and, on the other, the ways in which these problems were negotiated and (partially) overcome. First I outline the problematic nature of claims to ‘the people’, as a figure associated with the usurping claims of liberal states and related projects, but also as a homogenising identity which ignores the difference of experience of those which it aspires to gather (this looks specifically at how ‘the 99 percent’ was criticised in such a way by black feminist voices). Having established these problems, I go on to engage with the words of Occupiers to see how Occupy reproduced these problems.

Having established this tendency, I then develop the argument that, although Occupy London was drawn into the language of representation by the discourse of the 99 percent-as-people, there are features of this that move beyond the kind of usurpation considered as central to representation thusfar. First I use the work of Martin Puchner (2006) to consider the specific form of the slogan (qua slogan), seeking to performatively constitute a future-possible subject rather than claiming to speak for an existing one. This includes an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) discussion of the importance of instantiating transformations on the plane of language as a component of a radical political process. I use this to inform a discussion of the logic of assembly that was so important in Occupy London. I argue that this desire for ongoing folding in of the represented produced the possibility of a more dynamic, mobile form of representation, though I then trace the breakdown and failure of this project, as marked by the decreasing use of the slogan. The chapter then addresses two important, though troubling, discursive features of Occupy London trying to assert the validity of its representative claims: seen in the self-presentation as ‘ordinary people’, and claims about the ‘diversity’ of those gathered in the square. Finally I move onto a major analytical argument, which considers how Jacques Rancière’s (1999) concept of ‘disagreement’ provides a way in which we can reconsider the apparent problem of representation and ‘the people’; each of these Rancière argues is central to critique and the reassertion of
the political. Developing this I argue that, in the figure of ‘the 99 percent’, Occupy articulated a distinctly progressive version of the people, one that is fundamentally attached to a critique of inequality. This represents a bridge between the two tendencies of the chapter. This is not a neat ‘solution’ to the problems of this tension, but an argument for the complex nature of representative claims in Occupy London.

5.2 The ‘99 percent’ formulation

5.2.1 Origins

The slogan had emerged firmly from the American context. Following the Adbusters call-out to ‘Occupy Wall Street. Bring Tent’ a meeting of New York City activists of various stripes sought to give some substance to this idea (Graeber 2013) as the seemingly arbitrary date of the proposed ‘occupation’ approached. In a first meeting of the ‘Outreach Working Group’ two days later, during a discussion of how they would frame the action, they were reminded of a Joseph Stiglitz article published in Vanity Fair earlier that year – on April 30\(^{th}\) 2011 – entitled ‘Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%’ (Stiglitz 2011). The article focussed on income inequality in the United States, suggesting a polarisation of living standards between a super-rich one percent of the population and everyone else. As its title implies, the article also highlighted the political influence of this ‘one percent’, suggesting that this sharpening inequality had a corrupting influence on the notionally democratic system famously described by Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg address, as government ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’. David Graeber’s account of that planning meeting for what would become Occupy Wall Street presents it as a sort of eureka moment (a status lent it by its subsequent success):

 Someone – this time I remember quite clearly it was me, but I wouldn’t be surprised if a half dozen others had equally strong memories of being the first to come up with it – suggested, “well, why not call ourselves ‘the 99%’? If 1% of the population have ended up with all the benefits of the last 10 years of economic growth, control the wealth, own the politicians... why not just say we’re everybody else?” (Graeber 2011: no pagination)
The flyer they produced for the upcoming ‘New York City General Assembly’ bore the slogan ‘We The 99%’. The first prominent use of the full ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ slogan was a Tumblr blog (wearethe99percent.tumblr.com) launched in August 2011, where working- and middle class Americans laid out their grievances at the hands of recession, debt, lay-offs, foreclosures and the rest. Bearing their photographs and potted versions of their situations, this sought to give substance and biography to the concept of a 99 percent, on the wrong side of inequality.

By the time Occupy Wall Street got going in earnest ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ was a pivotal feature of the emerging phenomenon. When, on October 15th, Occupy the London Stock Exchange brought Occupy to London as part of a Global Day of Action, the language was brought to the British context. That this was a movement of the 99 percent against the one percent – whatever precisely that meant – was already a fact of the Occupy movement before the first tents went up in London. Indeed, the repetition of this claim was fundamental to the articulation of the events in London as part of a wider Occupy Movement, so deeply embedded was that slogan. This translation from a context in which its statistical claim had originated to one where it had not, brought into sharper relief a series of dynamics and tensions at the heart of the slogan.

5.2.2 Understanding ‘the 99 percent’ in Occupy London

Particularly early on, it had asserted itself so strongly as a central claim of the movement that it was often used as an incontrovertible analytical fact, and one that could be used without much chance of facing dissenting voices: of course there is a 99 percent – the mass of people on the wrong side of inequalities of wealth, income and political influence – and of course Occupy is an expression of this. This was a feature of a certain uncritical enthusiasm that defined that effervescent beginning. With time though, the implications of the slogan came to be problematized and critiqued. As one participant in this research puts it ‘It’s a great meme and a soundbite. But the detail needs filling in’ (Debbie). As I will show, it was not just ‘the details’ but the basic premise of the slogan that was up for negotiation.

A first indication of the conflicting meanings and applications of the ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ slogan, can be found by turning to the responses of research participants
to the question of what they understood the slogan to mean. It is worth noting that while I always intended to push participants as to the ambiguities surrounding the slogan, this was frequently precipitated by the fact that they themselves brought this discourse into their own answers. What emerged very clearly was that ‘the 99 percent’ was at the centre of Occupy London’s conception of itself and its projects, but that people’s understandings of what it named varied significantly.

‘I think the 99 percent more than anything else shows the inequality of power and economic inequality in which we live, in our society and globally. It’s an expression of that imbalance.’ Maria

‘It was literally the voice of the people; the voice of the people being heard.’ Donna

‘That’s funny because the first thing that comes to mind is that in a way we represented the voices of the 99 percent, but that’s a very dangerous thing to say for a movement like ours.’ Jesse

‘I think it was just a statement of shared identity and grievance. [...] What’s our identity? It turns out there isn’t an easy one, and then they related that to the grievance, which was to do with the banks and that. It was a skilful way of giving voice to that frustration. We are all the people that have been fucked over by this.’ Matt

In just these few responses, we see the emergence of some of the most significant concepts and figures around which the tension of the 99 percent was staged. Maria’s claim that it is an ‘expression of that imbalance’ emphasises a politicising claim about a depersonalised dynamic of inequality at the heart of financial capitalism – the first of the two tendencies I sketched above. Donna’s reference to the ‘voice of the people’ moves this into the second tendency, the terrain of representation, the uncomfortable nature of which is signalled by Jesse: this is ‘dangerous’ for ‘a movement like ours’. Matt’s analysis brings us more concretely into the occupied square, as the slogan comes to be an expression of the sorts of self-conceptions emerging from a movement undergoing a process of identity (see Melucci 1998).
It should be clear then that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ named not only a major claim of the Occupy movement, but also a terrain upon which the movement, in its London articulation, negotiated its discourse and its politics. In tracing these tensions, we can understand this foundational feature of Occupy London: its conception of the relationship between the movement and the wider social field. What emerges is not one but several competing conceptions, such that we can also signal the limitations and progressive potential of these. Having established that these tended to push in the two contrary directions of a non-identitarian critique, and a represented people, I now turn to the first of these.

5.3 The critique of inequality

At its most radical, the articulation of the 99 percent was about a politicisation of social relations through an assertion of the fact of inequality. This entailed a statement about income and wealth inequality, but this also extended to a claim regarding the disparity in political influence that accompanied the reality of poverty and extreme wealth. This was about naming a dynamic inherent to contemporary capitalism, framed in the context of the financial crisis, the bailing out of the banks, and the beginnings of austerity. Taken this way I begin discussion by bearing down not on the full structure of the slogan ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, but on the framing of the 99 percent/one percent dynamic. This is a fair reflection of the use of these concepts and understandings within Occupy London. While the reference to a ‘we’ was a crucial dimension of the slogan’s rhetorical device, and an important point of tension and negotiation within Occupy – the details of which I will come to shortly – reference to the 99 percent and one percent far exceeded its association with the grammatical form of the entire slogan. While it framed its claim in terms of an opposition between the 99 percent and one percent, this insistence on the fact of inequality was not (necessarily or always) a statement of identity. It did not entail the crystallisation of the 99 percent as either a stable object of speech, nor a subject – a ‘we’ – acting within and upon something like history, or the movement. Rather it dispersed that antagonism across social space, without necessarily moving into a ‘next step’ of gathering identity.
My claim that this represents the more progressive direction of the competing logics of the 99 percent is at once normative and political. It reflects a certain partisan commitment to those moments in which Occupy proposed a politics against representation, or the homogenisation of difference, and oriented instead toward the autonomous mobilisation of dispersed and distinct political actors and subjects. In holding off the moments of identity (understood here in terms of both the narrow scope of social movement studies’ interest in the self-identifications of collective actors, and in the broader Deleuze-Guattarian sense of a closure of potential connections of becoming) Occupy enacted an expressive political process whose potential came in its resistance to the representative claims that are often understood as the basis of the political (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Rancière, 1999; Žižek 2010). Ultimately, this anti-identitarian mode of the 99 percent was always fleeting and failing, and the tendency for it to shift toward representative claims regarding ‘the people’ was finally dominant. It is all the more important, then, to explicitly signal the way in which ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ articulated a critique rather than a claim to collective identity.

5.3.1 Politicising inequality

Such an articulation of a critique of social relations that stops short of identity has been expressed by Nicholas Thoburn (2015) as follows:

‘We are the 99%’ is an assertion that the vast majority of the world’s population are exploited by and for the wealth of a small minority. It names, in other words, a relationship of exploitation and inequality [...] Framed in this way, inequality and exploitation signify not so much the control of one group, the 99%, by another, the 1%, nor even the distribution of wealth, but the very form that life takes in such a system [...] In naming this inequality and exploitation, ‘We are the 99%’ simultaneously designates a breach. Let me stress that in neither aspect does the slogan name a substantial identity; rather, it at once names and cuts the social relations of exploitation, among those who feel cramped by these relations, feel their intolerable pressure. (Thoburn 2015: 177)
The point to emphasise here is a conception of ‘the 99 percent’ that denotes a situation where structures of exploitation and inequality – themselves inherent to, and inseparable from, capitalism – determine the very shape and patterning of social life within the system. In this sense it echoes Marx’s insistence, in *The German Ideology*, that the mode of production is a ‘mode of life’; the mode of life of individuals located within particular relations of economic life. ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, then, is an explicit and politicising insistence on the fact of this unequal, exploitative relationship. The idea that ‘the 99 percent’ ‘designates a breach’ is also significant as we note that this claim did not seek to represent the mobilised, nor their wider constituents, but instead aimed for the diffusion and amplification of this politicisation. In terms of this ‘breach’, Gerald Raunig (2008) has discussed the early publication, following the events of May 1968 in Paris, of a book entitled *Mai 1968: la brèche: premières réflexions sur les événements* (Castoriadis et al: 1968). In particular, Raunig picks up the chapter by Claude Lefort, who emphasises that while this ‘breach’ implies the act of breaking through – sometimes literally in the case of student and worker occupations – it also refers to a broader social rupture, and the opening up onto the possibility of new, revolutionary social composition:

> The breach in this sense is not merely destructive but also contains the potential for recompositions and uncustomary concatenations [...] As the breach perforates the state rather than taking it over, so, at the same time, it actualizes itself as a distinctive new form of social organization.’ (Raunig 2008: no pagination)

If we are to consider the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ denoted a breach, this breach must be considered alongside the wider anti-representational, desire-following breach staged by Occupy, as expressed through (certain moments of) the practice of occupation (as I have discussed in Chapter 4), or the rejection of ‘clear’ demands oriented toward the state or other power brokers (which I address in detail in Chapter 6). ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ was that dimension of Occupy’s breach which politicised social relations based on the fact of inequality. Rather than

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1 In *The German Ideology*, Marx states that ‘This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce’ (Marx and Engels, 2004 [1845]: 42)
collecting disparate subjectivities and positions into a unified subject of social change – and in spite of that ‘we’ that always tended in a different direction – ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ dispersed and multiplied the points of antagonism associated with its critical claim.

The ‘WeAreThe99Percent’ Tumblr blog, which was foundational to the emerging discourse of the 99 percent, usefully illustrates this last point, though it comes from the American context. Established in August 2011, the blog took the form of a series of pictures and accompanying text, uploaded by individuals across the United States. Each picture bore the image of an individual holding up a sheet of paper, briefly outlining that individual’s situation on the wrong side of America’s economic divide. Some examples include:

‘While my taxes were bailing out my bank, my bank was squeezing me, I am the 99%. U.S. Army vet.’

‘In 3 hours my CEO makes more than I do in a year. I am the 99%. You are the 99%. We are the 99%.’

‘My husband and I are struggling with over $85,000 in student debt. Our 2 little kids suffer so we can attempt to pay our bills. We are now living in an RV. We travel to find work. We are the 99%’

‘61 years old. No health care. No savings. No pension. I am the 99%. Occupy Wall Street’

These potted stories give details of – and the accompanying pictures a face to – the realities of inequality in contemporary Western capitalist society. The same issues of debt, healthcare insurance, the bailing out of banks, exploitation wages, hunger and insecurity recur. Each of these stories reflects the embodied particularity of the 99 percent problematic. The constitution of Occupy, and the spaces of enunciation that it produced, created the possibility of just such a rendering-concrete of the abstract critique of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’.

In Occupy London, when participants reflected on why Occupy said ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, many emphasised how this was an expression of inequality, rejecting – or at least deferring – the homogenising force of identity:
‘I did a lot of reading. I felt obligated, and I really wanted to understand. Then I saw those incredible graphs of wealth inequality off the Richter scale. [...] So then I got what they were talking about.’ Vicky

‘The tiny minority of the one percent have benefitted at the expense of the majority. That is indisputable. That is economically – it’s based on economic statistics.’ Eric

‘We have a completely unsustainable, unjust, undemocratic financial system. You either have the people who suffer because of it, or the people who profit from it. The one percent are the people who profit and the 99 percent are the people who suffer. Simple.’ Joe

As we see here, the ‘we’ of the slogan is suspended, as those who used it assert the truth of inequality that it named, and the social effect this inequality has. This rests on the opposition of the one and 99 percent, and emphasises the social relations described by this opposition. Both Vicky and Eric offer a clear sense that, first and foremost, ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ is a statement about inequality; or in the words of Maria, quoted above in the introduction, ‘I think the 99 percent more than anything [...] is] an expression of that imbalance’. As Joe has it, this has produced ‘the people who suffer’ and ‘the people who profit’. In this latter formulation, it is not wholly clear that Joe quite expresses that same claim stated by Thoburn above that what we are dealing with is a ‘form of life’ rather than a relationship of control between one group and another; these expressions of social conflict are always just a short slippage away from a narrative of two opposing blocs. However, in leading into this point with a reference to the ‘completely unsustainable, unjust, undemocratic financial system’ that has produced such a result, this seems to move the previous claim by Eric and Vicky – that the results of structural inequality are statistical facts – into the more advanced point that social life is structurally determined by such relations.

Every participant in this research mentioned inequality, unprompted, very early on in interviews. This was usually during answers to questions about how they came to participate in Occupy London, or their awareness of Occupy prior to getting
involved. Elsewhere, Occupy London’s early statements and ‘official’ pronouncements return time and again to the issue of inequality: the Initial Statement of Occupy the London Stock Exchange stated ‘we want structural change toward authentic global equality’; the International Statement of 2nd November 2011 said ‘As long as this system remains in place, the people of the world continue to suffer from an increasingly unfair share of income and wealth’; later, in the Economics Statement, agreed by the Economic Working Group on 6th December, the fourth point, framed as a broad goal was ‘Tackle systemic economic inequality’. What is more, the preamble of the latter makes the stark claim that ‘OccupyLSX has been labelled as many things but what unites us is our commitment to economic justice and social equality’. ‘We Are The 99 percent’ was a slogan that foregrounded inequality and problematized capitalist social and economic relations based on this. As Maria states, highlighting this feature rather than any expression of identity, ‘it didn’t mean necessarily that we… it was a way of expressing the inequality and unfairness of the system’.

5.3.2 Competing visions of inequality

It is worth briefly pausing on the deeper assumptions of these statements about inequality; on the ideological positions that animated them. In the second issue of The Occupied Times newspaper a short article entitled ‘Closet Egalitarians’ stated ‘Some of us are anti-capitalists, some are anti-corporatist, some are anti-corruption, we are participatory democrats, left libertarians, social democrats, liberal socialists, or environmental activists. But on the question of inequality, we speak with one voice’ (2nd November 2011: 5). On the one hand this statement is a fairly accurate reflection of a general sense in the early days of Occupy that such political labels were not so salient as to represent a barrier to a collective political process. However, this generalised sense necessarily ran into difficulty when addressing concrete features of economic, social and political life, and the often incompatible understandings of these. Can people ‘speak with one voice’ from all these varying positions, on the question of inequality: its causes; implications; possible remedies?

By ‘official’ here I mean simply agreed by consensus by either the Occupy London General Assembly or one of the Working Groups, and disseminated via the central channels of Occupy London, namely the website. For a critical engagement with how Occupy organised such statements, see Chapter 6.
It seems clear that they can collectively say ‘inequality is bad’ – the sort of negative statement of *protest* that was easier for Occupiers to agree upon – but such a claim need not reflect a deep critique of the structural necessity of exploitative inequality under capitalism, and can indeed just as readily express the more liberal, and moderate, view that inequality has become excessive, and can be ultimately addressed by the policy interventions of the capitalist state.

While a self-defined ‘anti-capitalism’ was often professed by participants in Occupy London, an understanding of inequality in such terms was often less than direct. Hints of a systemic-level critique are hinted at in admittedly vague references to ‘the system’ that had produced, and kept producing inequality, but participants do not always explicitly describe or define this system. As Maria has it ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ ‘was a way of expressing the inequality and unfairness of the system’. Several other interviews also make references to ‘the system’, with a strong sense that what singled Occupy out was an orientation toward that system rather than what were perceived as cosmetic policy changes. As Joe put it – in terms echoed across Occupy London from the start – this was about addressing ‘the disease itself, not just the symptoms’. Several participants made references to ‘the system’ that produced exploitative inequality without explicitly developing this to name something like capitalism, or to make such a position clear by offering a clear sense of what overcoming this system might entail. For Stephanie, the root of the problem of inequality (but also broader issues of environmental destruction and climate change) was ‘this capitalist system which is going to do us all in’. For another participant Ian, when pushed on what a solution to these systemic problems might entail, his answer was direct enough: ‘We need to crack on and smash capitalism’.

However, in such moments – where the question of what overcoming capitalism might involve, or look like – it is unclear that the aspiration of ‘smashing capitalism’ necessarily does much more than name a general sense of a system-level antagonist of progressive social movement in which ‘capitalism’ stands in for a variety of understandings of how social relations are produced and might be overcome. This is not insignificant, as it certainly names the culprit well, and in such a way that does not focus on ‘the one percent’ as simple perpetrators, or a group of ‘banksters’, corrupt monopolists and aristocratic oligarchs whose rule has become excessive (though this is a dominant effect and character of the capitalist system in the period in which Occupy has emerged). But the absence of a more
The currency of liberal critique can be seen in the temporal framing of some of the statements on inequality quoted above as part of the Economics Statement and International Statement each from that early period of Occupy London Stock Exchange. The International Statement refers to the ‘increasingly unfair share of income and wealth’, and the Economics Statement begins its exposition of how it will ‘tackle systemic economic inequality’ with the statement: ‘The economic system we live in increasingly benefits the few over the many’. While this sense of *increasing* inequality (on a national scale, the implication seems to be) is true enough, it is significant that this framing indicates the wider tendency within Occupy to claim that what is needed is *less* inequality – a return to the social democratic

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3 A fuller engagement with the reasons for – and the consequences of – Occupy London’s aversion to concrete political positions appears in Chapter 6.
welfare state of the post-war consensus, a better distribution of the resources of
capitalist society – rather than a claim that capitalist relations necessarily produce
not only inequality, but exploitation; an attack on capitalism as such.

A text commonly quoted around the occupation – and referred to as ‘basically
Occupy’s Bible’ by Economics Working Group member Andy – was *The Spirit Level*
by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009); a book which focuses on the effect of
wealth inequality on a series of social metrics, such as healthcare and mental health
outcomes, success in education, and social cohesion. Subtitled ‘Why more equal
societies almost always do better’, their prescription is strictly about harmonising
levels of consumption in given societies, to be overseen by the Keynesian state. It is
important to note here that this liberal critique of *excessive* inequality to be
remedied by policy alterations (such as progressive taxation, taxes on undertaxed
forms of capital accumulation, or ending poverty wages) is really the original
provenance of the concept of the 99 percent, originating as it did from the Stiglitz
article, which offered a similarly Keynesian, social democratic vision of how the
enrichment of America’s ‘one percent’ had come at the expense of the rest in the
post-Reagan years.

The prominence of such positions in Occupy is unsurprising. Not only were these
the dominant critical discourses that were circulating in the period building up to
Occupy, but also this was a mobilisation produced and peopled by good numbers of
precisely those social groups for whom the promise of later success for current
efforts, and of ‘doing better’ than their parents, was breaking down. For a
discussion of this in the case of Occupy Wall Street, see Graeber’s (2013) *The
Democracy Project*, but in London too students, working class youth, and concerned
liberal-progressive parents made up a significant proportion of Occupiers early on.
Many of these people, newly entering the world of autonomous street politics,
brought with them the widespread progressive liberal sensibility that was more
ready to see the neoliberal developments of the previous thirty years as the
harbinger of the newly excessive inequality they heard named in the slogan ‘We Are
The 99 Percent’. As such there was an ongoing tension between understandings of
inequality, in which more liberal understandings were initially dominant. There was
a broad shift toward a more radical critique with time, though it is important to note
that this was always a central dimension to the discourse of the 99/one percent,
articulated with various strength in earlier moments.
Of course, we must look beyond the explicit language of Occupiers to assess the anti-capitalism of the movement. Chesters (2013) has argued that Occupy was essentially an anti-capitalist movement. He clarifies,

However, in order to make sense of the Occupy movement as anti-capitalist, it is essential to understand contemporary capitalism as far more than an economic system. It must be understood as a socio-cultural, political and ideological entity that is inextricably linked to the core institutions of Western modernity as well as to a universalising global spatiality, one which Occupy explicitly and materially contests. (Chesters 2013: 115)

It is important to retain this sense that the anti-capitalist critique of Occupy was best expressed through a series of embodied practices that entered into points of conflict with capital and the state, without necessarily using the language of anti-capitalism. Chesters makes a comparison to the alter-globalisation movement, of which he says,

Though there are many elements of the movement that are not consciously anti-capitalist, taken together the most important and significant aspects of the AGM are anti-systemic, and anti-capitalist, if not in their intent, then at least in their effects. (Chesters 2013: 116)

This provides a word of caution not to be too drawn into an evaluation based on the apparent recourse to liberal understandings of excessive inequality, and even the role of the social state in fixing this. The articulation of the fact of inequality – named by ‘the 99 percent’ – retained the politicising power to distribute a radical critique. That being said, these more limited liberal tendencies did emerge in more troubling ways later, getting in the way of some of the movement’s most progressive features (as discussed in Chapter 6).

I have argued that one significant tendency of the discourse of ‘the 99 percent’ was about articulating a non-identitarian critique of inequality, while also indicating that this entailed conflicting understandings of that inequality. I now turn to the other major tendency of that discourse: to affirm the 99 percent as ‘the people’, a gathered identity. I begin with a discussion of why ‘the people’ is a problematic
5.4 ‘The people’ as identity

The tendency of the discourse of ‘the 99 percent’ to drift toward the gathering of an identity – ‘the people’ – was always present, and ultimately dominant. This figure of apparent unity raises several key problems for a radical politics to which I turn in a moment. In turn, the conception of the 99 percent as the people was associated with the emergence of claims to representing that people, through its staging, or demonstration, in the occupied square; a representational regime that Occupy’s dominant political discourse explicitly rejected. First I outline the problematic nature of claims about ‘the people’, as argued by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. I then consider the related, but more specific problem (and problematisation by some Occupiers) of how the 99 percent identity erased the difference of experience within this imagined people. The chapter then turns to the ways in which participants in Occupy London understood the movement as the ‘voice of the people’ – reproducing the problems discussed above – and how this relates to wider self-conception particular to Occupy and related movements.

5.4.1 The problem with ‘the people’

While it is a common figure in much political discourse, ‘the people’ implies a series of claims associated with the homogenisation of difference and the gathering of a putative identity oriented toward a particular vision of politics. This represents a marked departure from my discussion of the concept of the 99 percent up to now, for which a holding off of identity was an important characteristic. For a useful outline of some of the problems and implications of ‘the people’, the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004) is instructive.

In their popular espousal of a non-identitarian constituent political process, Hardt and Negri signal the problem with a people as follows: ‘The people has traditionally been a unitary conception. The population, of course is characterized by all kinds of differences, but the people reduces that diversity to a unity and makes of the
population a single identity: “the people” is one.’ (Hardt and Negri 2004: xiv). This ‘single identity’ is in turn seen as a basic principle of organising power, as understood across the entirety of dominant political theory, which collectively states that ‘only “the one” can rule, whether that one be conceived as the monarch, the state, the nation, the people, or the party’ (2004: 328). The people, it is therefore argued, bears all the baggage of the Hobbesian vision of sovereign power, whereby the chaotic rabble are united by social contract beneath the head of the monarch. In republican democracies the people now stands in for the monarch but is similarly the self-identical figure acting as guarantor of sovereignty.

For Hardt and Negri, ‘the people’ is a device necessary for the claim to sovereign power, which is necessarily a usurpation masquerading as ‘legitimate’ representation. Here they take up Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s understanding of sovereignty as located in the ‘general will’ of the people: this ‘general will’ is not the ‘will of all’ – the plural expressions of the population, which Rousseau can only hear as ‘an incoherent cacophony’ (Hardt and Negri 2004: 242) – but is a unity created through a claim to representation. As such it is always a usurpation and denial of the difference and multiplicity of that population being gathered as a people. Hardt and Negri recognise that ‘the people’ has been a useful figure for resistance movements in the modern era, but note that the principal reason for this has been the need to establish the authority of particular organisations and legitimate their use of violence. In both the claims of liberal states and revolutionary movements then, their argument remains that ‘the ambiguity of the notion of the sovereign people turns out to be a kind of duplicity, since the legitimating relationship always tends to privilege authority and not the population as a whole’ (2004: 79).

5.4.2 Erasing difference

An important second issue must be raised regarding difference and its flattening in the mass of the 99 percent. More concretely this highlights the liberalism of a ‘people’ in which is subsumed (and policed) the gendered, racialized, classed difference of actual people. The dubious homogenisation associated with this is the source of criticism from the one participant in this research who claims to have never used the slogan, as a result of recognising a political problem with its claim.
‘I never really used the slogan... thankfully. And I’m really glad because I think it’s a downfall of Occupy. I think it’s really fucked up because the implications suggest we’re all the same – everyone’s the same and there’s this small group and they’re the fuckers, and if it wasn’t for them everyone would be cool.’ Amit

‘This all goes back to the idea of the 99 percent: ‘we’re all workers, we’re all the people of the world, and if we rise up...’ It doesn’t work like that.’ Amit

These arguments are a direct challenge to those claims made by other interviewees that present precisely this flattened picture of Occupy’s composition, audience and constituency: when Andy says that Occupy has been ‘getting through to the general population that we are being exploited and ripped off by a minority. These people are aware of us’ (my italics); or when others talk about the ‘general public’ that Occupiers encountered in and around the camp, such as when Ian says ‘the general public could walk past the camp, and find us there’ Amit’s comments hone in on the homogenising tone of the slogan, and associated attitudes regarding a collective mass subject of politics. It is worth noting that, while Occupy London was Amit’s first experience of political activism, he went on to organise on direct action campaigns with refugees, South Asian migrant workers, and a series of black liberation groups. His problem with the homogeneous 99 percent subject is that it ignores the very specific localised conditions and experiences of inequality, oppression and exploitation.

The problem with this dimension of a gathered 99 percent identity is highlighted by Baltimore feminist collective W.&.T.C.H, in their communiqué ‘On The Recent #Occcupations’ (2011):

If we want to use this figure to underscore how far polarized the rich and the poor are today, fine. But those of us that don’t homogenize so easily get suspicious when we hear calls for unity. What other percentages hide behind the nearly-whole 99%? (W.&.T.C.H., 2011: 1)

In the face of this potential homogenisation, the authors of the communiqué bear down on the decidedly heterogeneous distribution of the effects of exploitation and
oppression, firmly marking the difference between those who will bear the brunt and those whose privileges will offer them more protection.

Is a woman of color’s experience of the crisis interchangeable with that of the white man whose wage is twice hers? Are we all Troy Davis⁴? As austerity grinds us down, who among us will go to prison? Who will be relegated to informal, precarious labor? Whose benefits will be cut, whose food stamps canceled or insufficient? Who will be evicted? Who will be unable to get health care, to get hormones or an abortion? (2011: 1-2)

The authors go on to note how economic crisis invariably means a particular burden placed on women, and how the conservative cultural backlash often associated with times of recession (for example the privileging of the heterosexual family as the basic social unit to be assisted by governments) reinforces the fragile social position of gay and trans people. Signalling these considerable differences, W.&.T.C.H. propose not a rejection of alliance building and solidarity – this they welcome as necessary – but a collective project which understands that ‘unity must be constructed with an analysis of difference, not just plastered blindly over inequalities’ (2011: 2). In this 99 percent identity they see the cry of those members of the disappearing middle class who generalise their experience of new-found precarity, crushingly stating, ‘Why say “99%” when you really mean “me”?‘ (2011: 5).

It is with this analysis in mind that one must turn a critical eye to statements like the following:

‘If you’re not one of the wealthy elite that controls most of the money, land and pretty much everything else that goes on in this country, you are a part of that 99 percent, whether you realise it or not – and things aren’t going to change unless those people make it change.’ Rob

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⁴ Troy Davis was a black Baltimore resident found guilty of the 1989 murder of an off-duty police officer, and finally executed on 21st September 2011. Many discrepancies in the trial were pointed to, such as the subsequent retraction of eye witness statements and apparent cajoling by the police. Davis’s case was a major civil rights issue, particularly in Baltimore, at the time when Occupy Wall Street started.
'It’s trying to differentiate... it’s trying to say there is a one percent, who are at the heads of the corporations etcetera, who have massive amounts of money and they’re running it for themselves, and everyone else should join together to try and defeat them, because if we all did, we could.’ Ellie

Such calls for unity in mounting something like a counter-hegemonic bloc against the rule of ‘the one percent’ sound clear enough like radical calls to arms; and they may have some potential in this regard. But in emphasising a kind of unity that constructs an unproblematised ‘we’ based on telling people they are part of a collective subject, whether they realise it or not, risks a radical practice that is blind to reproducing oppressive inequalities. Indeed, this marks the apparently ‘inclusive’ language of the 99 percent as premised on the exclusion of ‘those of us that don’t homogenize so easily’. Later, I discuss how Occupiers sought to overcome the problem of representation by presenting themselves as simply ‘ordinary people’; while this was a useful strategy in Occupy London’s self-presentation (and self-understanding) this always risked the subsuming homogenisation outlined here.

5.4.3 Occupy London as ‘voice of the people’

Participants in Occupy London articulated a ‘people’ in such a way that bore the very features I have noted above: subsuming the very different positions and subjectivities gathered by the term; the association with liberal democratic concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy and popular will. In these moments the slogan is addressed in its entirety, with the problematic ‘We Are’ catalysing – or rather designating – a new series of problems. Here, ‘the 99 percent’ figures as a mass collective subject, while the figure of the represented people emerges prominently as Occupiers claim that Occupy’s was the voice of the people.

'We were just coming at it in a totally different way. No one had geared it, or engineered it that way. That was even more important. It was literally the voice of the people; the voice of the people being heard.’ Donna

‘Occupy is the voice of the people. So the people have to be there to voice themselves.’ Joe
Rachel: ‘There was just so much – at that time anyway - so much, not just hope, but expectation, that there was agency now, and we were going to have it, and we were going to use it. And it was all ‘we’. It was ‘we’ from the first day. Even though I was a virtual stranger within no time at all I was ‘we’.

JM: ‘And what was that ‘we’?’

Rachel: ‘We, all of us who... the people, really.’

These statements are an eloquent expression of the 99 percent conceived as a people, and it should be clear that this is far from the previously discussed logic of expressing a politicising critique of capitalist social relations while rejecting the need for identities. Of particular interest is Rachel’s rather complex formulation, which is echoed elsewhere as she explains her understanding of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’:

‘I think I read it to be “we”, the great collective “we”: everybody versus those who skim off the top of the system, I suppose.’ Rachel

Her statement that ‘there was agency now’, and that this agency was now available to ‘the people’ of the 99 percent, raises an interesting sense that Occupy was experienced and narrated as a fundamental tipping point toward the possibility to act. It is a neat reflection of the sense of political agency experienced by those mobilised by Occupy and participating in its processes, and the conflation of this with the wider agency of the people of the 99 percent. This distinction between the agency of the relatively small Occupier collective and a wider historical agency is not entirely clear cut. It is true that this new agency is associated with those participants who for the first time were actively involved in a politics they had long supported but not found a way of participating in. But in this sense the events of social movement are precisely a rupture in the fabric of the possible and the opening up of new capacities to act that, at least potentially, stretches beyond the biographies of a few participants into a wider-spread situation in social life.

However, I have noted the danger of the total generalisation of this into claims about the people, and it is clear from Rachel’s formulation that Occupy got close to this. Furthermore, this language raises the question of the relationship between the localised agency of the assembled and that of the people. In the other two quotes
above this is resolved by the deeply problematic representational claim to being ‘the voice of the people’. This reinforces precisely the concerns raised earlier regarding the 99 percent’s drift toward the figure of the people.‘

Such representative claims regarding the people reflect the presence in Occupy London of a wider circulating discourse associated with the wider ‘movements of the squares’ in 2011 from Occupy Wall Street to the anti-austerity movements of Spain and Greece, and the ‘Arab Spring’ (Katsembekis and Koupkiolis 2014, Graeber 2012). In these movements the prevalence of ‘democracy talk’, although often more readily associated with the direct democratic internal processes of the movement (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014), also meant the persistence of the language of ‘popular will’, or ‘popular sovereignty’, that we have noted as a feature of the usurpation staged by ‘the people’. This was associated with the claim that the excluded people of democracy were now assembled in the occupied square.

In the case of Occupy Wall Street – which generated many of the key discursive features of the occupation movements that followed, including that of London – there was a considerable liberal democratic common sense. While David Graeber’s (2013) framing of OWS as ‘The Democracy Project’ emphasises Occupy’s prioritisation of democratic self-management as the basis for the collective organisation of life – closer to an anarchist sense of autonomous organisation – that movement also made frequent reference to the formal democracy of American public life and associated historical myths, not least in marching behind banners saying ‘We, The People’ (referring to the U.S. Constitution) and circulating references to the ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’ formulation that had formed the basis of the Joseph Stiglitz article, which had inspired the frame of the ‘99 percent’ in the first place. A recurring terminology in much of the commentary surrounding OWS was that Occupy had awoken the ‘sleeping giant’ of the American people, an echo of the concerns raised by Hardt and Negri (2000; 2004) regarding the Leviathan figure of the people.

References to the constitutional rights established by the Founding Fathers, and a history of hard won formal democracy were not only the tactical deployment of available discourses that might allow radical messages to resonate with a wider public (as described in Mark Bray’s Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street, 2013), but were heart-felt reflections of a dominant political discourse
in which the *representation of the people* continued to have real currency. While the context of Occupy London was certainly different, the transnational flow of political discourse in Occupy (the consonance of which was seen as important to the highly valorised globality of Occupy) meant that these were also key features of the discourse of the London occupation.

Aside from this connection with OWS, Occupy London was very directly inspired by, and connected to, the 15M, or *Indignados*, movement in Spain; Spanish activists connected to 15M had been pivotal in setting up the London occupation and initiating its organisational approach. In the 15M mobilisations, the focal slogans of ‘Democracia Real Ya’ ('Real Democracy Now') and ‘Que No Nos Representan’ ('They Don’t Represent Us') pitched a movement concerned largely with political power. This was reflected tactically in the focus on government buildings rather than those of financial and corporate power as in New York and London; for example in the recurring actions of ‘Rodea El Congreso’ or ‘Surround (the) Congress’. Wider still, the context of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ was largely conceived within Occupy London – and was presented in much of the UK media – as an upsurge of popular will against usurping tyrants. In particular the Tahrir Square revolutionaries cast themselves as ‘the Egyptian people’ (Katsembeksi 2014), and this framing was disseminated widely. As Mehmet Döşemeci (2013) convincingly argues, these media frames drew a sharp dichotomy between the popular movements of the Arab world and the rebellious minorities of Occupy-type movements in the global North, fitting in with a wider tendency from the latter Cold War to judge a movement’s legitimacy by its location in the imagined timeline of a transcendent historical march toward the formal liberal democracy of capitalist states.

In his analysis of the movements of 2011, Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) has argued that this claim to being the people is particular to the contemporary wave of struggles, and represents a departure from the framings and self-understandings associated with previous waves of protest. Based on a close empirical engagement with movements in Spain, Greece and New York, Gerbaudo finds a common thread to be the resurgence of ‘popular identity’, a term he takes from Ernesto Laclau’s work on populism (Laclau 2005). Gerbaudo claims that the ‘movements of the squares’ represented a substantive shift away from the modes of self-conception and organising associated with the alter-globalisation or global justice movements, of which Occupy is sometimes considered a latter manifestation; to be sure the very
concrete connections of social networks and political discourse can be traced back from Occupy London through UK Uncut, the Climate Camp movement, back to the networks of the alter-globalisation movement, itself having clear connections to the Nineties’ urban and environmental movements of Reclaim the Streets and the roads protests.

Departing from Alberto Melucci’s (1989) conception of ‘collective identity’ as the process of identifications at the heart of all social movement activity in the contemporary age, Gerbaudo states that the collective identity of movements like Occupy was what Laclau describes with the term ‘popular identity’, where actors conceive of themselves – and make their claims as – the people writ large. Importantly this is both a claim about who the ‘we’ is at the centre of the action, but also an aspiration, as the movement expressed an ambition to represent the people as a whole (Gerbaudo 2012; 2014). This desire of protesters to ‘cast themselves as the entirety of the citizenry, rather than a marginal group of rebels’ (2012: 3) sets the Occupy protests apart from what Gerbaudo characterises as the subcultural modes of the alterglobalists. For the latter, Gerbaudo argues, a conscious sense of being a dispersed network of activist minorities (whose mode of organisation was that of networking and the occasional convergence as swarms on the site of major summits) meant that a claim to being the 99 percent would have been laughable. He distinguishes between an imaginary of being everyone and of being everywhere:

> Activists were well aware that while “being everywhere” – as expressed in the title of the famous activist book *We are everywhere* (Credland et al.: 2013) – that they were highly scattered across a “rebel archipelago” of squats, eco-villages, communes and insurgent communities, and could thus never lay a clear claim to numerical superiority. (Gerbaudo, 2014: 11)

So clear a distinction is overdrawn. The title of one popular account of the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, *You Are G8, We Are 6 Billion* (Neale 2002), echoes a common slogan and banner of that time, which in turn reflects a willingness to at least makes some claim to being a global people. Conversely, one could hardly imagine a more obvious example of a “rebel archipelago” than the global scattering of Occupy camps in late 2011. Nevertheless, Gerbaudo’s focus is not on what he identifies as the dominant circulating perception of who the ‘we’ at the centre of the struggle was, and who this might extend to. I return to the relationship between these two
moments of struggle in Chapter 6, where a discussion of the role of consensus
decision making in Occupy marks a related orientation toward a certain
representative centralisation.

I have now shown the ways in which participants in Occupy London reproduced the
problems identified earlier with the idea of gathering the 99 percent into an identity,
the people. I have located this in the wider circulating discourse of the movements
contemporary to Occupy London, noting that the prevalence of claims to
representing the people was a feature of that particular wave of struggles, in which
a circulating language combined with the collective experience of agency in the
occupied square to reinforce the sense of an emerging people. I now turn to a
critical engagement with the ways in which Occupy London recognised and sought
to overcome, the problem of representation at the heart of ‘the people’.

5.5 Representing the people: problems and partial solutions

The gathering of the 99 percent into the identity of the people raised the problem of
representation as the basis of the relation between the assembled of Occupy
London and this wider people of the 99 percent. While the claims to being the ‘voice
of the people’ imply the ready adoption of such a logic, representation was a highly
controversial concept for Occupy London. This was the result of an insistence, from
the very beginning, on the inability of some to speak for others, as Occupy London
advocated a politics of direct democracy, direct action and autonomy, the rhetoric of
which reflected and reinforced a suspicion of representation. At the same time, the
discourses and practices of the occupation were evidently producing certain
representational claim, which had to be negotiated.

Important here then is the conflict and ambiguity this tension created. This emerged
in a particularly stark way when participants brought up the idea of representing the
99 percent. In the following examples, each of the participants had already begun
to talk about the 99 percent as an identity of one sort or another, variously
something like a people or a pseudo-class: a thing to which Occupy London had
some sort of relationship. When then asked what was the quality or nature of this
relationship, each seems to both espouse and reject representation in the same
breath:
That’s funny because the first thing that comes to mind is that in a way we represented the voices of the 99 percent, but that’s a very dangerous thing to say for a movement like ours. I can’t really say “represented” … But at the same time that is probably the best way I can describe it.’ Jesse

‘Well I mean obviously we didn’t represent […] It didn’t say Occupy in itself is the 99 percent. When we look even at mass movements, the group of people who organise is much smaller than the group they represent. If you look, for example at the MST [Landless Movement] in Brazil, it’s a mass movement of thousands and thousands. The organising group is much smaller, but it represents others.’ Maria

There is then this ambivalence around representation. In a first move, it is the first term that occurs to each of them, and in a second, they refuse it, or at least find it troubling. In both cases these two steps take place before the participant has said a word, as the very idea of representation is immediately introduced as a problem. In Maria’s it comes out almost as a disavowal of her own as-yet unspoken use of such a term. Still, in a third step, each of them ends up with it being the best word for the dynamic they are trying to describe. We should take seriously this position of being drawn toward the language of representation while also explicitly rejecting it, and being stuck with it anyway. This points us toward an important ambiguity regarding the regime of representation in Occupy London, to which I now turn.

5.5.1 The performative slogan

In their early commentary on the significance of Occupy, Jenny Pickerill and John Krinsky (2012) turn their attention to how the experience of Occupy now called for more academic attention to the ‘crafting and repeating of slogans’. Slogans, they say, are not frames; ‘they are more ambitious’. The nature of this ambition is left tantalisingly unstated, but it is to one aspect of the ambition of slogans that we now turn. A hint of this is given in Pickerill and Kinsky’s argument that slogans take on a life of their own, as they say ‘It is exactly through this repetition that slogans come to populate the discourse and establish their own truths’ (2012: 281). The ‘truth’ of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ was to be produced through its recitation.
In *Poetry of the Revolution* (2006), Martin Puchner advances a theory of the manifesto that has considerable applications for the theorisation of the slogan. In part through his use of J.L. Austin’s (1955) concept of performativity in language, Puchner provides a way of locating the slogan in a liminal space between present and future, as it expresses a current condition (of inequality, and a people defined by this) and a future arrangement (the constitution of the 99 percent people). More than this, the slogan is a vital moment aimed at producing that futurity. Austin’s work points to how the manifesto proposes to call into being a new, fragile reality – the future to which it refers.

Citing Marx’s claim in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* of 1852, that the social revolution ‘cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future’, Puchner pauses on this sense of poetry – *poiesis* – as an act of creation, to outline how the *Communist Manifesto* ‘seeks to produce the “modern revolution” through an act of self-foundation and self-creation’ (2006: 2); that is, the manifesto *speaks into being*. For Puchner, such speech acts are *performativ*e in the sense described by Austin, where utterances such as ‘I swear’ do not describe but rather constitute reality – they perform the very action they reference. Staying with the *Communist Manifesto*, ‘Proletarians of the world, unite!’ aspires to being performative and generative, in that the actualisation of the fully-realised proletariat (as agent of history) depends precisely on that union of those who share the common condition of proletarians: ‘The last sentence, like all those of the Manifesto, is thus addressed to a recipient who does not yet fully exist. It performatively creates its addressee as agent in the manner of the Declaration of Independence’ (Puchner, 2006: 31).

A similarly poetic-creative dimension to language is addressed in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the ‘order word’, based on their insistence that the role of language is not chiefly to *represent* the world but to *do something to it*. Summing up this position, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 84) state that ‘Language is made not to be believed, but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience’ and that ‘language is not life; it gives life orders’:\(^5\) Addressing the matter of slogans, they turn to Lenin’s

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\(^5\) This Deleuze-Guattarian conception of a pragmatics of language is a central idea running through Chapter 6. There, the principal consideration is what forms of speech and speaking did to the people gathered in the square, and what it allowed them to do (that is the kinds of collectivity that was produced through collective speech). Here, on the other hand, I focus on role of this very specific aspect of Occupy speech, this slogan *qua* slogan, as it brings Occupy London into particular relations with the figure of ‘the 99 percent’.
On Slogans (1977 [1917]), and Lenin’s call for new revolutionary slogans to be
deduced from an analysis of the historical configurations of that moment, and
directed toward moving things along to the next critical step; for example, Lenin
discusses the obsolescence of ‘All power to the Soviets’ once the commencement of
the war demanded a reorientation toward the centralised power of the vanguard
party. As neither the coordinated proletariat nor the truly authoritative vanguard
party yet existed, the role of slogans and manifestos was to prefigure and catalyse
these forms on the terrain of language, in what Deleuze and Guattari call an
‘incorporeal transformation’. These statements, they argue, ‘extracted from the
masses a proletariat class as an assemblage of enunciation before the conditions
were present for the proletariat to exist as a body’, and ‘extracted from the
proletarian class a vanguard as an assemblage of enunciation and was attributed to
the “Party”, a new type of party’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 92).

This performative, productive aspect of the slogan, or the manifesto, is always at
risk of failure, as it depends on the authority of the speaker to enact the
transformation at hand. As Deleuze and Guattari state, ‘Anybody can shout “I
declare a general mobilisation” but in the absence of an effectuated variable giving
that person the right to make such a statement, it is an act of puerility or insanity’
(1987: 90-1). Puchner also notes this, contrasting performativity with Austin’s
contrary concept, theatricality. For Austin performativity requires a speaker who has
the authority to perform, and this authority is contextual; the archetypal non-
authoritative context is the theatre where normal speech acts do not function, and
where no enunciation can be truly performative. Puchner argues that theatricality
haunts the Communist Manifesto - the threat that it will all just turn out to be a
theatrical act, not backed up by the history-to-come. Puchner develops this, going
on to claim that manifestos tend to occupy a liminal position between theatricality
and performativity – between powerlessness and authority; they are written from a
position of weakness, ‘project[ing] a scenario for which it must then seek to be the
first realization’ (Puchner, 2006: 29).

‘We Are The 99 Percent’ vacillated between performativity and theatricality. It was a
speech act in a feedback loop with its own authority to be spoken; a claim to the
right to speak, and to speak for and from the people but where this people was not
yet constituted. In its performative moment it tended toward the constitution of a
loose 99% subject, but as with the manifesto it teetered on the brink between
constitution and description. Theatricality haunted the slogan and the Occupiers using it. The one thing 'We Are The 99%' could not really stand up to was an audience. In such encounters the spectre of theatricality has threatened the self-legitimising claims of Occupiers, as illustrated by the following note of my own from an Occupy London march during the first weeks of the occupation:

>'After leaving St. Pauls we headed along an un-planned march route along Fleet Street and the Strand, through Trafalgar Square and on to Parliament. For much of the way our march packed the street, but we were flanked most of the way by tourists and shoppers spending their Saturdays in town. Some looked interested enough, a few joined, but plenty more just looked some combination of confused, horrified or inconvenienced, pinned against walls, inside shop doorways, and avoiding us round side streets. And there we were marching through the lot of them shouting 'We Are The 99 Percent' and 'This is what democracy looks like'. I've had my doubts about the 99 percent thing before, but it just felt ridiculous shouting it surrounded by all these people who didn't seem to identify with us at all and just wanted to get on with their shopping.' Field notes, Saturday 5th November, 2011

The gaze of the audience here threatened to disrupt the performative conjuring of the slogan. Or rather, this is a reminder that a statement like 'We Are The 99 Percent' was always far closer to theatricality than performativity. Those gathered in the square shouting 'We Are The 99 Percent' were the first embodiment of that expansive 'we', which claimed to be wider still, and needed to expand.

The performativity of the *Communist Manifesto* is epitomised by the imperative form of the verb in 'Proletarians of the world, *unite*!'; the very addressee of the phrase must be called into existence through the work of the manifesto. With 'We Are The 99 Percent' the issue falls instead on the subject: 'we'. The continuous folding in of more and more into the space of that 'we' – the unbroken extension of the sentence's subject – is the condition of the slogan's authority, and indeed of the wider authority – even perceived legitimacy – of Occupy itself (at least *that* Occupy, Occupy London). There was then always this tension between the dynamic performativity of a subject whose expansion defied identity, and its reduction to mere theatre, spoken by a reduced 'we': the troupe of Occupiers. I now turn to this
desire to progressively fulfil the slogan’s claims through the ongoing assembly of more and more of ‘the 99 percent’

5.5.2 Assembly and dynamic representation

The logic of assembly – amassing the people of the ‘99 percent’ in the occupied square to participate in the emergent process of occupation – was central to Occupy’s dominant regime of representation; one that demanded the persistent permeability of the line between the represented and the site of representation. With ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ seen as an aspirational promise for the movement, the emphasis from very early on was on the privileging of assembly as the mode for progressively fulfilling this aspiration. This assembling of the 99 percent in turn produced the occupation as a space where the 99 percent would be both produced and represented, in such a way that undermines the clear distinction between a representing inside and represented outside. This dynamic form of representation reinforced the privileged position of the centre of representation: the assembly in the occupation.

‘We Are The 99 Percent’ was an aspiration. The slogan named a desire to expand further and further to include and incorporate the ‘everyone’ of the 99 percent, as these responses by two participants indicate:

‘Obviously the whole point of our presence is to facilitate the society we want to see, which is one that includes every human being in the process’
Bernie

JM: ‘When people in Occupy say ’We are the 99 Percent’, do they mean Occupy itself is the 99 percent?’

Andy: ‘I think we hope to be, yes.’

This in turn is a reflection of the expansive self-understanding that characterised the explosive and unpredictable beginnings of the Occupy movement. It should be considered alongside the injunction of those early days to ‘Occupy X’ or ‘Occupy Everywhere’. However, while the desire to be the 99 percent created a necessity for ongoing expansion, it is not necessarily the case that this would prioritise the
assembling of the 99 percent in the already occupied square. As we have seen in
the previous chapter, Occupy did not always necessarily fetishise the central role of
the established occupation, but rather sometimes sought to deterritorialise Occupy,
moving the ethos and practice of occupation into ever newer geographical and
social spaces. This followed a logic of dispersion, in keeping with an understanding
that the 99 percent were everywhere, and that the problems of inequality,
exploitation and political dissatisfaction were everywhere, entangled with particular
local contexts. An expansive politics of the 99 percent could then have meant not
bringing more people to the St. Paul’s assembly, but establishing other sites of
assembly and taking Occupy’s critique to the 99 percent, so conceived.

And yet, very quickly – in fact right from the beginning – the logic of assembly here
dominated. For a movement criticised for its apparent inability to make demands (of
the state, or other power brokers) a vital demand, oriented instead to those outside
of a privileged and powerful minority was that they assemble. As the final point of
the ten-point Initial Statement of Occupy the London Stock Exchange stated, ‘This is
what democracy looks like. Come and join us!’ This was a call to participate in the
multiple projects and activities of the movement, and to contribute to the General
Assembly that had been the organising space in which the Initial Statement was
agreed, but crucially this was to be participation by coming down to the occupation.
This is hinted at by the following lines from one participant, Ian, who says that
Occupy London ‘invited’ the arrival of more and more people:

‘Everybody was invited in a sense. Compared to other movements it is
about as inclusive a movement as you can get, in terms of its outreach, just
by being in a very public place and being very accessible […] I personally
thought at the time that we had to create this forum for open democracy
where we didn’t have any too-solid ideas. We just needed to invite
everybody in, and then that would be created within the movement’ Ian

These lines are useful, both in signalling the fundamental limitation of inviting
‘everybody’ to a small London square, and in giving a very clear expression to the
belief in the emergent process of occupation, as created by the ongoing folding in of
the 99 percent, which shaped much of the self-understanding of Occupy London.
Crucially, as the square became the site of assembly it necessarily became a site of
representation; not only the types of representations produced by the frenzy of
media attention, but in a broader sense that this centre of assembly was a site in which the 99 percent was demonstrated; that is, shown, in the almost scientific use of the term ‘demonstration’ (see Barry, 1999). This demonstration relied again on the ongoing arrival of new bodies.

In his work on the ‘squares movements’ of 2011, and with a particular focus on the aganaktismenoi of Athens, Alexandros Kioupkiolis (2014) has noted that the kind of representation taking place in the occupied squares had a very particular character. Focusing on the logic of assembly, and placing emphasis on the need to open up organising spaces he argues that while claims to representation were important, there was a genuine desire that the represented keep folding in to the sites of representation. Kioupkiolis is attendant to the unfolding of this process, stating that ‘They depersonalize representation, whose function is assumed by anonymous, mobile and shifting crowds’ (2014, 165). This form of representation – one that is open to an ongoing process of unfolding complication through the ongoing movement across the permeable barrier between represented and representing – indicates a mode that is distinctly different from the political party (even notionally radical conceptions of workers’ parties). What is more, it suggests a manner of representation that is dynamic and does not depend on the tendentially stable identities of either the mobilised activist grouping nor the people without.

The words of London Occupiers usefully illustrate this feature of representation.

‘Occupy is the voice of the people, so the people have to be there to voice themselves […] You want a continual influx of thousands of people who are participating, taking ownership, being listened to, and listening to other people, developing directions and ideas together as one, using participatory democracy.’ Joe

‘The majority of people still active in Occupy […] believe we’re this mass movement, that represents this mass society, so we need to be really inclusive and be really careful about what we say to all these people who don’t give a shit about Occupy, and don’t even know Occupy exists’ Maria

Especially arresting is Joe’s formulation that Occupy is ‘the voice of the people’ and ‘so the people have to be there to voice themselves’. This requirement that they
'voice themselves’ suggests a funny kind of representation which retains the suspicion of representation seen above; the sense that nobody can speak for anyone else.

Joe’s phrasing makes clear that the legitimacy of the representational claim to being the ‘voice of the people’ depended on the ‘continual influx’ of the represented. In turn the demand that it be continual already indicates the limits and coming failures of this procedure of legitimising representative claims through reconstitution. Maria’s comment also reflects on this, from a later moment of vastly reduced capacity following the eviction of all camps and buildings, and the increasing bounding of Occupy London as a sort of activist grouping held together by common history, rituals, emotional ties and the absence of other avenues for people’s political activity. She too signals that the claim to represent is dependent on the ability to remain open to the represented, but here she notes the pathetic nature of such a claim, mocked by the circumstances in which Occupy now found itself; the theatricality. Her comment rightly indicates how Occupiers’ claims to representation are in fact not legitimate by virtue simply of a formal openness.

5.5.3 The illusion of the constituted people

The dilemma of perpetual assembly, and the tension between performativity and theatricality, are illustrated further in the eventual falling out of use of ‘We Are The 99 Percent. As we moved deeper into winter 2011, and as the camp became a diminished site of organisation with very few new arrivals beyond the occasional homeless person glad of the shelter and company, the full form of the slogan was rare. Beyond a certain period it simply didn’t make sense. It could be neither spoken nor heard in the way that it sometimes had. The 99 percent/one percent opposition remained as an analytical frame, but the full ‘We Are...’ articulation became a rarity. It resurfaced on in the larger demonstrations throughout 2012, and indeed on the nights of major evictions, but it seemed in these moments like an artefact that had more to do with the sonic-aesthetic identity of Occupy than any real grammatical piece of speech.

Ultimately the project of assembling the 99 percent in the occupied square – of fulfilling the slogan’s performative ambition – failed as people stopped coming. It
was ultimately doomed to do so, but early on even the slow process of Occupy London’s expansion through new arrivals could maintain the sense that it was taking place, and that the legitimacy Occupy claimed based on this was well-founded. When this stopped Occupiers further experienced the problematic nature of the claim to being the 99 percent. This moment also highlighted the way in which the illusion of the amassing people had been maintained from the distorted viewpoint of the square. I now turn to a short discussion of this breakdown of the logic of assembly.

‘I think at some point we just didn’t use [‘We are the 99 Percent’] that much, and I think the reason behind it is exactly what you mentioned: When more of us started thinking we were actually just a small group of people.’ Jesse

‘We are open to the world, but the rest of the world hasn’t turned up yet.’ Dmitri

This realisation – that ‘we were actually just a small group of people’ – was of course very reasonable. In this period toward the end of the occupation, not only had the people stopped amassing in the square, but good numbers of those who had contributed significantly to Occupy London in the previous months were leaving. Facing up to the reality of what this meant for any attempt to advance Occupy London’s politics in these new circumstances was essential. I discuss the increasing bounding of the Occupy London group in Chapter 6. For now, I signal instead the fact that this revelation – that the assembled were not ‘the people’ but a relatively small group – was experienced as a revelation at all.

The process of assembly in the occupied square meant creating a space of representation, demonstration and embodiment of ‘the 99 percent’, conceived as the people or everyone, but this very focus on assembly here presented insuperable limits: the obvious limitations on the entry and participation of ‘everyone’ in a small city square. It is not that Occupy the London Stock Exchange ran out of room; in fact assemblies never became all that impractical because of the incompatibility of the numbers and the space. But rather, the emphasis on the centralising call to ‘Come and join us!’ reflected an investment early on in staging an illusory demonstration of the 99 percent rather than the more optimistic possibility of calling
to ‘Go and occupy!’ The assembled could only ever stand in for the people; it was almost necessarily ‘theatrical’ in Puchner’s terms.

The sense of the successful folding in of the 99 percent relied on the illusion and techniques of the ground level of the occupied square. One important factor in the persistent faith in Occupy’s dynamic form of representation was the sort of myopia of the crowd. In his commentary on Occupy Wall Street, which nonetheless holds here, Craig Calhoun has said

There is also fragility in the very project of representing the people by public gathering. This is all but ubiquitous to protest movements. Whether in an occupation, or marches or sit-ins the participation of a crowd encourages the sense of being part of something bigger than oneself, of acting not just as small minority of the population, but as “the people”. Yet this also encourages the illusion that one has found much wider support than perhaps one has. (Calhoun 2013: 6-7)

Alain Badiou has made a similar comment on the shock that the uprising of May 1968 ended rather than continuing to advance a revolutionary situation in France: “But we were all on the streets!” (2012: 56) was the common sentiment of incredulity among participants caught up in the ‘intensity of compact presence’ (ibid: 35) of the demonstrations and occupations. As such, while it was in moments of encountering its outside that participants in Occupy London experienced the limitation of the movements claims, those limitations were always there, held off by the immediacy of the crowd. Within the occupied square and spaces of Occupy the intensity of bodies, voices, movement could create the sense of more and more people.

This was reinforced by communications techniques such as the People’s Mic, whereby a speaker addressing the assembled would speak in truncated sentences, with each part of the phrase being repeated first by those within earshot, then by those that heard that, and so on, going further and further from the speaker until all were reached. This produced a cascade of echoed speech through the crowd, as wave after wave repeated the words. Michael Taussig’s (2013) brief ethnographic account of Occupy Wall Street picks up on the way that this could reinforce the sense that ‘the people’ were assembling, as squares were filled with noise, and each
repeated wave of the people’s mic reiterated the vastness of the crowd. The
patterned use of the people’s mic in London is worth touching on. Firstly, this was a
technique which responded to the specific problem in New York that amplified
sound was banned. Its unquestioned application in the London context, where
amplified sound is generally permitted is attributable not only to the fact that it had
become synonymous with the aesthetic of Occupy, but that its use reinforced the
sense of a mass phenomenon. In later days when numbers were few and
communication within the group was possible without waves of echoed voices, it
remained common to hear the call of ‘Mic Check!’ that initiated the people’s mic,
and sometimes even for the people gathered there to repeat the words of the
speaker as if unaware that there was no interested crowd out of earshot. In such
moments the people’s mic had clearly become part of the ritual routines of Occupy
London (and in that sense did more to reinforce the identity of the group rather
than a sense of popular unity), but couldn’t help also holding up the aspiration to be
a mass phenomenon of the people, to the fact of that project’s failure.

5.5.4 ‘Ordinary people’
A further way in which participants in Occupy London sought to overcome the
problems of representation and usurpation at the heart of ‘the people’ was through
the way in which they presented themselves and their fellow Occupiers. Central
here is the discursive figure of the ‘ordinary person’. This was associated with an
avowed rejection of representation: the belief that no one person could speak for
another or for the movement as a whole, and the tendency to present themselves
as ‘just me’. It also denotes a distinct tone of representation insofar as those
claiming to be ordinary are not claiming to speak for the people, but instead to
really be the people, or a fragment of it; of the wider mass of ordinary people. This
vision of ordinariness is however marked by a distinction in how Occupiers represent
their own ordinariness compared to that of others. Additionally, this ‘ordinary
person’ elides difference in the way I addressed earlier.

The anti-representation stance of Occupiers reflected a reality that was lived in the
occupied square. This was the recognition that Occupy was a shifting, mercurial
network of things that exposed the problem of representation in a very everyday
way. The experience and words of one participant is illustrative. Early on in Occupy
Amit was in a meeting with a group of lawyers who had come to discuss the legality
of the encampment and how to organise the upcoming legal battle with the
Cathedral and the City of London Corporation. Amit remembers these lawyers
insisting that to organise future meetings, they would require a representative from
Occupy to act as a point of contact. Amit recalls the questions that occurred to him
at the time:

‘How do you choose... How does that group... How do you get those people
to go and talk to you guys and have a voice for everyone else. That’s one
small group having a say for the collective. And anyway, who the hell are
the collective? People are coming in and out every day. They come for one
day and never come back again, or they stay. How do you represent that?’

Amit

Amit is right that on this level – and highlighted during this time of the constant
flow of people in and out – Occupy was beyond representation. Representation
would always leave an excess, such that the claim to represent would have more to
do with a moment of domination. A similar sense was also apparent in early media
interviews with Occupiers who insisted that anything they said was just the opinion
of one person; ‘I can’t speak for Occupy, only for myself’ was a common refrain.
There were clearly problems with such a claim. In reality, the privileged voice this
person was given at that time would surely have been interpreted as at least
somewhat representative by those who saw it. Nevertheless, this insistence
reflected a dynamic that was central to the self-conception of Occupy London at this
stage. While this is more concerned with an individual’s ability to represent Occupy,
rather than Occupy’s representation of a wider people, this reflected a broader
concern regarding such possible usurping claims that Occupy represented the 99
percent. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, this presented a difficulty for Occupy London
with regard to generating demands and clear positions; the movement’s ability to
speak would entail the prominence of certain voices or claims over others. For now,
I only signal this suspicion of representation as the background to claims to being
‘just me’, the ordinary person.

Representing their statements and contributions as those of an ‘ordinary person’, or
similar formulations, Occupy participants both denied an explicit claim to speaking
for anyone else, while also presenting their claims as somehow generic, in such a way that a form of representation was always retained. One participant, Matt, illustrates this clearly when he says,

'We didn’t want to be pigeonholed as like super-political. We are very ordinary. That’s all part of our 99 percent idea. We’re not special. So that’s why people would say things like ‘I’m not a revolutionary, I’m not an anti-capitalist, but I’m really pissed off’. They would preface it like that as if to say ‘I’m not some super hard core whatever, I’m just a person’.’ Matt

Here we see the way that this ‘just a person’ is opposed to what we might see as the already-committed activist, with the associated ideological commitments (of whatever sort) that were viewed with suspicion in Occupy London. This in turn was a feature of the wider square-taking movements of that time. The Manifesto of the Barcelona 15M occupation camp stated:

We are normal and common people. We look like you: people who get up in the morning to study, to work, or to look for work, people who have family and friends [...] Some of us consider ourselves more progressive, others more conservative. Some believers, others not. Some of us have well-defined ideologies, others consider ourselves apolitical... But we are all worried and outraged by the political economic and social landscape that we see around us. (quoted in Dhaliwal 2012)

In their analysis of the occupation protests in Greece and Spain, Marina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2014) argue that signifiers like ‘ordinary people’ or ‘normal and common people’ are abstract and vague enough to include ‘everybody’. This, they argue, distinguishes them from identity and interest politics which seek recognition as a particular group. The formulation in the Barcelona 15M Manifesto, of ‘some of us...while others’ is indicative of a radical ethos of inclusion, and a desire to avoid foreclosing the possibility of participation from certain actors and sectors of society. As this statement suggests, this meant even ‘conservative’ and ‘apolitical’ voices could join the site of movements whose major claims were broadly those of a radical or progressive left, and which had been initiated, on a structural-organisational level, by groups rooted in the cultures of radical left movements. This
would become a major issue for the collective decision making practices of these movements – and certainly Occupy London.

There are two specific problems that arise with this figure of the ordinary person: the first relates to the application of this generic category; the second relates to the individualisation of the political voice. This first problem can be inferred from some of the other ways in which Occupiers refer to this ordinariness: for Bernie it is ‘regular people’; for Lucy it is ‘just citizens’; for Stephanie ‘Joe Bloggs off the street’. This latter term is most instructive: while people certainly represented themselves as ‘regular people’, ‘Joe Bloggs’ almost necessarily names someone else, reduced not to a common condition but to a certain genericness that no individual actually possesses. In this way, ‘ordinariness’ elided the different positions of particular speakers with regard to things like class, race, gender, as well as what were perhaps fairly firmly-held political positions. In this sense what Matt terms ‘our whole 99 percent idea’ could be put to work in erasing important differences, risking general claims that might tend toward dominant groups. These are connected to the criticisms of the homogenising 99 percent, raised earlier by W.&.T.C.H. and Amit above. This counters the argument of Prentoulis and Thomassen (2014) that references to ordinariness represented an important progressive dimension of these movements, by affirming the heterogeneity between participants, and indeed the wider constituency of potential participants. Secondly, representing their voice as that of the ‘ordinary person’ or ‘just me’ the Occupier risked reinforcing the individualisation of the political subject, in such a way that could bolster the delegitimising narratives mounted against protesters and participants in social movements. The claim to being ‘just a person’, spontaneously moved to street politics, reproduces a disempowering discourse that says that this is the model of ‘legitimate’ popular protest, to be contrasted with that mounted by agents considered outside of legitimacy: the agent-provocateur; the ‘rent-a-mob’; the ‘usual suspect’ activist. Therefore rather than challenges the way in which particular people or forms of political engagement are excluded from the legitimately political by dominant discourse, this reproduced a claim to legitimacy based on these terms.

5.5.5 Representation through ‘diversity’
I now turn to the most troubling way in which participants in Occupy London navigated the problems surrounding the claim that 'We Are The 99 Percent', imagined as a people. Above I have discussed the process of recognising the limitations of the project of assembling, or constituting the 99 percent in the square, and noted that this was always a feature of Occupy London, though it became more prominent as time went on. The continuing desire to be the 99 percent in the context the observable limitation to this claim, led to lure of the idea that Occupy represented the 99 percent by virtue of the claimed 'diversity' of the people gathered.

This is a sign of the huge importance for Occupy London of the claim that 'We Are The 99 Percent'. If this was not being fulfilled by the ongoing amassing of the people, then other rationales were found to justify the claim that the 99 percent were in fact represented in the square.

'I mean, I thought that Occupy had an extraordinarily diverse group of people in it. I think that at least 75 percent of the 99 percent was there. Because you know there were [...] journalists, scientists, doctors, psychotherapists, artists, painters, DWP workers, City workers low down, nurses. I mean you name it! And that was the middle class- Never mind the endless... the postmen, taxi drivers... I mean there were a lot of different people there. So, no, obviously we didn't represent the whole, literally, but I think we bloody well tried hard and we did our best.' Vicky

'I can see [why people might have a problem with the language of the 99%], but then again we were so diverse that I can still see why it was a legitimate language to use.' Jesse

'The second point of the Initial Statement says something like 'We are all ethnicities, all nations, all ages ...' it’s ridiculous. It gives you a sense of what people were trying to get at - trying to break down these divisions and fractures. But a friend of mine pointed out later that we should have said 'We welcome...‘ not 'we are...'. We aren’t all of those people.' Matt

Whether referring to the diversity of Occupy London in terms of socio-economic class, race and ethnicity, or professions, there is a tendency toward tokenism here
that troubles both the radical anti-representation stance found in other Occupy moments, and the more interesting type of representational claim we have accounted for (namely the dynamic form of representation embodied in the assembly). With the loss of faith in the expansive project of constituting a people, the liberal discourse which dominates wider political life provided this tokenistic model of representation as a substitute. The persistence of such understandings is not all that surprising, given the currency of such ideas in everyday liberal discourse, and the fact that Occupy had mobilised many people whose political vocabularies were rooted in mainstream liberal democracy, even as their practice pulled them in more progressive directions.

There was some truth in these claims that this was a ‘diverse’ movement, at least early on. As attested to by many interviewees who had previous activist experience, this was not a mobilisation of the ‘usual suspects’ (Eric) and ‘same old faces’ (Joe) that they were used to seeing at demos and actions across London. This is certainly overstated insofar as Occupy London was still very predominantly white, with disproportionately high numbers of university educated people driving much of the decision making. But we should take seriously the often heard claim that these groups were less dominant than in many previous waves of protest action in which these participants had been involved, and that this sense of relative diversity was based on a real experience that this was not the work of (only) the typical activist milieu. This opening up of the field of practice of direct action and contentious politics, outside of the typical activist ghetto, was certainly one of Occupy’s most exciting dimensions, maximising dynamic tension and forging new solidarities. This had real effects on the ongoing development of the Occupy movement in London, as well as the life experiences of many activists. But when this is envisioned as people ‘representing’ their respective situated ‘communities’, we have fallen into the trap of a wholly insufficient pseudo-democratic discourse upon which our current political culture rests; a culture Occupy London directly and explicitly challenged. The situation may be different if these were selected, legitimised representatives of organised situated communities and groups; if Occupy were a convergence of the generative mobilising forces of a wider network of organised collectivities. But there is no such potential in conflating the contingent right to make representations for a group, and mere membership of a group – a fact often conferred from outside anyway, not defined by the person in question. Even Matt’s critique of the Initial
Statement’s claim is based not on the claim that diversity legitimises representation, but on the fact that there was not *enough* diversity to claim representation.

Having seen the critique of W.&T.C.H. earlier – that the homogenising idea of the 99 percent ignores the difference of experience of particular groups – it is clear that dealing with difference is an important problem in developing a politics of the 99 percent. But this reductive logic of tokenistic diversity is insufficient; more so still if it is deployed to buoy up Occupiers’ own sense that their ambitious project is legitimate. While this was not a very prominent language to find in Occupy, its presence at all is significant – indicative of the wider circulation of liberal discourses – as is the way in which it highlights another trajectory of the need for ‘We Are The 99 Percent’ to be true.

5.5.6 ‘Disagreement’ as bridge

Having considered the ways in which Occupy London made certain representational claims in relation to the 99 percent, conceived as something like the people, this account has retained a sense, established earlier, that there are fundamental problems with such claims about the people. Although I have signalled how Occupy sought to affirm more progressive versions of representation and ‘the people’ (through assembly, constituting a future subject through the slogan, and certain aspects of the claim to being ‘ordinary people’) I have also shown the ways in which these also reproduce further problems. I now depart from a consideration of the empirical ways Occupy negotiated the problem of representation, to instead offer an analytical argument about how we might reconsider the claims to a people of the 99 percent, as a fundamental claim of radical politics and one which tentatively brought together the figure of the people with a critique of inequality.

The work of Jacques Rancière (1999, 2011) posits a fragile moment of representation as the basis of radical politics. This is conceived very much as a moment of radical democracy, and puts Rancière in dialogue with other post-Marxists who have turned to the political project of democracy, rather than that of communism, as the competing positions have sometimes been described (see in particular Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Laclau 2005, Žižek 2010). Here I begin with a brief outline of Rancière’s theorisation of politics, democracy and the people,
signalling some of the problems that arise with this. I then move on to consider how this illuminates a progressive dimension to the representational claims regarding the 99 percent, and argue, moreover, that the 99 percent – as a version of the people inseparable from the structural fact of inequality – advances one aspect of Rancière’s theory.

The language of ‘the people’ is important for Rancière, and commentators have observed the significance of his repurposing of the term for considering the apparent populist claims of the 2011 movements (Kioupkiolis and Katsembekis 2014, Dean 2014, Burgum 2015b). Important in these accounts has been a focus on how, for Rancière, the people names not so much a clear identity, but rather a terrain of contestation. He emphasises the opposition of conflicting visions of the people – or of the ‘community’ – as the basis of the political. He conceives politics as an aesthetic affair, whereby a dominant system of representations he calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ is interrupted. This distribution, or partition, is composed of those forces which condition the possibility of perception, thought and activity within a given, dominant order. In this context, the political is divided into two forces, or operations: police (‘politique-police’) and politics (‘politique-politique’). Rancière designates as ‘police’ those forces that partition and maintain in place a particular regime of the sensible: of the types of bodies, roles and modes of participation that can be perceived, and those that cannot. Outlining the way in which this police order acts by depoliticising certain spaces, Rancière says:

> It is police law, for example, that traditionally turns the workplace into private space not regulated by the ways of seeing and saying proper to what is called the public domain, where the worker’s having a part is strictly defined by the remuneration of his work. (Rancière, 1999: 29)

This idea of ‘having a part’ is essential, as the police order determines participation in community life and also determines the count of society’s parts; it says in what capacity – literally as what – an individual or group can be perceived, and therefore can participate (as waged workers, but not proletarians; as gays, but not as queers). In this schema, politics proper is precisely the interruption of this police

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6 For Rancière’s original French ‘partage du sensible’ I use the most common translation – ‘distribution of the sensible’ – though I note Julie Rose’s (2004) translation of ‘partition of the perceptible’ as it usefully emphasises the delineating partition that is key to Rancière’s concept.
order: the miscount of society’s parts and the insistence that something else, including other subjects, be seen; that they be political. This moment of initiating politics through a contentious miscount is what he terms the ‘disagreement’ (*mésentente*). This initiates politics as, for Rancière, politics requires an antagonism between the dominant count of parts and the miscount: Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part’ (1999: 11). Crucially for a consideration of the 99 percent, his account is particularly interested in moments where this takes the form of a universal claim, made in terms that affirm a new way of apprehending the life of the whole of the community:

> Politics in general is made up of such *miscounts;* it is the work of classes that are not classes that, in the particular name of a specific part or of the whole of the community (the poor, the proletariat, the people), inscribe the wrong that separates and reunites two heterogeneous logics of community (Rancière 1999: 39)

The claim to speak for, or as, the people is lent a central role in advancing a progressive politics. The exemplary historic disagreement Rancière refers to is the Aventine Secession of 494 BC, in which the need for the Roman patricians to enter into a treaty with the rebelling plebeians implied a disagreement. By virtue of their status, the plebs were necessarily excluded from the community of those possessing the capacity for political speech, but recognising the treaty meant accepting their inclusion within the political. Rancière takes this to be an archetypal assertion of the demos, which as Aristotle makes clear, does not suggest a unitary body, but always an abstract assemblage of those ‘ordinary people’ who have no claim to govern; those who do not count in the current distribution. By affirming their place in politics, and speaking as the people, the plebs affirm the general principle of equality, which is at the heart of Rancière’s politics.

Rancière is clear that this is not simply a matter of the admittance of an excluded, but already recognised identity group into political life, but rather the constitution and articulation of new subjects, or subjectification: the production through a series of actions of a body and capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience’ (1999: 35). He highlights the importance of their own
performative speech – consulting their oracles, making pronouncements in a way that aped the Romans – in bringing this about. Occupy did something similar in simply doing politics in the occupied square, and on the streets of the financial district, thereby performing the fact of its equality as a site of the political, and of their equality as political actors. But more important here is the suggestion that Occupy’s claim to being the ‘voice of the people’ might be seen as inherently progressive in advancing the fact of equality and the right of the excluded to speak at all. This vision of the-99-percent-as-people is a far cry from the usurping Hobbesian Sovereign suggested by Hardt and Negri’s critique of the people.

Another question arises, though: whether the interruption of the police order, and the admittance into the perceptible, is enough to constitute a radical politics. First, the idea of the distribution of the sensible is distinctly un-sociological in depending on one, singular aesthetic order. While proposing the primacy of a dominant regime of seeing is not so controversial, Rancière makes no account of the different perspectives and positions from which ‘the community’ is apprehended, including positions of marginality and resistance. This has a significant impact on his vision of the moment of interruption. While the more abstract account retains a sense of dynamic reconstitution of the field of collective life, the empirical examples tend to be predicated on the admittance of new categories in what he terms the police order: the plebs are given the logos from the perspective of their betters; or following another of Rancière’s exemplary ‘disagreements’, Auguste Blanqui’s profession of ‘proletarian’ is recognised and entered in the court ledgers. These claims make the transition from intolerable nonsense to sense. But it is hard to see how the apprehension of new categories by a dominant regime of sense-making can be lent too much progressive content. While there are clearly progressive features of these developments, a radical politics demands more than disagreement and interruption. It demands, among other things, a critique of capitalism. While Rancière assists us in recognising a potentially progressive democratic dimension to the Occupiers’ claim to being the representative voice of the people, it is important to retain his sense of this people as a site of contention and reconfiguration: what

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7 Another key examples of ‘disagreement’ is that which took place in the 1832 trial of French socialist Auguste Blanqui. When asked his profession, his response of ‘proletarian’ – and the process of initial confusion and subsequent recognition by the court – affirmed, Rancière argues, the until-then inadmissible truth of the proletariat, and concomitant critical understanding of capitalist social relations as structurally exploitative and unequal (Rancière, 1999: 38).
vision of the people did the idea of the 99 percent propose? And as what did Occupiers demand to be perceived in the cry of 'We Are The 99 Percent'?

The idea of the 99 percent bound together the figure of a democratic people and the fact of inequality. At its best the political interruption it instantiated affirmed the inseparability of the condition of the community from the structures of exploitation and inequality. As such this was not about excluded bodies and individuals making a claim for their inclusion – or incorporation – into political life, but was an assertion that the people is defined by relations of inequality. The power of mobilising this connection contributed to the sense among so many Occupiers that the movement’s greatest success had revolved around the affirmation of the 99 percent formulation. It did not merely ‘get people talking’ about inequality, though it certainly did this; it also had the subtle, but profound effect of articulating a people of inequality. At its most useful Rancière’s ‘disagreement’ is about affirming that bodies should be seen as something different than that which they are permitted to be within the dominant distribution. To claim to demonstrate the people of the 99 percent was to demand that they be seen as the embodied particularity of exploitative social relations. This in turn establishes a bridge between the two tendencies with which I began the chapter; the critique of inequality and the gathering of a people.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has accounted for the complex negotiation of ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, the central claim of Occupy discourse, which I have argued played out between two distinct tendencies. The first of these was the insistence on the fact of inequality, and I have argued that this created the possibility of a politicising ‘breach’ that might cut across social relations in such a way that acted as a critique of capitalist organisation. I have also shown that the understanding of this inequality – a central mobilising issue for Occupy London – varied between a critique of capitalist social relations as such, and more liberal understandings of an inequality that had now become excessive. This also entailed a more identitarian understanding, where the ‘one percent’ names an identifiable group of people rather than the dynamics of exploitation and dispossession.
While the critique of inequality named by the 99 percent need not have referred to an identity at all, there was another, ultimately more prominent tendency, to see this as something like ‘the people’. The chapter has clarified two concrete problems with the figure of the 99 percent-as-the-people: the problem of usurping violence that underpins it; and the erasure of difference, which must be brought out and dignified in radical politics rather than hidden beneath notionally inclusive categories that in fact privilege dominant groups. I have accounted for the moments in which Occupiers did make explicitly representative claims regarding the people of the 99 percent, but subsequently offered an account of how we must view the forms of representation emerging in Occupy London as more nuanced. I have argued that the slogan had a performative dimension, seeking not just to represent, but to prefigure and produce the reality it named, and I have shown that the logic of assembly – the ongoing folding in of the represented into the site of representation – was an expression of this desire (while also accounting for the more troubling claim to representation through ‘diversity’). Finally the chapter has used the concept of the political ‘disagreement’ – as articulated through a precarious claim of representation – as a means of connecting the two tendencies that have shaped the chapter.

This articulation of the people of inequality was central to the radical and arresting nature of the Occupy project. While it is important to understand this novel feature, this was intimately connected to the ongoing extension of Occupy London, such that the degradation and downswing of Occupy was in part marked by the increased obsolescence of the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’.
Months before I would go on to pitch my tent in Finsbury Square and participate in the events of Occupy London, during a trip to visit family in Cardiff, I bought a copy of the *Adbusters* magazine that contained the double-page poster first calling to ‘Occupy Wall Street’. Drawn first to the arresting image of a ballerina atop the Wall Street bull, flanked by black bloc anarchists in the mist, my attention was then drawn to the bold text above: ‘What is our one demand?’ it read. After momentarily, and dismissively, thinking to myself that the many social, economic and environmental ills targeted in that magazine – and facing the wider society – could hardly be addressed through any solitary demand, I gave the question no further thought, parking it alongside the other unanswered questions the poster prompted, most notably that of whether this call to occupy Wall Street would come to anything.
It did, and it spread. That October, my first visit to the St. Paul’s camp revealed the breadth of claims emerging in this unfolding movement. Weaving through the tents and stone pillars on a bright, but chilly Saturday, I read the words painted on placards, posters and tent sidings, overheard conversations, and stopped to read the Initial Statement, hand written in felt pen on a sheet of flipchart paper inside the Info tent. Between them, they named the many issues around which Occupy had mobilised: the casino practises behind the financial crisis and the false solution of bail-outs and austerity measures; a political crisis of institutions beholden to business interests; an ecological crisis; global inequalities and poverty; issues of privacy and civil liberties in the internet age; the unliveability of things as they stood. What they named and called for ranged from the general and systemic to the particularities of policy. Then, on one pillar of the colonnade archways running along one side of the camp, I noticed a familiar image. Surrounded by maybe twenty other fly-posted stickers and flyers, each with its own particular claim, was a printed reproduction of the *Adbusters* poster, its provocative question – ‘What is our one demand?’ – thrown into sharp relief now in the context of so many voices, so many statements. I wondered how this movement that so privileged the inclusion of multiple positions and concerns, might articulate common demands; how might the many of Occupy London speak with one voice?

This chapter considers the way in which collective speech was constituted in Occupy London, and how collectivity was itself constituted through moments of collective speech. Demands, like other articulations of common will, always entailed the possibility of disciplining a complex movement, or allowing ascendant voices with representative claims to usurp the power of the assembled, conflicting with Occupy’s rejection of institutionalised leadership and modes of representation. At the same time Occupy London was always creating moments of collective speech, from the decision-making space of the General Assembly, to interactions with the media, and the various statements drafted and issued. This chapter turns to each of these in turn to consider how a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) – an organising concept for the chapter – is arranged through concrete movement practices. This builds on, but is distinct from, the concerns of Chapter 5, where the problems of representation and the claims to unity were discussed in relation to the way in which Occupiers conceived of the wider ‘99 percent’. While the concern there was the discursive and practical ways in which...
Occupiers connected their activities to a broad understanding of social relations and the social write large, the current chapter is concerned with the dynamics within the occupied square, and the forms of collectivity constructed by and between the participants of Occupy London.

Speech is a basic problem for collective radical projects, as they mount challenges in terms of sense-making and seek to express themselves. This idea is integral to several key conceptions of movement politics: Alberto Melucci (1996) and Alain Touraine (1971) for example argue that that contemporary movements are engaged principally in struggles over meaning; Jacques Rancière’s (1999) vision of politics as fundamentally a challenge to the order of sense-making, and realignment of the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (as discussed in Chapter 5); Michel Foucault’s (1970) recognition of the significance, to any politics of liberation, of asserting the legitimacy of one’s voice, and of the right to name, such that movements ‘confiscate, at least temporarily, the power to speak’; Jurgen Habermas’s (1985: 127) idea that social movements ‘raise debate and moral questions, and reassert communicative rationality’ in the public sphere.

The significance of movement speech as a defining problematic for Occupy London is indicated by the prominence, in much commentary on Occupy, of the movement’s apparent refusal to make demands (as this account makes clear, demands of sorts were in fact made). This included those critical voices that saw this as a failure to engage with the antagonism and prioritisation essential to politics (Žižek, 2012; Kioupkiolis, 2013; Katsembekis, 2013; Deseriis and Dean, 2012), and those who praised the rejection of demands, either in terms of its ‘inclusive’ effects (Calhoun, 2013; Mitchell, 2013) or as a certain anarchist orientation away from power-brokers like the state (Graeber, 2013; Bray, 2013; Newman, 2013; Harcourt, 2013). These varying positions are considered in detail below.

This locates Occupy London within a wider dynamic facing contemporaneous movements; mobilisations that brought together large numbers of people of varying political positions into the occupied squares, where a common negation of the prevailing order was easier to come by than a common affirmation. While many Spanish 15M activists disliked the ‘indignados’ label, it was widely used both inside and outside the movement. The sense that this was a moment of indignant outrage – the label coming from the title of Stephane Hessel’s influential *Indignez-vous*
was prominent in the self-understandings of the connected movements (the demonstrators of Athens’ Syntagma Square, for example, used the Greek translation of *indignados, aganaktismenoi*) and as a frame for interpreting them. This was positioned precisely in opposition to the articulation of clear common statements or demands. Craig Calhoun expresses a generalised understanding when he says of Occupy Wall Street,

> Where journalists complained that the movement wouldn’t state a simple list of demands or program, in fact part of its brilliance and a source of its success lay in refusing this in favour of a much broader evocation of outrage. (Calhoun 2013: 10)

Rather than coherent common statements, the effect of the indignant crowd was often characterised as an unintelligible noise, whether this was in Shulman’s (2011) labelling of Occupy Wall Street as ‘cacophonous and polyvalent’, or Kaika and Karaliotas’ description of the ‘collective moan’ of the Syntagma occupation, which ‘remained a noise’ despite the clarity of individual voices within it (2014: 6-7). Indeed, this connection between anger, noise and unintelligibility is taken to be characteristic. Nancy and Strong’s (1992: 375) statement that ‘anger is the political sentiment par excellence. It brings out the qualities of the inadmissible’ recognises a certain political potency, but sees in the moment of indignation a break with sense-making; anger, they say ‘goes beyond all that can be accomplished reasonably in order to open possible paths for a new negotiation of the reasonable’ (ibid). The question is how this moment of rupture can be organised to extend the moment of connection-in-rejection.

The words of participants in this research not only highlight the significance of Occupy as a moment of speech, but their terms point to the tension that underpinned it. When asked about Occupy London’s greatest success, more than half of the participants in this research say something like ‘getting the message out’ on things like inequality, the financial crisis and austerity. As Eric puts it ‘an event like [Occupy] creates an opportunity to get a message out, and that tiny window is quite limited, and if you don’t get the message out in time, you’ve lost it’. Meanwhile, a central idea in Occupy’s circulating discourse was that the movement was facilitating a ‘conversation’, with many disparate voices brought together to the camp and its assemblies to participate in a dialogue toward change. The words of
one Occupier, writing just after the eviction, that ‘what the Occupy movement could do was start conversations’ (Anonymous 2012: 442) reflects a general sentiment I heard time and again. There was a basic tension between the processual and polyvocal ‘conversation’ of the occupied square, and the need for this to produce a singular and definitive ‘message’. This tension between ‘conversation’ and ‘message’ recurs throughout the chapter, as I account for how this was negotiated differently by differing modes of speech.

I begin below by outlining Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’, which undergirds my analysis throughout, before moving onto a discussion of how speech and collectivity were negotiated empirically. First, I take the General Assembly as the paradigmatic site of Occupy London’s ‘conversation’ and ‘message’, considering two very distinct types of collective speech: the ‘People’s Mic’ where the content of shouted words was less important than an embodied co-resonance; and the application of consensus decision-making, which I argue tended in Occupy London toward uniformity, policing the actions of autonomous movement spaces (as illustrated by a defining dispute many months after eviction). Next, I turn to the question of media representation and the context of a movement being constantly called to speak. I follow the conflict this produced in a movement for which no one, in theory, could speak, with a focus on the dispute between two privileged centres of speech – the Press Team and Occupied Times newspaper – over how Occupy would be represented. Finally, I offer an analysis of the statements and demands that Occupy London produced, showing that while there was a broad tendency toward inclusive, conflict-avoiding statements, when concrete claims and demands did emerge they tended toward a liberal reformist position, which I analyse and critique.

I have touched on the matter of certain liberal features of Occupy London earlier, in particular in my discussion of the understandings of inequality named by claims about ‘the 99 percent’. As this becomes a more significant point of analysis now, I briefly clarify that I take to be liberal those elements of Occupy which articulated the following connected orientations: a broad belief in fairness and meritocracy as a way out of injustice; a related individualism, emphasising individual rights, as well as individual responsibilities; the concomitant understanding of inequality, the financial crisis, and forms of oppression as moral issues; an orientation toward reformism, guaranteed by, rather than fundamentally critiquing, the capitalist state.
Such a politics was revealed in various moments through the collective speaking of Occupy London.

Throughout my analysis, I pause to consider what kinds of collectivity were thrown together through moments of speech, and what the limitations to these were. In particular, this marks a critique of certain liberal dimensions to Occupy – seen in the privileging of ‘self-expression’, and aversion to creative conflict, reformist demands and the PR approach to the press – and of a certain weakness of collectivity, which often stalled at the stage of speaking, rather than making this the basis of a deepening solidarity of action.

6.1.1 Collective assemblages of enunciation

To consider the ways in which collectivity was constituted through speech, I turn now to Deleuze and Guattari’s understandings of enunciation and language. Like other aspects of their work, this responds critically to the concepts of psychoanalysis, and in particular Jacques Lacan. Lacan’s theory of the subject (1966) distinguishes between the ‘subject of enunciation’ – *le sujet de l’enonciation*, understood as the unconscious ‘I’ that speaks and is announced through speech – and the ‘subject of the statement’ – *le sujet de l’enoncé* – the grammatical ‘I’ of language, which seeks to designate the former, but does not truly signify, or represent, it. Lacan here argues that the subject is not quite the agent of speech but rather both speaks and is spoken.

Deleuze and Guattari retain this sense of a speech that produces its speaker, but their wider philosophy of multiplicity, and against identity and Oedipal subjects, means they are less concerned with the subject, and more with the essentially multiple and social nature of enunciation, as indicated by their designation of ‘collective assemblages’ of enunciation. For them, the subject is neither the precondition nor cause of language. Speech comes not from Lacan’s divided subject – split in two at the ‘I’ – but always from a crowd of sorts. As Deleuze has it: ‘Who speaks, and acts? It is always a multiplicity even within the person who speaks and acts. All of us are “groupuscules”’ (Deleuze in Foucault 1980: 206). This is the basis of an understanding of ‘the necessarily social character of enunciation’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 88), with individuated speech emerging from the collective
assemblage of the sense-making language system. Describing this dynamic they say,

> The collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends solely on my apparent social determinations, which combine many heterogeneous regimes of signs. Speaking in tongues. (1987: 93)

Elsewhere, Deleuze and Guattari say that to engage in speech (and writing) is ‘to elect the whispering voices, to gather the tribes’ (1987: 93). This image of the moment of speech as one where the murmur of the molecular crowd is thrown together as a singular-seeming voice, announcing itself, is very helpful for considering the dynamics and tensions at play when Occupy spoke. While Deleuze and Guattari’s words above often refer to the individual person speaking, their account applies to the constitution of empirical collectivities, gathered in moments of speech; indeed, their conception wholly undermines the distinction between notionally individual and group speech. This application has been recognised by Aragorn Eloff (2015: no pagination) who says that political formations are ‘not groups consisting of individuals, but arrangements of enunciation’. Similarly, when Deleuze and Guattari say that ‘the statement is individuated, and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so’ (1987: 88) this illuminates the contingent and pragmatic nature of collective speech; it is contextual, never foreclosed, and enacted to get something done. A sensitivity to this runs through this chapter, which seeks to show how different moments and modes of speaking instantiated particular arrangements of enunciation – kinds of speech and collectivity – which contained particular political implications. This focus on a pragmatism of language is important. Deleuze and Guattari are principally concerned not with deciphering semiotic chains, but with what language does, and what it allows us to do, stating that in speaking ‘one is not representing or referring, but *intervening*’ (1987: 96). This understanding of language as action, and platform for action, runs through the chapter as I address the possibilities opened up, and limits encountered, in particular moments and types of speech.
6.2 The General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) was the most prominent site of collective speech, and of coordinated collectivity across Occupy London. It was a space in which the various positions and voices mobilised by the event of Occupy London, and clamour of that crowd, moved toward moments of harmony, agreement and the possibility of ongoing organisation. The GA’s centrality to Occupy London is indicated in Lucy’s statement that it was ‘our signature’. Sam Halvorsen, himself an active participant in the St. Paul’s GA, has stated that the General Assembly was the backbone of Occupy as ‘a process of grassroots activism, broadly conceptualised as a form of autonomous politics’ in which ‘the process is the point’ (Halvorsen 2012: 428). While the process of consensus decision-making was certainly important to the direct democratic and prefigurative dimension of the occupation, this is not to say that the final point of these discussions was insignificant, as I will show. Alongside this the GA was the site of a more immediate experience of speech and inchoate collectivity, from the unfolding group discussions to the chorus of the People’s Mic (discussed below). The GA was therefore a key nexus of Occupy’s ‘conversation’ and its ‘message’, staging the tension between a polyvocity marked by difference and possible conflict, and a univocity that privileged something like unity in agreed positions.

The first General Assembly of Occupy the London Stock Exchange took place on the first day – October 15th 2011 – as the people within the large police kettle outside the Cathedral came together to decide how to proceed. The methods and form were initiated by activists from the Spanish 15M and from the milieu of London’s anti-capitalist and environmentalist politics (Camp for Climate Action, UK Uncut). Following this, during the period of the occupation there was a GA twice a day at St. Paul’s, as there was in Finsbury Square for much of its time. Early on, the busier GAs would consist of several hundred participants (averaging one to three hundred but swelling to toward five hundred), though these numbers did not last much past the end of November 2011. By January 2012, GAs attracted maybe fifty to one hundred active participants, and the Assemblies that met to prepare for eviction in February could fit in the marquee tent which no longer often served as Tent City University, but rather accommodated people sleeping off hangovers and boredom on wet sofas (and who were often unimpressed with the noisy GA that sprang up around them).
Prior to each GA a ‘Process’ Working Group would organise an agenda, based on any points brought forward from previous GAs, things fed in from the various other Working Groups, and any events or circumstances that needed to be addressed collectively. At the start of the GA everyone able to attend – many of those sleeping at the occupation, others who lived at home but attended key meetings, as well as casual but repeat participants and one-off visitors – gathered on the cathedral steps which worked as staggered seating for the assembled (though on especially rainy days we crammed into the sheltered portico at the top of the steps, leaning on the white pillars, or sitting on the cold stone floor). As people arrived and took a seat on a stone step, they filled the time awaiting the GA’s start by chatting with friends and new acquaintances, circulating the day’s news and rumours, reading, rolling cigarettes, or eating a hot bowl of something from the kitchen, whose serving times often coincided with the GA, staggering the arrival of those keen to guarantee a meal before the meeting.

At the bottom of the steps was an open area from which most speaking took place, often with amplification: megaphones, or mics and speakers. Each GA was facilitated by what was intended to be a rolling roster of trained facilitators (although training was regularly offered it became common for certain people to settle into this role) who would initiate the GA with a welcome, an outline of the agenda, and a brief introduction – aimed at everyone, but especially newcomers – to how the Assembly would work, including the range of gestures through which one could show agreement, disagreement, or make a series of interventions. These hand signals would be read by the facilitators over the course of the Assembly who would therefore be able to keep track not only of the queue of people wanting to speak, but also the wider mood surrounding a topic. The content of the GA itself might vary but would usually include feedback from the extant active Working Groups (for example, the Press Working Group communicating some interesting coverage Occupy London had received, the Recycling Working Group asking for help with the bins later), ‘shout outs’ to let people know of any actions or activities they could participate in, discussions, and proposals. These latter ranged from collective position statements on a range of issues, statements of solidarity with movements and activists elsewhere, the establishment of new Working Groups, or decisions about the organisation of the camp or meetings. For discussions and bigger
decisions, larger GAs would split up into ‘break-out groups’ for more manageable conversations that would then be fed back at a later time.

*The Guide to General Assemblies*, published on the occupylondon.org.uk, stated that the GA’s role was making ‘decisions about the direction or processes of Occupy London as a whole’. While this indicates its role as organisational centre, this document was in fact only produced after the eviction of the St. Paul’s camp, when a period of quite sporadic and scattered activity led some to a desire to pin down this bureaucratic function of the GA. However, the GA’s place in Occupy had exceeded that of a space of decision-making, as one participant, Matt, outlines in these two quotations,

‘We needed a venue where the camp could communicate with itself officially. We needed to come together and decide what was important. We had two assemblies a day [...] The first one in the day was more practical camp stuff. The second was more political debate and strategy, although they tended to blur into each other.’

‘If you have a camp you need a venue where people can engage with practical questions, but also engage in more abstract political questions and develop their ideas. It’s also very important for cohesion. It also provided an entry point for some people who were walking by, who might stop and decide to participate in something. There were all sorts of reasons it was needed’ Matt

The point with which Matt begins – that the GA was needed so the camp could ‘communicate with itself’ is an interesting formulation. The extent to which Occupy London could be considered a unitary thing (‘itself’) was dependent on moments, like the Assembly, where the many were gathered in the event of speaking, and where Occupy London was produced as subject and object of speech. It is also worth noting Matt’s comment on the difficulty of fulfilling the intention to distinguish between two ‘types’ of assembly – one oriented toward the political ‘issues’ around which Occupy mobilised, and another toward the functioning of the occupation camp. While this may in part reflect a certain lack of collective discipline and the related tendency of each new immediate issue to spill into the next debate or meeting, it is also a manifestation of the deeper character of Occupy’s politics in
terms of the interspersion of the circulating political critique with the running of everyday life, and – important for the discussion here – the tendency to not clearly distinguish between those pronouncements of the GA whose audience and target were interior or exterior to the movement and occupation. That apparently outward-oriented pronouncements were also always about constituting the internal life of the square is similarly important for this consideration of constitutive enunciation. I now turn to the two distinct forms of speech that defined the General Assembly, but tended toward two very different types of collectivity, with their own implications: the People’s Mic, and the process of consensus decision-making.

6.2.1 The ‘People’s Mic’

The ‘People’s Mic’ – also called the ‘human microphone or ‘Mic Check’ in Occupy London – was a method for communicating in large crowds without amplification. It had emerged out of necessity in Occupy Wall Street, where Occupiers lacked the permits required for amplified sound, but nonetheless needed to communicate to large crowds, particularly in the GA. The People’s Mic worked as follows: the individual addressing the assembly would speak in short sentences or sentence-parts, with all of those in ear-shot then repeating, in unison, those fragments, one after the other. This way those a little further away could hear, and then repeat the words for those further out still, in a ripple effect of sound. The call of ‘Mic Check!’, which initiated this process, had an immediate effect on the bodies in the square, as each became alert to its role in this embodied technique. While the deliberative decision-making dimension of the GA was certainly important, so too was this more immediate production of a fragile collectivity of bodies networked in the moment of speech.

This technique was the topic of much commentary surrounding Occupy. While the claim that it was ‘the most powerful invention of the Occupy movement’ (Taussig 2013: 21) ignores the admittedly less prominent use of this technique in social movements at least as far back as the anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s (Costanza-Chock 2012), it reflects the sense that the People’s Mic was viewed as more than a functional innovation; that following its practical adoption it came to constitute ‘a general part of the movement culture and a signifier of the
participatory nature of Assemblies’ (Costanza-Chock 2012: 381). This is indicated for example in its enthusiastic adoption in the London occupation, where there was no such problem with amplified noise, and where speakers and megaphones were often used. By the time of Occupy London’s beginning, the call of ‘Mic Check!’ was already central to the practices and aesthetics of the movement.

The People’s Mic staged the tension between multiple and singular forms of speech. This is even suggested in its name, juxtaposing as it does a technology for individual amplification, and the many named by ‘the people’ (for a detailed discussion of the problem of ‘the people’ as singular and multiple in Occupy, see Chapter 5). It produced a form of speech whose significance exceeded the communicable content of the words. The call of ‘Mic Check!’ threw together a collectivity of speech from the disparate conversations of the square, as individual voices were, momentarily, handed over to the collective. In a movement where there was plenty of disagreement, one suddenly found oneself with another’s words in one’s mouth; that voice one part of an uproarious shout of many voices in unison, filling the square. Developing from the Deleuze-Guattarian concepts addressed above, Aragorn Eloff (2015: no pagination) has said ‘We need assemblages of collective enunciation and creation, not communication’. This distinction between communication – determined by its other, the recipient of speech, and the relay of information – and enunciation, or the endogenous expression of the capacities of the assembled, helps clarify that aspect of the GA which was about the expression of immanent power, rather than the content per sé. As Craig Calhoun (2013: 5) says, this ‘made ordinary statements into ritual performances’. The People’s Mic assembled Occupy London through its own performative announcement of itself.

There was an immediate and bodily effect to this on those participating. Throughout the course of my research, I frequently observed and felt the electric relay of the call of ‘Mic Check!’ through a crowd: an elevated energy; a sharpening of attention; smiles of enjoyment.; the affective networking of bodies in speech together. Aside from being ‘united’ by the particular statements and pronouncements that it agreed upon (addressed below), the General Assembly was a collective brought together by those affective experiences of co-resonance. This is, however, not to agree with Calhoun’s (2013: 6) argument that the People’s Mic ‘made the group a demonstration of participatory democracy’. The latter names an approach to the
decision-making modes of the community which presumes certain rational forms of speech and the negotiation of a plurality of voices, whereas the People’s Mic was animated by an affective entanglement which accompanies, but is not the same as, the linguistic expression of political positions.

It is worth noting that the functioning of the People’s Mic was not always smooth, and not without conditions. I often noticed that certain statements were repeated louder, firmer and with more gusto, while for others the volume and enthusiasm of the echoing voices dropped. Particularly early on, statements that reaffirmed Occupy’s significance, popularity or global reach would be repeated with a roar and even interrupted with cheers. This might include news of success in Occupy camps elsewhere in the world, statements of solidarity and support for London’s Occupiers, or broad statements – strongly worded – around which Occupiers could unite: ‘We, the people have had enough’; ‘An economy that works for everyone’; ‘This is what democracy looks like’. When statements entered into more contentious terrain, where there was marked disagreement among the assembled – for example ‘Occupy is a movement against capitalism’ – there was sometimes a noticeable quietening, an irksome tone, and even singular voices raised in groans of disagreement. During my own participation in the People’s Mic, I was certainly happier to repeat some words more than others, broadly reflecting not only my own politics, but also a sense of what had already been admitted as a shared platform in Occupy London. The effect of all this was that the rising and falling pulse of echoed voices in the People’s Mic both reflected and reproduced certain limitations on that which was admissible in Occupy. Rather than being expressed through explicit disagreement, this was a less clear, though no less real, way in which the collective project of Occupy was shaped by a dispersed disciplinary dynamic.

The People’s Mic revealed a potential in its contingent and fleeting harmonisation of the crowd’s many voices. Moments of collective bellowing were the muscle-flexings of this emerging collectivity, though it was not clear where this would go; whether this would be the basis for ongoing radical action by a more organised collectivity, or whether it would stall in this moment of experiential thrill, revealing a hedonistic individualism. As an aesthetic and affective practice, the People’s Mic certainly articulated the way in which the occupation was a site for staging ‘the 99 percent’, but while this aesthetic question is central to Occupy’s significance (Taussig 2013), it is different to the question of organisation. While the People’s Mic entailed an
intensification of affective potential, a pragmatic understanding of enunciation is concerned with what this then lets us do.

6.2.2 Consensus and process

I now turn to the second feature of the General Assembly, the process of consensus decision-making by which Occupy London’s General Assembly agreed on proposals, statements and demands, as well as on camp matters. This was an organising principle for the ‘conversation’ of the occupation, providing the means to arrive at agreement. One participant, Joe, neatly expresses the ideal that underpinned this, in terms of the apparent collective sense of ownership this produced (here in relation to the agreement of Occupy London’s Initial Statement):

‘It was real democracy [...] Everyone instantly had total ownership of that statement. It wasn’t like a small hierarchy had a little gathering, then came out like: ‘Right, we’re telling you what this is all about’. It was more like: this is what everyone has decided on for the last 48 hours. You had ownership.’ Joe

This link between participation and collective ownership was, however, not so straightforward, as indicated by a certain disjuncture between the principles of consensus and the particular way in which it was conducted at Occupy London, the basis of the discussion that follows. While the principles of consensus decision-making – and certainly its application during the alter-globalisation movement – explicitly emphasises the importance of polyvocal difference and the creative capacity of conflict, there was in Occupy London a tendency to use consensus in such a way that avoided dealing with conflict, and sought to produce an identitarian form of unity. While it may be empirically true that through this process ‘a heterogeneous crowd of leftists, centrists, nationalists, religious people and apoliticals, gradually took form as a collective actor speaking [...] as a ‘we’, i.e. as one voice.’ (Katsembekis 2013: 182), we must interrogate this apparent transfer of the many into one. In principle, the GA sought to provide a much-needed organisational centre that would remain faithful to the ‘diversity’ of the assembled, but it too easily drifted toward a limited vision of individual self-expression that placed limits on advancing Occupy beyond this moment of speech.
Consensus-based decision-making has for some time been a prominent form of decision making in autonomous, horizontally-oriented social movements. A lineage of the use of consensus in movement settings can be traced from the Quakers, through the Movement for a New Society, the anti-nuclear Clamshell Alliance of the 1970s, ACT UP and radical environmentalist groups like Earth First! (Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009). It is a form of ‘formalised horizontality’ (Feigenbaum et al 2013) rooted in a desire to develop counter-institutions that can operate parallel to dominant structures with a view to directly challenging these. Consensus found particular prominence in the alter-globalisation movement from the late 1990s (Juris 2008; Graeber 2009; Maeckelbergh 2009), from action-specific planning as in Seattle in November 1999, to major platforms such as People’s Global Action (PGA). Its use in Occupy reflects a broader link to the ‘political culture’ of the alter-globalisation movement (Bray 2013).

In her definitive discussion of the internal democracy of the alter-globalisation movement, Marianne Maeckelbergh (2009) provides a clear picture of a consensus model that seeks to bring out conflict and draw creative energy from the ‘diversity’ of the people brought together in and by that movement. Its title *The Will of the Many* poses a problem that was at the heart of Occupy’s speech: how can the many qua many construct something like a moment of collective will. For Maeckelbergh, the alter-globalisation movement’s consensus process was predicated on a rejection of liberal democracy’s concern with difference as inherently antagonistic, and therefore requiring the solution of representation. Instead, ‘differences need to be understood as strands of a network that can be woven together to create new structures’ (2009: 172), such that interests are constructed through the collective process of the movement’s unfolding. As a result, Maeckelbergh argues, the movement was ‘conflict-embracing, welcoming conflict as a sign of diversity, resolving it by rejecting the normative principle of singular unity and expanding the constructive potential of conflict’ (2009: 142). She puts this approach to unity and diversity in terms of speech when she says that this entailed a rejection of the ‘normative principle of univocity’ (ibid), which underpins both representative and deliberative forms of movement decision-making, and is typically based on the domination of certain voices.

Significantly, Maeckelbergh does see consensus as a way of building some kind of unity, but much is revealed by her recommendation that such unity be built around
abstract terms, avoiding a divisive precision of definitions, such that different parties can imbue such terms with their own particular understandings; this is similar to Laclau’s (1996) concept of the ‘tendentially empty signifier’ around which coalitions can build. It is clear from Maeckelbergh’s proposal that, for her, the alter-globalisation movement was always ultimately a platform for action, to which speech had a pragmatic significance. Within this rubric, abstract terms on which all could agree could mobilise divergent groups and constituencies for what mattered: street politics; direct action; summit shut-downs; and the organisational practices that prefigured possible futures. For Maeckelbergh then, a deep ethnographic engagement with the alter-globalisation movement revealed a process that took for granted the plurality of voices, and that built those into common projects and interests through consensus and cooperative action.

Occupy’s consensus approach differed from this in its attitude to conflict, unity and the very point of collective speech, marking its distinction from the alter-globalisation from which it inherited many of these practices. Rather than bringing out creative conflict to build a sufficiently unified platform for otherwise autonomous action, Occupy London tended toward a desire to avoid difficult but sometimes necessary conflict, and to use the GA as a sort of sovereign centre that exerted an authority over the movement’s various corners. This GA was characterised by an ethic of extreme inclusivity – in keeping with the discourse of being a movement of ‘the 99 percent’ – alongside a desire to prioritise the right of all those included to speak, leading to the inflated power of individuals to derail the actions of others. If the ideal result of the arrangement described by Maeckelbergh was maximum capacity to act and sufficient coordination, the consequence of Occupy’s approach was a version of unity that stifled action and asserted a centralising authority of lowest-common-denominator common ground.

In his analysis of the ‘movements of the squares’ of 2011, Paolo Gerbaudo (2012, 2014) has said that these movements mark an ideological step-change in their renewed emphasis on unity over autonomy and a diversity of tactics. In Chapter 5 I have discussed his idea that the 2011 movements reflected a turn toward ‘popular identity’. This is one of two major, and related distinctions he draws with the alter-globalisation movement. The second is, Gerbaudo claims, that the more recent movements have been marked by a desire for unified positions, whereas the alter-
globalisation movement had tended to see full agreement as unrealistic in so plural a movement and world (much as Maeckelbergh argues).

It is worth pausing on this apparent distinction between two related moments of contemporary struggle that in many ways bear much resemblance. In his analysis of Occupy, Graeme Chesters (2013: 105) has argued that ‘the Occupy movement is one manifestation of the alter-globalisation movement’, stating that these two moments share a range of common features. Chief among these is the fact that they are each movements mounted against the incursions of neoliberalism on ever more areas of social, economic and cultural life. But he also argues that there is a common imaginary between these two moments of mobilisation. Chesters outlines these:

The three core elements of this imaginary are (a) a rejection of the notion of state power or party politics; (b) the foundational importance of difference and multiplicity and (c) critique, reflexivity and enquiry, rather than linear or formulaic dogmatisms. (Chesters 2013: 116)

Of particular importance here is the second point about the privileging of multiplicity and difference, which has already been touched upon in relation to the alter-globalisation movement, and embodied in its approach to consensus. While it is accurate to say that the self-conscious valorisation of these things persisted in Occupy London, what emerged from my prolonged encounter with the institution of the General Assembly is a more centralising force that indeed, as Gerbaudo describes, sought a problematic form of ‘unity’. This unfolded in a way that in fact held back the extension of the Occupy project, as I argue below. This is not to disagree that these were each moments of the same common movement – a term which is itself ever in dispute – but to remain attentive to the way in which features of past movement moments are applied anew in subsequent mobilisations, running into a new series of problems.

This did not mean GAs were not full of disagreements, on things like the wording of statements, what banners to put up, or the remits of Working Groups. Given the emphasis on the inclusivity of all, disagreements were extremely common. Indeed, as the following statements attest, much was found wanting precisely in this
combination of openness and a consensus process that valued all these disparate voices.

‘Hey, if you read the people who have written about consensus, they say it should only be used when people all share the same common values. How can you say that of a group of people in public who you have never met before and don’t know? You can’t make that assumption.’ Eric

‘The combination of consensus decision-making and open membership is utterly fatal and can only lead to failure in any movement which employs it.’ Kevin

‘It’s very hard to agree on stuff if you’re coming from such a wide range of backgrounds [...] There’s a risk of lowest common denominator: What can we agree on? Well, we can agree on this vague wiffly-waffly thing. People who wanted much more from it felt frustrated and gave up and went away.’ Ellie

In large part, the problem was the combination of a desire to let everyone in and let everyone speak. Rather than extending Occupy through forms of organisation which would bring out and deal with conflict, delimiting the movement in ways that would be productive while necessarily excluding some, what was prioritised was extension through the suspension of the indignant moment. As I document in the following section, this was significantly handled via a problematic focus on the right of all to speak, meaning the collective could be significantly held hostage by troublesome individuals.

6.2.3 Blocks and derailment

Occupy London’s approach to the consensus process emphasised unrestricted self-expression, as exemplified by the official use of the ‘block’ feature of the decision-making process, and the unofficial exposure to derailment. While the guidance documents on consensus and the GA outline a clear process whereby disagreements with proposals are ‘folded in’ to the proposals themselves, and solution-seeking discussions entered into by conflicting parties (much in the mould of Maeckelbergh’s
image of creative conflict), they also make clear that 'Sometimes, one or more people object to the proposal so strongly that consensus is not reached and the proposal cannot go ahead'. The document goes on to say that 'a block is a serious matter and implies that the person blocking feels the proposal is against the fundamental principles of the movement [Occupy]'. However, this runs into the problem raised by Eric earlier regarding the incompatibility of consensus and 'open membership'. The following quotes bring this to bear on the problem of the block:

'It's different if you’re in People’s Global Action. They had PGA principles. If you blocked it was on those principles. If you do that in an umbrella like Occupy, a block doesn’t mean anything. It just means you disagree in a broad sense. For you it might be against the movement but without those principles what does it mean?’ Amit

‘Blocking was supposed to be: ‘I disagree so strongly with this that I’m going to walk away if it’s implemented’. I don’t think there was ever someone that walked away as the result of a block, which is what I felt it should have been.’ Rob

With no clear yardstick against which to measure if something was ‘against the fundamental principles of the movement’ the block was less a mechanism for political consistency and more an expression of personal will. Furthermore, not only was there no practical substance to the idea that one would ‘leave the movement’ if a proposal went ahead, but Occupy London’s desire to ‘include rather than prioritise’ (Calhoun 2013) or inability to deal with antagonism (Deseriis and Dean 2012) meant that ultimately one stubborn block could mean broadly popular proposals were vetoed. The General Assembly’s emphasis on a problematic form of unity was thus extremely open to the impact of individuals seeking to block proposals. As Lucy recalls, of an attempt early in the camp to establish a new Working Group to focus on the ‘internal communications’ of the camp:

‘There was one person in particular that was completely against it, and disrupted the whole process. They even blocked the formation of the working group. So there was this thing: do we keep on going or what? We were all sitting there, people from press [working group], the info tent, everywhere, all insisting it should be done, but there was one person in that
meeting blocking it. There was a lot of confusion about what should be done. I walked out of that meeting thinking: okay, well I still think it’s important and I’m going to start by working in the info tent and seeing what I can do. But it was a shame the working group didn’t work.’ Lucy

Related to this dynamic, was the GA’s exposure to derailment by individuals or small groups that the process had little scope for addressing. This was particularly marked in the case of certain individuals – often intoxicated – whose loud interruptions or rambling attacks represented an ongoing challenge to the functioning of the Assembly. This was not a matter of blocking proposals, but rather filling limited organising time with distracting topics or unhelpful personal jibes. Amit rightly asks,

‘We talk about being inclusive, but do you mean every single fucker who wants to come and say something?! If so, you’re open to derailment. How do you deal with that?’ Amit

Several participants in this research recounted stories of whole GAs side-tracked by the insistent interruptions of people using meetings to mount personal attacks. While these people were criticised, and sometimes asked to leave, this was almost never enforced other than in extreme cases of direct threats. At other times, discussions were derailed by more well-meaning people who proceeded on their own topic of discussion, sometimes at length, perhaps somewhat intoxicated by the uncommon experience to hold court in political dialogue. While the power of such experiences was certainly a highly motivating force to people’s early enthusiasm for Occupy, as an ongoing principle of organisation it ran into problems. There is some truth to Amit’s comments on the differing attitudes toward consensus, between those with previous experience of it, and those for whom this was an entirely new thing: ‘People who know about consensus know it takes ages and they fuck off straight away. And then the people who don’t know it are like: This is amazing I’ve never done this before!’

This ongoing privileging of self-expression at the expense of collectively productive progression reveals a liberal individualism that limited the radical prospects of the GA. Commenting on a similar dynamic in Occupy Wall Street, Mark Bray has argued that there was a ‘liberal libertarianism’ that was averse to any kind of coercion, and
thought that ‘any attempt to silence anyone in any context was anathema’ (Bray 2013: 92). He continues,

The problem was the people who had dabbled enough in counterculture and diffusely radical politics to understand the potentially oppressive nature of coercion and authority, but hadn’t rid themselves of a lingering liberal individualism that prioritised unconstrained individual ‘free speech’ over any concept of the collectivity. (ibid)

This tendency was certainly present in Occupy London’s culture of blocks and derailments. When Rob says that ‘By the end of Occupy, GAs were taking hours and not resolving anything after hours of debates’, there is an indication of the degree to which this debilitated the movement, limiting its ability to move past an initial experiential glimpse of empowered collectivity. If we are to understand modes of speech in terms of the pragmatic question of what they allow us to do, the stifling nature of this reading of consensus is clear. The incompatibility of this individualism and the ideological orientation toward unity documented above is important to note. A final dimension of this is the way in which the GA was asserted as an authoritative movement centre, to which I now turn.

6.2.4 The General Assembly and the Future of Occupy

While the pivotal role of the GA was taken for granted in the earlier period of the occupation, with time – particularly in the lead up to eviction and the post-eviction period – this became a point of dispute. On the one hand, its role as a guarantor of a certain, problematic unity was asserted with renewed vigour, while at the same time, others pointed to the constricting nature of a proto-bureaucratic body beholden to the whims of everyone’s self-expression, and attempted to move beyond it, seeking other structures of collective speech and action.

An early sign that the GA was getting into trouble, was the drafting of the Statement of Autonomy, agreed by consensus in early December 2011, which clearly emerged from the need to assert the primacy of the GA at a time when this was in question. Stating that ‘any statement or declaration not released through the General Assembly […] should be considered independent of Occupy London’, this
responded to the first signs of a drift of organising capacity away from the General Assembly. Mark Bray’s (2013: 87) words about Occupy Wall Street apply to the London occupation too, as he says that there was an increasing sense by some that full GAs were ‘a great outreach tool but a very difficult medium for day to day logistical work’, leading to the proliferation of ‘back room deals’. This was exacerbated by the fact that the cold, wet winter and increasingly tough environment of the camps meant that they were perceived as increasingly unappealing meeting locations by some. But this was principally a matter of the GA – open as I have shown to blocks and derailment in a culture of free expression – holding back action. As Jesse says,

‘Often it wasn’t that easy to devise a strategy between 300 to 400 people, all with different ideas as to what they want to do. What was a lot more natural was for people to find people they had affinity with and devise strategies from within groups of eight or ten.’ Jesse

If this tension was surfacing by the end of 2011, it became greater still with the loss of the territories that had gathered Occupy London together; the common ground which allowed the multiple different moments of speech and action to be understood and communicated as one common phenomenon. Following the evictions, several of the more interesting actions emerging from the Occupy London milieu could not be communicated as being Occupy London actions because of the difficulty of getting GA consensus. An early prominent example was the occupation of Friern Barnet library (discussed in Chapter 4), an action which many in Occupy subsequently recognised as a great success, as the nearest thing to a translation of Occupy tactics into other local context for concrete gains. As Matt frustratedly recalls, of the inability to say this was an Occupy London action, ‘that issue was given to the squatters; the squatters saved Friern Barnet Library! Thank you squatters.’ Another example came during the time of the 2012 London Olympics, when a core of direct action oriented friends from Occupy London (including myself) occupied a large empty house belonging to Anish Kapoor (whose ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture was the centrepiece of the Olympic park), turning it into a pop-up social centre called Bread and Circuses, focusing on social justice issues relating to the Olympics, and a critique of the place of grand spectacles in austerity Britain. The way I got involved in this was significant: following a GA on the steps of St. Paul’s, I was approached by Lucy, who told me about an ‘interesting meeting’ happening
later that day in a Bloomsbury squat. This was not something she communicated to the GA as a whole. Later, at that meeting, I was surprised to find many very active Occupiers who all agreed that, given our tight time-frame and the general problems of the GA outlined above, trying to get official agreement from the GA would be a waste of time. Unable to use the name Occupy London without GA approval, and not wanting to provoke an argument, we decided to refer to ourselves as ‘supporters of Occupy’ in any communications. As Jesse says of this period,

‘It was just a bunch of us recognising it’s so much easier doing stuff with people you trust and work with well, rather than trying to go through the whole process of doing something as Occupy. Which you may say is not democratic, but is it really valuable to waste our time and energy by putting them into endless discussions, and the problems of power structures and relations?’ Jesse

In this way, as those defensive of the GA’s role sought to clarify its role in order to exert greater control on the collective speech of Occupy London, the result was that the collectivity of Occupy was weakened, as that potential site of convergence and communication between active elements came to be avoided.

An important moment for the negotiation of the GA’s role in Occupy came in late 2013. There had been no General Assembly for many months; from regular weekly, later monthly, occurrences, they had begun to be called ad hoc as and when needed for particular decisions, and by Spring 2013 they fell out of use altogether, due in part to the very low numbers of attendees and the fact that the most active parts of the network no longer saw them as useful. At this time, a reduced number of Working Groups continued their activities fairly independently, as did a loose network of people who still sought to act as Occupy London. Connection between these was maintained through online spaces (especially email) and occasional collective projects, but largely in terms of Occupy participation in actions organised by other networks (for example, the anti-fracking camps, demonstrations against the G20 and the DSEI Arms Fair). In the interest of a more coherent and strategic forward direction, those people still active in these circles initiated what was variously called the Strategy Meeting or the ‘Future of Occupy’ (FOO) meeting, on a monthly basis in an East London social centre, from October 2013 to March 2014. Though by no means mass assemblies, these were attended by up to forty active
participants, whereas the last GAs before their falling out of use in around May 2013, had been attended by less than ten (clearly making a mockery of their notional significance). While it was not called a General Assembly, this was the only ‘assembly’ of Occupiers during this period, and it came to such collective pronouncements and decisions as reorganisation of the website, statements of solidarity with various mobilisations elsewhere, and, significantly, a plan to reorganise Occupy London’s meeting structure (essentially breaking up the all-encompassing GA, and having a distinction between public-facing Assemblies and ‘internal’ meetings for finance and strategising), and to consider introducing a quorum for decision-making.

The response from certain others, active in Occupy London’s online discussions but not in its active Working Groups or offline activism, was that this ‘Future of Occupy’ meeting was overstepping the mark, straying into the territory of the General Assembly, and indeed planning for fundamental changes to the GA itself. It was during this time that I first heard someone refer to the GA as the ‘sovereign body’ of Occupy, and to refer also to ‘decisions that affect all of Occupy London’, as the rightful remit of the GA. This sense of the General Assembly as something approaching a moment of supreme authority had not always been clear (though it was suggested by the Statement of Autonomy) especially during the occupation when that geographical territory gathered the activities of all those participants as a collective enterprise regardless of the explicit agreement or binding decision of all in the Assembly. In the absence of that territory, the case was being made – via this language of ‘sovereignty’ – that there was a clear distinction between a General Assembly and a meeting (even one that was the closest thing to a GA in ages). While a meeting was only an arrangement of those individuals present, the very pronouncement of a General Assembly apparently performatively constituted the sovereign body of an Occupy-as-speaking-agent.

Having been an active participant in the FOO meeting and in the remaining active centres of Occupy London activity, and also recognising in this the real, actually-mobilised capacity of Occupy London as opposed to an imagined space of sovereignty conjured by the spell of its name, I was part of a group that disagreed with the above position. Rather than bringing together the creative capacities of the Occupy London network, this use of the ‘General Assembly’ as locus of sovereignty policed them through its insistence on an identitarian uniformity. What is more this
was perceived as a power exerted almost ‘from the grave’ as the GA as an institution and space was felt to be gone at this time. This chimed with a wider sense, in the post-eviction period, that the long shadow of the camp was excessively determining the future direction of an Occupy London locked into practices established in a very different context (in Chapter 4, I have discussed this with relation to the ongoing significance of the protest camp form, and the site of St. Paul’s). Matt put his objections in related but different terms:

‘Recently there was this impetus – I don’t know where from – where people said ‘Let’s get out onto the street and do General Assemblies again. That’s what Occupy’s all about, and we lost it’. Then there is a list of a million emails saying ‘Yes. Finally’. Me and some people were like ‘Where’s this come from?’ There was a piece of rhetoric saying ‘Let’s do this callout about reclaiming our democracy’ and so on – all very passionate – and doing it at St. Paul’s. I think me and about six of my friends that I work with all had this non-plussed response. That just seemed like sheer nostalgia.’ Matt

It was, therefore, of great interest when, as a response to the building tension around this issue and others a General Assembly was called – publicised through OL’s online channels – on Saturday 1st March 2014. Three features of this resurgent GA are significant. Firstly, the ‘magic spell’ of calling it a General Assembly worked. As the main facilitator of that GA I was expecting it to be a small circle of close acquaintances, but in the event more than one hundred gathered in rows up the steps of the Cathedral, including many erstwhile active Occupiers who had not attended anything for some time (and who would apparently come out for a GA, but not for the Strategy Meeting), people no longer based in London but who thought this important to attend, and several people entirely new to Occupy London. Clearly among this cohort the calling-into-being of Occupy’s sovereign head was legitimate, lending it a real performative quality. However, this moment was short-lived. General Assemblies in subsequent months were attended by ever smaller numbers (and ultimately stopping again after a couple of months). As stated, the GA had fallen out of use as an organising space many months before, leading to the FOO meetings themselves, and was largely reinvigorated now as a reaction to those meetings. But the GA, organised by people who almost all lived outside London, still did not make sense as an organising space, compared to the more casual but actually active and London-based Future of Occupy.
Meanwhile the FOO group had been fundamentally undermined. The day before the March GA, it had been made clear that the Future of Occupy proposal to break up the GA structure would itself require consensus at a GA, and that it would be blocked by at least two people (both organisers of the March GA, both based away from London, and both committed to the idea that, as in the occupation phase, the GA was the locus of sovereignty and collective wisdom). The conclusion that the problem of a no-longer-functional GA could only be fixed within the structures of that broken organ later led Matt to say, to the hearty laughter of those connected to the FOO, ‘I’m bordering on sheer terror that we’ve wasted our entire lives’. FOO meetings stopped almost immediately after, in the knowledge that its decisions would be perpetually challenged and limited by the dissenting group.

It is worth noting that of the four proposals which the March GA sought to reach consensus on – successfully in each case – two sought moments of agreed collective speech, as did another ad hoc proposal that did not reach consensus due to lack of time for discussion. This reinforces the point that the GA was at this stage better at speaking than acting, and in fact held the latter back. These three proposals were: that Occupy London supports the anti-fracking camps (the proposer used the phrase ‘I want Occupy to say that it supports the fracking movement’); that Occupy London would support the upcoming Neo-Luddite event, ‘Breaking the Frame’ (being added to a list of supporters and promoting it online); and an attempt following a discussion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership for Occupy to state it is against TTIP, and supports campaigns against it. The two remaining proposals sought more than pronouncements. One gained agreement for the establishment of a new Working Group to redesign the Occupy London website; also in its way concerned with communication, this reached consensus, but nothing came of this initiative, revealing a certain redundancy to GA decisions.

Although these proposals support the argument that at this stage the GA was unable to generate a proactive direction for Occupy, the final proposal does complicate this picture. This successful proposal established a Working Group to plan ‘an action in October focused on Parliament’. This became the week of actions called Occupy Democracy, which for a short while in October 2014, did mount a sizeable protest in Parliament Square, attracting several hundred people from veteran Occupiers to a new cohort of mostly young people, who remained active in
Occupy and related networks. This reveals that the GA had not lost all orientation to action. However, in the event, Eric, who brought the proposal to this GA, went on to essentially lead all planning of the action, and its form was not allowed to deviate much from the plan he had prior to the founding of the Working Group. The March GA was useful in recruiting assistance for sure, but in many ways this was a personal project that sought support from the GA in terms of promotion, use of social media channels and so on. The consensus of those attending the GA was not a collective commitment, but rather a collective nod to Eric to go about his plan with the largely symbolic backing of OL.

The conservative and nostalgic tone of this rejuvenated GA is further highlighted by the sense of many on the GA-defending wing that this had been a success. As one participant, Sasha, later wrote in a congratulatory email to the Occupy London list,

'We had one of the best General Assemblies ever, with an astonishing 4 proposals unanimously passed, working group feedback, speakers, discussion groups, reports back and shout outs, brilliantly facilitated in less than 2 hours.'

The content of these proposals and discussions was less significant than the fact that Occupy London had said things and done things. I was personally praised and thanked heartily by many people for facilitating so successful a GA. For a short time, I was caught up in the enthusiasm of this moment, and wondered if my prior assessment (that the FOO was a convergence of the real organising capacities of Occupy, and that the GA was largely a theatrical relic for those emotionally connected to Occupy's past but not active in its present) might prove wrong, possibly overly influenced by my closer relationships with the more visibly active participants. The numbers at the GA if nothing else provoked this uncertainty. However, the GA barely survived as an institution past this moment, and in re-

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8 The events of Occupy Democracy came around two months after the end of my fieldwork period, and is not covered in any detail in this research. In summary, an attempt to establish a protest camp in Parliament Square was ultimately stopped by police and Heritage Wardens working for the Greater London Authority. A ban on all sleeping equipment led to the protest centring on the defence of an area of tarpaulin sheets. Some daytime protests and evening assemblies attracted significant numbers, as stated above, but these events were the final visible manifestation of Occupy London in terms of street protests.
emerging, if only briefly, it discouraged and demoralised the most active Occupy organisers. This therefore bore out my initial assessment.

In summary then, the General Assembly was the principal site where the many gathered by Occupy London converged as a speaking collectivity, where the ‘conversation’ of Occupy London circulated, and was amplified, and where the ‘message’ was debated and articulated. In the chorus of the People’s Mic, the potential for harmonious collectivity was hinted at in a theatrical and embodied display, and the question then was whether forms of organisation and collective speech could coordinate a productive extension of this potential. While the organisational form of the GA was experienced by many, particularly early on, as an empowering basis for the self-organisation of Occupy London, as well as an ongoing political education, when it came to moments of collective speech, the GA was characterised by incompatible features. It sought a type of unity that did not deal well with difference, and which rather than providing a loose common platform for autonomous action, in fact, through the assertion of GA sovereignty, stifled activity. While insisting on the GA’s authority over other corners of the movement, the GA’s process entailed an individualistic culture of ‘self-expression’ that was debilitating to any ongoing collective enterprise. The fact that the Future of Occupy controversy was met by a reassertion of GA primacy through the threat of an ongoing minority ‘block’, leading only to the shedding of a motivated FOO contingent, and the petering out of the GA, is indicative of this limit. The type of ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’ that emerges through these practices is one whose liberal features made very little possible beyond simply speaking.

6.3 Mediated speech

A very different mode of speech and collectivity was produced in Occupy London’s engagement with the media. In raising the dynamic of representation – always problematised as I discussed in Chapter 5 – this created the possibility of concentrated power to speak for and as Occupy London. Furthermore, particular ways of negotiating the problem of the media reveals an investment in ideologically distinct visions of what Occupy London was. Journalists had shown an interest in Occupy London even before the occupation began, and their presence was a
defining feature of Occupy London camp life. Given the perceived importance of distributing Occupy’s ‘message’, this constant engagement with the media can hardly be underestimated, but in a movement producing various, sometimes conflicting messages, it was also controversial. Contact with the media was a moment of representation in a movement that was suspicious of anyone speaking for the collective (which I have discussed in Chapter 5), and as such these moments of representing Occupy London to the news media were moments that could tend toward the concentration of power in the form of spokespersons or skilled media operators. The media provided a vital moment of movement speech that could communicate Occupy’s message outward, but also contribute to the circulating discourse of the camp. In turning to this now, I am concerned not with an extensive analysis of what particular media outlets said about Occupy, nor precisely what was said by Occupiers in interviews and so on (this is beyond the scope of my discussion here), but rather I am concerned with how the intense awareness of the media catalysed disputes over speech and representation within Occupy London.

Coverage by the news media has long been a feature of movement practice (Martinez 2012), such that the two can be considered ‘interacting systems’ (Gamson and Wolfsted 1993). ‘Discovery’ by the press often comes later down the line, giving the illusion that movements have come ‘out of nowhere’ (Gitlin 1980), though in the case of Occupy London, media interest was immediate (as I discuss below). As a vehicle for disseminating messages, the way in which coverage can be gained is of real interest to activists. While the size of mobilisations is the strongest predictor of newsworthiness, making the news can be achieved through innovative methods (Della Porta and Diani 1999), or through appealing to sensationalism with theatrics, property damage, violence and so on (Gitlin 1980). In the case of Occupy London, though, the symbolic and discursive link with events already globally significant – the ‘Arab Spring’, occupations in Spain, and Occupy Wall Street – meant that a certain newsworthiness was earned before the first tent was erected.

6.3.1 The Media as a Feature of Occupy London

In Chapter 5 I have shown that there was a deeply held suspicion of forms of representation in Occupy London. This entailed a circulating belief that no person
could speak for others. Articulated in participants’ self-presentation as just ‘ordinary people’, this was one way in which Occupiers affirmed the legitimacy of the claim that they were ‘the 99 percent’, conceived as ‘the people’. Clearly the interest of the media presented a challenge to this ethos. While they articulate a central value in Occupy, Ian’s frustrated statement that ‘We didn’t have any spokesmen, so how the fuck do we speak?’ was never entirely accurate. De facto spokespersons did emerge, and the frequent media interactions created many temporary representatives through each interview and vox pop. Furthermore, the very consumption of mediated representations of Occupy London was itself a regular feature of occupation life. Newspapers of all sorts circulated, and people crowded around to read any story on Occupy. The explicit criticism of representative claims did not necessarily translate into a lack of interest in these representations once they were produced, particularly in the case of positive coverage which was often the source of interest and cheer in the camp. Major stories, such as the Daily Mail report that most of the tents were in fact unoccupied at night – thereby seeking to further delegitimise the occupation – were major topics of conversation. This was an unresolved contradiction: a movement that saw representation as a problem, and yet was always concerned with being represented well. Still, there remained a deep desire to not prematurely delimit Occupy’s capacity to bring in a breadth of claims.

The resulting dilemma is put well in Prentoulis and Thomassen’s words regarding the indignant occupiers of Madrid and Athens:

Greek and Spanish protesters faced a further dilemma related to representation: how to avoid the violence done to their singularity – and to the heterogeneity of their different parts and demands – by representations of them in the media as a single and unified movement. To be heard and to be seen, the protesters needed to be part of a movement with a single and stable voice and face, yet this view of the movement was precisely what the protesters were resisting. (Prentoulis and Thomassen 2014: 221)

Such potentially compromising moments of representative speech were common during the occupation. Spyro, a key early organiser and the person who started the Facebook group from which Occupy London began, has stated the strange circumstance that intense media interest predated the occupation itself, with major media platforms responding to the press release four days before the beginning of
the occupation. His comment that ‘We were very lucky [...] usually actions are covered after not before they happen’ reflects a wider sense in Occupy London that this level and type of media interest in some sense marked this mobilisation as unique. The climate this created in the camp in the following weeks and months is touched on by many participants in this research.

‘They were everywhere. Absolutely everywhere. You couldn’t move without tripping over journalists.’ Ellie

‘It became quite normal to be standing having a fag and going, ‘Oh, I’ll be back in a minute, I’ve got CNN. And then you’re going ’That’s alright I’ve got Sky in 5. I’ll see you back here in 20 minutes’ You fucking what? That was totally normal, I’m not making that up.’ Joe

‘There was so much pressure. You have the whole of the international media community and basically the whole of society looking at you, going: What is your point? Why are you here?’ Bernie

‘One of the long running problems with the Occupy movement is that when we arrived at St. Paul’s we were immediately surrounded by the world’s press wanting to know what we were doing, so we had to pretend that we knew what we were doing. All of that pretence didn’t allow us enough room to be genuinely confused [...] We had to present this image like: we’re the shit, and we know what we’re doing. But that’s really not true.’ Matt

These last two quotes indicate the way in which the ‘media circus’ – a term many participants used – had considerable effects internal to Occupy London, not only creating a clear sense of pressure for participants, but directing them to hurry in delimiting what the movement was ‘about’, reducing its many claims, direct action interventions and embodied practices to a solitary ‘point’. As such, the circulating presence, via media interest, of a dynamic of representation created a constant call to identity. The demand for greater clarity in what Occupy was about, was a demand to exclude certain voices in favour of others, and to align the diverse movement to an abstract standard, not as a result of the endogenous processes of
collective discussion and action, but as a response to the perceived need to communicate via the media’s dominant modes.

The effects of this dynamic were more marked due to a general desire in Occupy London to engage with the media, in a way that distinguishes it from some previous waves of social movement. This was often noted by those with prior activist experience as a distinguishing feature of Occupy. Eric, with vast experience of movement politics over thirty years, saw this ‘completely different attitude toward the mass media’ as the result of a ‘more sophisticated understanding, because people lacked the political baggage’ of previous waves of activism. For Joe, Occupy benefitted from the relative rarity of ‘these dreadfully sort of Neanderthal ideas about: no, we don’t deal with the mainstream press’. Both clearly see Occupy’s openness to the press as a positive, more politic position. However, this assessment is itself bound up in a series of organisational and ideological assumptions.

This engagement with the mainstream media might first be understood in light of Paolo Gerbaudo’s (2012) distinction between the alter-globalisation movement and the occupation movements of 2011, where, as I have already shown, he argues that the former contained a subcultural mode and investment in a certain outsider status, whereas the latter had no such outsider identity, conceiving of itself as a movement of ‘ordinary people’ and even as ‘everyone’. While this is overstated (Occupy was not lacking in subcultural types invested in romantic ‘activist’ identities), the argument that Occupy had a general self-presentation as ‘ordinary’ is largely true (as discussed in Chapter 5). In Occupy London this was found in the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’, and a suspicion of activist identities. In this context, the alter-globalisation movement’s dominant approach to the media – an emphasis on activist media and developing counter-institutions such as Indymedia (McCurdy 2008, 2010) – appeared less necessary in Occupy, and even contrary to this ideology of ‘ordinariness’. What is more, a desire to fulfil the promise of the ‘99 percent’ claim tended toward a sense that such sizeable channels of communication must be used. But, where Eric, above, says that Occupy was ‘more sophisticated’ as it ‘lacked the political baggage’, the second claim is more accurate than the first. In mobilising significant numbers of people with no prior experience in the cultures of anti-capitalist activism, those attitudes toward the media were often absent in Occupy, but so too was an awareness of the critique that produced that position. That critique recognised the way in which the media takes over the narrative of
social movements, and turns protest into a spectacle (see Debord 1967). There is therefore a liberal naivety in the view that Occupy’s use of the mainstream media represents a necessary progression from a ‘Neanderthal’ rejection of the press. Both the alter-globalisation movement and Occupy expressed an avowed rejection of representation, but whereas the former recognised the media dynamic as an extension of this, the latter basically did not. Where there was awareness of this, the desire to ‘reach’ the ‘99 percent’ – to spread ‘the message’ – won out.

6.3.2 The Press Team vs The Occupied Times

The problem of media representation in the constitution of Occupy London played out most prominently in the conflict between two camps: The Press Team, who acted as the Working Group that oversaw liaison with the press and television, collated coverage of Occupy, provided media training for spokespeople, and produced press releases; and the editorial team of The Occupied Times (commonly abbreviated to ‘OT’), a newspaper largely produced within the occupation at first – modelled on the Occupied Wall Street Journal – and aimed at circulating its form of news and discussion around the camp. This was animated by political and interpersonal differences, but was significantly a conflict over the role of media representation, mounted by two privileged voices whose platforms gave them the power to speak for the movement, constructing dominant frames and self-understandings.

Both groups made quick impressions on me. About a week into my time in the occupation camp, I spent the evening in an open fronted tent at Finsbury Square, folding copies of the first edition of The Occupied Times, directed by a serious-seeming man in a brown leather jacket and flat cap. It was dark out already, and four of us – all with a cup of hot tea to hand – stood around an old wooden decorator’s table, piled high with freshly printed newspaper sheets. We folded and folded for maybe two hours, putting together each copy, ending up with hands stained by the black ink. I was impressed by how good it looked, but wondered who this highly organised group of people I had hardly seen at camp were. While it became clear that much of the activity of writing, designing and editing the paper took place off site, these rituals, which I participated in a couple of times, seemed in
some way to bind the OT to the very everyday life of the camp, and to the labour of those of us in it. The Press Team – or those I identified as such early on – were people who spent plenty of time in camp, early on at least, but spent much of it on phones and computers in tents. I watched them from a distance as they darted around between phone calls and frenetic conversations, before disappearing into a tent again. Like other Working Groups, they fed back to the GA, but did not end this by publicising their next meeting, as many others did.

From their beginnings, the Press Team and OT were of different, and even opposing orientations in terms of ideology and attitudes to the media. The Press Team, a central organisational pillar of Occupy London was instrumental in gaining the considerable press coverage the camp received. Counting on the prior professional experience of its members, and with clear evidence of its success in getting the Occupy message in the mainstream media, they in fact questioned the need for an entirely separate media institution in The Occupied Times. As Ellie, who had a fringe role in both groups put it,

‘Basically, the Press Team didn’t want The Occupied Times to exist, or wanted it to be under the Press Team’s control, because it was media, so they should be in charge. And The Occupied Times said right from the outset: No, we’re independent, we do our own thing.’ Ellie

The Occupied Times, was, in turn, from its inception critical of the place of mainstream press coverage in Occupy, and therefore of the Press Team’s approach. As it stated in an editorial ‘We started from a simple observation: the moment that a movement becomes newsworthy, it begins to lose control of its narrative’ (OT18, August 2012: 2). As Feigenbaum et al have stated of similar activist newspapers, from the Occupied Wall Street Journal of OWS to the Evading Standards of the J18 ‘Carnival Against Capital’ in 1999,

The titles of these newspapers sought to actively subvert or “culture jam” the names and brands of mainstream media, [...] a form of protest action in and of itself, and a challenge to the ability of massive news corporations to construct and represent reality. (Feigenbaum et al 2013: 98)
As indicated in the *détournement* of its title, the *OT* was critical of the mode of representation the Press Team engaged with. In a latter day edition, an article written by figures central to its team from early on stated, ‘A press group in any “social movement” acts as a point of interaction for mainstream media and thus sets about shaping the movement’s outer identity’, in a manner akin to ‘the spin doctors of Westminster’ (OT21, May 2013: 14). A critique of usurping representations was at the heart of the *OT*’s avowed project (even if it necessarily produced representations of its own, as I address below). Following the way that activist newspapers are often more integrated and embedded in the daily life of their movements (Feigenbaum 2013) and indeed how hard-copy newspapers themselves give a sense of place in a way digital news finds harder (Feigenbaum et al. 2013), the *OT* seemed more oriented toward the unfolding ‘conversation’ of Occupy, and the Press Team toward its ‘message’.

An example of this is the negotiation of the label ‘anti-capitalist’. The question of whether individuals, and the movement as a whole, was anti-capitalist or not was common in the early period of the occupation, and the term appeared in a fair amount of the press coverage of Occupy. The *OT*’s approach was to bring out this potentially divisive question, and have its pages contribute to the ‘conversation’ of a movement working toward agreement. In the first edition of the *OT*, they initiated a regular feature – a ‘Yes vs No debate’ on different issues – with the question ‘Are you an anti-capitalist?’, with a column outlining each position. The Press Team, on the other hand, were more concerned with avoiding this, and instead seeking to make sure the ‘anti-capitalist’ label was averted in the press. Spyro, a central figure in the Press Team, expresses the logic of this as follows:

“For someone who watched the news from home and hears about “anti-capitalist protest”, they might think: well, I agree with some of the things they say, but does that make me an anti-capitalist? And if I am an anti-capitalist then what does that make me? Does it make me a communist or…? So it’s a bit confusing. We tried to focus on the things that bring us together, because the values that brought us together were the same, there was no doubt about it […] So in the press releases we wouldn’t use the term “anti-capitalist”. All the press releases we would send out, we would start by saying “Occupy London, the movement for social and economic justice”. But the media ignored that term we were trying to push as something that
unites us, and they continued, with every report and every article, starting by saying "Anti-capitalist protesters...” Spyro

There is this sense here that the Press Team was engaged with that broader tendency in Occupy, identified by Craig Calhoun (2013) to ‘include rather than prioritise’. On the one hand this exhibits the same aversion to productive conflict that was identified earlier as a significant limited, liberal feature of the GA. But it is also clear that, from the Press Team’s perspective, this was part of a desire to extend Occupy by extending the moment of assembly and constitution, holding space for the movement by holding off delegitimising media labels and not pinning down ideologies in a way that would necessarily exclude. There was, however, also a genuine ideological difference that meant that the OT were more keen to push this divisive, if necessary question. As Ellie says, the OT team became ‘a small core who had quite strong political beliefs, who over time seemed more and more determined that this was the OT way [...] I suppose it was quite hardcore left wing stuff... anarchist and anti-capitalist’. Later she says ‘the OT people were very, very angry that Occupy was not anti-capitalist’. A criticism levelled at the Press Team, from the OT and elsewhere that it was excessively informed by a Public Relations mentality. Asserting the link between this and the problematic assumptions underpinning it, the OT later stated,

> A press team sees nothing incongruous between the culture of PR and “messaging” and a movement’s stated rejection of “business as usual”, often to the dismay of those who view this abuse of language and corruption of communication as both central to the present system and central to why it is to be despised. (OT21 May 2013: 14)

Significantly, they did not claim that this was a self-conscious cabal undermining the radical possibilities of Occupy, but rather recognised that these limitations and contradictions were simply not perceptible from particular points of view, subjectivities and levels of political awareness. Eric, not involved in either group and, as shown above, glad of some engagement with the mainstream press, also points to the PR experience of important Press Team figures, including Spyro, stating,
‘They thought that their skills were the only thing that needed to be said about media, when actually the question of the media is more sophisticated than they realise, and it’s not just a PR exercise.’ Eric

While the success of the Press Team in gaining widespread and often sympathetic coverage was not questioned, it was argued that their central role in the organisation of Occupy London meant not only that Occupy was represented a certain way, but that it was constructed and produced in a manner oriented toward a politics of superficial spectacle. This is articulated well by Rachel, who became increasingly involved in the Press Team, but became troubled by the way it operated:

‘That’s the thing with getting all that media, because once you begin... it’s addictive. It’s like ‘oh we’ve got the media, and it’s everywhere’. Then you begin to play into the image, so in a way you’re allowing the media to map out how you respond [...] I’ll be really honest. I myself became very much into this idea that the measure of my success is how much is getting picked up by the media [...] In the first instance I was fascinated by it, but then as I became involved in it myself I became disgusted; utterly and completely burnt out and bitter [...] It’s a hidden voice that is very much linked to culture and media. I don’t mean a person, but a dynamic. I know I sound paranoid, but it’s real, trust me.’ Rachel

Here Rachel offers an insider perspective of being drawn into this overarching logic. Significantly for the discussion of movement speech here is Rachel’s understanding that this works as a ‘hidden voice’, which, rather than being the position of particular individuals (though particular people were certainly key to its unfolding) is a ‘voice’ distributed as an approach and a style. Elsewhere, Joe has said that the philosophy of the Press Team was ‘keep this momentum going at a hundred miles an hour’, and Rachel offers a personal account of how this manifested itself in the priorities and actions of group members.

The idea that the media could ‘map out how you respond’ is illustrated in the Press Team’s response to the ‘anti-capitalist’ label. Rachel herself talks about the concern with forming a ‘counter-image’ against delegitimising media depictions, whether this was as anti-capitalist, anti-social, drunken, or counter-cultural hippies. By reacting
like this, as Rachel says, ‘you’re not focusing on what Occupy is about…’ – that is, its own immanent capacities and emergent projects – ‘...but on what the media is doing, and responding to that’. Michael Taussig (2013) documented a similar tendency in Occupy Wall Street, where the criticism by the media and city administration that the occupation camp was dirty meant inordinate efforts went into public displays of hygiene: scrubbing and sweeping Zucotti Park in mass operations. Here again, the image determined the response of those wrestling over meaning.

These tensions ultimately led to *The Occupied Times* explicitly and officially distancing itself from Occupy London. In August 2012, the *OT* published an article by one of its editors entitled ‘Occupy London is Dead – Long Live Occupy’, stating ‘There is no longer an Occupy London. Press statements targeted at the corporate media gain few responses, if any’ and that ‘the liberals that still cling on to the name of Occupy London should honour the hard work of others and let their own egos go’ (*OT* 16 August 2012: 18). On the facing column was an article by two other editors on ‘the commodification of protest’, pointing to the recent involvement of Occupy London in the Latitude music festival, which was lambasted for its commercialism within which a mock Occupy camp served as a weak, aestheticised commodity. This had been a sort of ‘final straw’ that appeared to the *OT* anti-capitalists as a sign that the PR-chasing liberal performance of the Press Team had won the day. A later editorial stated starkly that Occupy London ‘was conceived out of PR, and that’s how it continued. Central to the planning of events was corporate messaging, press releases and marketable aesthetics’ (*OT* 21 May 2013: 14). While this pointed to the not insignificant fact that Occupy the London Stock Exchange had been initiated by a Facebook group started by a central figure in the Press Team, this revealed an excessive drift into a criticism that sought to write off Occupy London as a media stunt. While this was clearly a prominent feature of Occupy, I have shown that a series of territorial, discursive, and tactical practices unfolded through Occupy London, in ways that far exceeded the media-centric orientation of a particular group, much less the intentions of any one person who started a Facebook group.

Finally, it is significant that both of these groups operated in similar ways, raising similar criticisms from other Occupiers, who viewed them as closed, elitist cabals. *The Occupied Times* was ‘a small core’ with ‘an entrenched way of thinking and
behaving’ and ‘people who had the same ideas [as one another] brought in more people with those ideas’, (Ellie). Joe criticised their organising style saying ‘at the *OT*, you had a totally hierarchical organisation’. Meanwhile, the Press Team was criticised for being ‘one of the most exclusive spaces’ (Ian), or ‘almost impenetrable’ (Ellie). While Joe insists that they were an ‘open group’, Rosa, an interviewee with considerable media-specific training, said ‘I felt the Press Team should basically just fucking love me [...] but instead it was like I had to go out of my way to find things out all the time. It was so hard’. In the context of a movement where legitimacy was intimately connected to a sense of democratic accessibility, the emphasis on the closed, hierarchical styles of these groups can be seen as a more general claim about the validity of their work. This is not to say such criticisms were not true, but rather to note that these arguments – which could be levied against most Occupy spaces at one time or another – were especially prominent in the case of organs of privileged speech and representation. Each of these were involved in the task of producing dominant representations of Occupy London, for outsiders and insiders alike, and while this clearly had consequences for the overall constitution of the collectivity and the movement, this was operated as a concentration of power to speak for and as Occupy.

In summary, Occupy London was the site of a ‘media circus’, in which the dominant attitude of Occupiers sought to engage with the mainstream media in a way that distinguishes it from other, related moments of struggle, such as the alter-globalisation movement. This was the result, in large part, of an aversion to rebel outsider identities, and an ethos of engaging with ‘the 99 percent’ by making the most of these channels. This was reinforced by the degree to which Occupy mobilised people new to radical struggle who did not share the prejudices of previous waves of protest, but who also lacked a clear analysis of the liberal limitations of engaging with the media spectacle and the problems of representation as a concentration of power. The Press Team, in large part embodied this dynamic, and while they sought to hold space for Occupy London’s process by fending off critical media depictions, it often did so in a way with implicit liberal assumptions as to what was admissible, and in such a way that reproduced a corporate communications style of PR. The opposition of *The Occupied Times* had potential to be more rooted in the ‘conversation’ of Occupy London, bringing out necessary controversial questions, but it similarly acted as a concentrated centre of
representation. Occupy London’s dominant mode of engagement with the media threw together an ‘assemblage of enunciation’ that more than anything else made possible the prolongation of the first indeterminate moment of assembly and potential, but in such a way that was full of liberal traps. In producing spaces that spoke for, as and from Occupy, they were drawn into the game of representation, and the inevitable concentration of power in particular voices.

6.4 Statements and demands

As the beginning of this chapter indicated, the question of demand-making was an important one. The apparent rejection of demand-making was a key feature of much of the early commentary on the Occupy movement’s particular mode of politics, and it allowed me to highlight the problem of how Occupy London spoke; how a movement oriented toward the process of its own ongoing self-constitution and unfolding ‘conversation’ was challenged by moments of definitive collective claims and demands. I now turn concretely to this, through an analysis of the various ‘statements’ made by Occupy London. Starting with the Initial Statement which first outlined the rationale, ideological underpinnings and project of the occupation, Occupy London went on to produce eleven substantive statements, each of them passed by consensus in a General Assembly. Their tones range from the general to the very specific, and their content from the clarification of organisational methods to agreed positions on various political questions around which Occupy mobilised. Significantly these do include framed demands, and I will return therefore to the common understanding that Occupy was demandless.

Below, I begin by discussing debates around the place of demands in radical politics, before moving on to briefly outline of how these positions emerged in the commentary surrounding Occupy’s apparent demandlessness. I then offer a discussion of the function and content of Occupy London’s statements and demands, particularly focusing on how these reflected key ideological disputes in Occupy, and considering why the impression persisted – even among Occupiers – that Occupy did not produce demands. I argue that these statements and demands tended in two directions, each of which entailing a distinct form of speaking collectivity, and each revealing limits. Firstly, broad and inclusive statements sought
to further extend the assembling and self-constitution of a movement of ‘the 99 percent’. While this could in theory extend the Occupy project by making possible further forms of action, it largely made common action and purpose harder to come by, stalling Occupy in the moment of speaking only. Second, more concrete and specific demands, oriented toward reformist policy change, created the possibility of extending Occupy as a campaign, with linear targets, goals and so on. Despite possible limitations of such a reformist strategy, this could have pushed in more radical directions, building on common terrain to gain victories, while encountering the limits of reform. However, the fact that such demands were not pursued much past the point of being articulated reveals a weakness of collectivity.

6.4.1 Demand-making and radical politics

The problematisation of demands in Occupy fits into a longer context of the role of demands in radical political projects, associated most with the influence of anarchism on contemporary movements. This tends to focus on the idea that making demands of institutional actors in fact legitimises the capitalist state, and the false hope that it can be an agent of radical change (Day 2009; Crimethinc 2015). The claim often follows that a politics of direct action is in opposition to demand-making, embodying an approach that is ‘neither revolutionary nor reformist, but seek to block, resist and render redundant both corporate and state power’ (Day 2009: 107) through acts of direct intervention to right a wrong, meet a need and so on. A deeper critique even insists that we are in no position to even formulate the demands that might undermine capitalism: ‘Alien to ourselves, we are at home in capital. We don’t even know our needs, and yet we still hold banners crying for their fulfilment’ (Kaspar 2009: no pagination). These arguments against demands are positioned against those more closely connected to particular Marxist traditions that insist on the need to engage with the state (Laclau 1996, Žižek 2007), with Ernesto Laclau insisting the social movements depend on the ‘chains of equivalence’ built discursively between disparate demands. Of the turn away from demand-making and toward prefigurative projects, Žižek (2007) has said this is a cop-out that in fact leaves the liberal-democratic state about its business, and opts for an insufficient ethics of keeping one’s hands clean. In this sense, he argues, it is the corollary of Third Way social democracy which concurs with the conclusions of
capitalist realism (Fisher 2009) that the capitalist state is here for good, and cannot be fundamentally challenged.

Others have recognised certain limitations of demand-making as an anti-capitalist strategy, while still insisting on the continued relevance of demands, even if these are recast beyond this image of reformist requests. This has especially included seeing demands not as the final condition for ending protests, but rather as compositional. Transitional or directional demands, it is argued, provide a ‘direction of travel’, marked by vitally winnable shorter-term objectives (Milburn 2015, Price 2015), which also act as an ethical demand on ourselves (Critchley 2013). This extends as far as demands that ‘call into question the entire existence of normal political governmental systems under capitalism’ (Critchley 2013: 7), something in line with the words – attributed to Che Guevara – that became a popular graffiti in the May 1968 Parisian uprising: ‘Be realistic, demand the impossible’.

Meanwhile, demands can also connect different sectors of society together in common projects, creating – for next time – stronger networks with experiences of victory. Johann Kaspar puts this in the terms of this chapter, stating that,

The demand is a tool for self-organization. It unifies separated individuals against a common enemy toward a common good. It is the unification of the exploited based upon a common enunciation, “We want X”. The demand becomes a self-mediation, a self-constitution of the undifferentiated masses into a singular one, a subject who demands. (Kaspar, 2009: no pagination)

This background has played out in the discussions of the Occupy movement’s rejection of demand-making. Some (Kioupkiolis 2013, Katsembekis 2013) have pointed to the renewed interest in Laclau in assessments of the movements of 2011. Žižek (2012: 78) stated early on that the Occupiers ‘express an authentic rage that remains unable to transform itself into even a minimal positive program for socio-political change’, a sentiment echoed by Alain Badiou (2012: 47), who referred to the ‘vibrant indecision’ that characterised the wider square-taking movements in Europe. Both identify a certain energetic and emotional dynamism, but insist that the failure to corral this into an organised programme of demands is a failure of politics itself. This latter point is important to the critique offered by Marco Deseriis and Jodi Dean (2012) who see, in the lack of demands, ideological weakness and an
inability to deal with antagonism; a tendency discussed above in relation to the role of conflict in consensus. They identify three principle objections to demand-making in Occupy: the 'anti-representation objection' that any demand will delimit the ability of the movement to include ever more of 'the 99 percent'; the 'autonomist objection' that demands orient the movement toward external actors over endogenous processes and solutions; and the 'co-optation objection' that demands allow for swift integration by various institutional actors. These are all pillars of a broader anarchist-inspired critique of demands.

Positive assessments of Occupy's demandlessness have also rehearsed the long-running debate, ranging from a focus on the practical benefits for an 'inclusive' politics – for example, the idea, quoted above, that 'part of [Occupy's] brilliance and a source of its success lay in refusing [lists of demands] in favour of a much broader evocation of outrage' (Calhoun 2013: 10) – to a more fundamental affirmation of a politics that refuses a focus on external institutions at the expense of the emergent process of the 'autonomous' movement. Saul Newman (2013) calls this 'the politics of anti-politics', and Bernard Harcourt's (2013) influential analysis argues that Occupy was characterised by a 'political disobedience', which entailed, in addition to a tactical civil disobedience, a refusal to play by the rules of the political game. Part of this political disobedience, Harcourt argues, was precisely the rejection of the antagonistic politics proposed by Deseriis and Dean above, and a focus instead on the constituent process of the movement. In this context, the call for demands, or their imposition – such as in Adbusters’ insistence on ‘our one demand’ in the promotional poster – has been seen as a form of policing in the Rancièrean sense (see Kerton 2012) that seeks to bound within acceptable realms of intelligibility the excesses of Occupy, and which would threaten to undermine the leaderless and direct-democratic 'horizontal' politics of the movement (Graeber 2013, Bray 2013). For both David Graeber and Mark Bray, these are markers of the anarchism of Occupy, signalling the preference for a ‘politics of the act’ over a ‘politics of demands’ (Day 2009). This position has been advanced further by Aditi (2012) who insists that the Occupy movement represents a moment of insurgency, which does not begin with clear plans and demands, but rather represents the re-opening up of historic possibilities. Political programmes, he argues, emerge from these insurgent moments, rather than being their catalyst, such that the criticism of Occupy’s lack of
clear demands ‘misses the point by confusing the disruption of the given with the task of reconfiguring it’ (Arditi 2012: 1).

6.4.2 The statements of Occupy London

Given the volume of commentary on the apparent absence of a desire or ability to levy demands, and the association of this – by both advocates and detractors – with a privileging of a certain indeterminacy of political positions, the production of Occupy London’s many statements is of especial interest. If moments of collective speech were problematic, these represent very concrete moments of agreed speech, written down, published online and referred back to by movement participants throughout Occupy’s time; moments in which the collective spoke as one through particular mechanisms and negotiations. I was present for several GAs that reached consensus on statements, and these were often long processes of thrashing out the wording. Objections might be raised over this or that phrase, and attempts were made to find agreeable solutions in the moment. Where this was not possible, Working Groups would be formed to go away and redraft statements in line with any objections. Although some of these processes were more meticulous than others, and were certainly somewhat affected by things like the fatigue of the crowd, the weather, or the number of people present, these were nonetheless all significant moments of consensus, taken seriously, with a general sense that when speaking with one voice, what was said, and what that said about Occupy, mattered.

In total Occupy London produced eleven major substantive statements (in addition to several additional ‘statements of solidarity’ in support of other movements and mobilisations). These include statements of agreed positions on particular issues or problems, and also on the internal processes and functions of Occupy London. In brief summary, and in chronological order, the key statements were as follows: the United for Global Democracy statement (published 14th October 2011, and agreed by GA later that month), the call to action that initiated the October wave of occupations, with an international focus against the ‘global Mubarak’ of ‘undemocratic international institutions’; the Initial Statement (October 2011), a founding document of the London occupation, naming the ills against which it
mobilised and making a series of claims about how Occupy sought to engage with these; the Safer Spaces Policy (November 2011), agreed to establish a communication style that fostered non-violent communication, and sought awareness of structural obstacles to equality of access, along lines of race, gender, and class; the Corporations Statement (November 2011), a ‘policy’ statement oriented toward ‘the present corporate system’ as an obstacle to better democracy and equality, ending with the making of demands; the International Statement (November 2011), released during the G20 summit in Cannes, France, calling for a ‘global dialogue’ between movements across the world; the City of London Demands (November 2011) focusing on the City of London Corporation’s lack of transparency and accountability; the Statement of Autonomy (December 2011), affirming OL’s independence from all political parties and NGOs and partisanship only to ‘the people’, and calling for those participating in Occupy with links to ‘professional activist’ bodies to disclose this; the Economics Statement (December 2011), summarising the major problems with the economic and financial systems around which Occupy mobilised, proposing remedies from concrete policy proposals to calls for a broader re-thinking of the economy; the Online Safer Spaces statement (December 2011), reasserting safer spaces guidelines for online spaces like social media and email; the Homelessness Statement (February 2012), a response to impending eviction, decrying poor homeless services and the waste of empty buildings and council funds, and calling for the Greater London Authority to fulfil its ‘duty of care’ to the many street homeless then living at the occupation; the Statement of Solidarity (May 2013), much later, offering a rather vague statement welcoming ‘all action which, in good faith, seeks redress of injustice through non-violence’.

The content of these statements often tended toward inclusive catch-all statements that would exercise Occupy London as a speaking collectivity, while avoiding exclusionary ideological statements. Claims that Occupy wanted ‘structural change toward authentic global equality’ (Initial Statement), ‘a positive, sustainable economic system’ (Initial Statement), and ‘a global system that is democratic, just and sustainable’ (International Statement) were able to capture the range of ideological orientations present. Similarly, disagreement was unlikely on suggestive statements open to interpretation, such as the need to ‘Globalise Tahrir Square’ (United for Global Democracy), or the claim that corporations ‘benefit a small
minority and not the needs of the 99 percent’ (Corporations Statement). Such language left space for nuanced interpretations and different implications (in terms of appropriate mean of action and redress), but set out a common territory as the basis for collective action. They indicated values more than concrete aims, and a broad trajectory rather than the means to get there. Thus they had a compositional role that emphasised common ground.

The statements, however, went beyond this, including the articulation of explicit demands; necessarily more exclusive types of statement, delineating as they must particular targets and forms of action, with concomitant ideological underpinnings. Some of the commentary on the Occupy movement, principally Occupy Wall Street, insisted, against the ‘no demands’ discussion, that the movement did indeed contain implicit demands, whether this was the demand for equality (Taussig 2013, Gitlin 2013) the need to ‘get money out of politics’ (Gupta 2015) of the demand for dignity and ‘full citizenship’ (Calhoun 2013) expressed through Occupy’s slogans, methods of action and representations to the media. While this is true enough, these explicit demands represent moments in which differences were negotiated through discussion and the GA process. Of Occupy London’s eleven statements, six contain explicit demands, introduced with the words ‘we demand’, ‘we want’, and ‘we call for’. Three statements use the word ‘demand’ and one – the City of London Demands – contains this in its name. Occupy London was clearly prepared to articulate demands. The question that follows, in view of the pragmatic approach to collective enunciation, is what type of action this was oriented toward, and how this constituted the actors along with the action.

Like the statements above, some of these demands are broad and general, though they nonetheless provide a compositional and directional function. A demand such as ‘Rewrite the rules of the economy in the interest of wellbeing and sustainability’ (Economics Statement) is both indeterminate – who is to rewrite these rules, and how do we interpret ‘wellbeing and sustainability’? – and at the same time hints at a profound critique of contemporary economic life. Followed up by the demand that ‘banks and financial institutions need to be accountable to society’, this is a demand whose fulfilment would represent a fundamental reorientation of an economy based on profit-seeking and expanding private interests. These are demands that expose the inability of the current system to provide something that sounds just and reasonable (Critchley 2013).
Other demands outline explicit policy reforms, centring around the issues of taxation, financial regulation, and what we might broadly define as accountability and transparency. The Initial Statement calls for ‘an end to global tax injustice’, which is developed in the Corporations Statement’s call for the abolition of tax havens, tax avoidance and tax evasion. The Economics Statement goes into further detail, calling for more progressive taxation and for the closing of tax loopholes, and for the UK government to stop blocking international efforts to achieve the above. The Initial Statement and Economics Statement each call for ‘independent financial regulation’. Several demands seek transparency with regard to corporate lobbying and the unaccountable structures of the City of London. This includes the need for ‘legislation to ensure full transparency of corporate lobbying, overseen by a credible body’, and for the City of London to detail all advocacy work and open itself up to Freedom of Information requests.

These concrete demands reflect an affirmative reformist engagement with the context of Occupy’s political context: the sense that the financial crisis was the result of irresponsible behaviour by the banks; the sense that austerity was a political choice that could be avoided given the political will to chase down the taxes of the rich; a broad anger at the access to policymakers provided by wealth. Significantly, they appear to reveal a certain confidence that the solutions to this lie in the institutions of liberal democracy and the capitalist state.

Taking seriously this apparent ascendancy of liberal reformist policy demands, we can understand this in light of the wider dynamics that underpin liberal features across Occupy’s modes of speech and collectivity, as discussed above. As I have argued, Occupy mobilised many people new to the field of radical street politics, which meant that many arrived with broadly liberal reformist motivations. Several participants in this research refer to the radicalising effect of ongoing involvement in Occupy, and I witnessed many more develop strident and articulate anti-capitalist politics from an earlier, more moderate position. In this sense, reformist demands genuinely articulated a political outlook that was the entry-point of many Occupiers. Even for those developing more radical positions, a persistent sense that others would find these alienating – making them problematic for a project of mobilising the wider ‘99 percent’ – meant liberal senses of what was admissible persisted.
The place of those with more radical politics is very important to this, as the consensus GA process that led to agreed statements certainly included them. These frequently recognised the role of seemingly moderate demands in an unfolding radical project; that is the directional and compositional function of less radical claims. Furthermore, there was a sense that using a language closer to the common-sense political discourse of British society was necessary to fulfilling the promise of a movement of ‘the 99 percent’. This, in turn, was reinforced by media scrutiny ‘mapping out’ the response of Occupiers, as in the account above of the Press Team’s perceived need to combat the delegitimising label of ‘anti-capitalist’. Elsewhere, this same dynamic could be witnessed in the dispute over the main banners hanging over the St. Paul’s and Finsbury Square camps, reading ‘Capitalism Is Crisis’ and ‘Capitalism Isn’t Working’ respectively. Debate circulated right from the start about whether these fairly represented the Occupiers, and whether they contributed to the desire to include a broad swathe of ‘the 99 percent’. When I, along with a group of six friends, finally removed the Finsbury Square banner, we did so not because we disagreed with its claim (none of us did), but because working on the Info desk, talking with passers-by, office workers, visitors and so on, had shown us that that language put up too quick a barrier to open conversation with people for whom a critique of capitalism as such was beyond the pale.

An understanding of why the presence of these demands does not indicate a general liberal consensus requires a further interrogation of their status as demands. In reality, none of these demands were pursued as demands. Even those ones whose policy orientation indicated potential targets of campaigns, they were not (with the exception of the City of London Demands) articulated to particular power-brokers. More important still, they were not advanced as campaigns through the ongoing actions of Occupy London (for example developing strategic means of achieving these reforms). Rather, they were more than anything expressions of positions which had emerged from the ongoing ‘conversation’ of Occupy as a whole, or particular Working Groups. This was a movement that was drawn to speak, but for which such acts of speech did not necessarily have ongoing consequences. They were not, whatever they said, policies or fixed positions. This reveals a deep truth about the limited collectivity of Occupy London. Occupiers could arrive at collective moments of speech, even those constituting a petitioning, campaigning voice, but lacked the organisational form and solidarity to carry these forward. The ‘liberal
libertarianism’ and individualism witnessed in the GA was a broader problem, manifesting here in the lack of ongoing commitment. The Economics or Corporations Working Group could draft a lengthy statement and bring it to the GA for agreement. For the maybe hundreds of people waving their hands in consensus, there was often little consequence to agreement. These areas of interest would then move back into the particular Working Groups, where interested parties would pursue them or not. It was not a collective commitment of much depth. The same is true of the many ‘solidarity statements’ agreed by the GA, which generally amounted to lending Occupy London’s name as a supporter of other actions. These were brief commitments with low risk and low effort, that further revealed the degree to which speech came easier than action.

The generally inconsequential nature of these statements and demands is perhaps best indicated by the fact that several participants in this research make reference to the fact that Occupy London did not make demands. This was variously seen as a good and bad thing. Rachel saw Occupy London’s greatest strength in ‘its absolute refusal to make alternative suggestions’. Matt, on the other hand says that the greatest shortcoming of Occupy London was ‘being reluctant to have more detailed critiques and demands [...] building the movement around things that affect people’s lives, which usually involves a demand or reform’. Elsewhere, Jesse asserts the importance of maintaining a broad critique and ‘not pinning them down to a list of the five or ten most important’, while in the build-up to Occupy Democracy in 2014, the organising group often repeated the need to learn from Occupy London’s mistakes, and make clear demands. This widespread disregard for the moments in which Occupy London had made its lists and enumerated demands – and this by people who were very active and participated in many of the GAs that agreed them – indicates the fact that the demands and statements did not constitute a significant ordering principle for the movement.

The statements and demands of Occupy London were often produced at key junctures, responding to current events and challenges, whether this was the Initial Statement’s establishment of the basic premise of the occupation, the Homelessness Statement’s addressing of the impending fate of homeless Occupiers after the coming eviction, or the International Statement’s articulation of an alternative global order to that of the G20, meeting in the UK at that time. However, while these began by meeting real needs, by the time of the International
Statement, or the Statement of Solidarity, which declared solidarity with basically everyone, the statements seem to be more about a desire to say something; to be speaking. These events provided an opportunity for speech in a movement for which speaking came easier than much else, and for whom extending the project of Occupy in creative directions was far harder than engaging in ongoing performances of speaking together. This had been a vital constitutive element early on, but later it was evidence of basic limits to Occupy’s way of operating. Rather than ongoing commitments these were fleeting moments of conditional unity.

In his analysis of the movements of 2011, Alain Badiou (2012) presents us with a way of thinking about this tendency of an emerging movement to want to flex its muscles and announce itself on the stage of history. Of the Spanish 15M movement he says,

> The movement is forever being asked: What is your programme? But the movement does not know. In the first instance, it wants to want; it wants to celebrate its own dictatorial authority – dictatorial because democratic ad infinitum – when it comes to statement and action. It subordinates the results of action to the value of the intellectual activity of action itself, not to the electoral categories of a programme and results. (Badiou 2012: 98-99)

It is not clear how Badiou understands ‘action’ here, but we should interpret it to include the action of speech and demand-making. Recognising the European occupations as less promising imitations of the ‘Arab Spring’ movements, and particularly that of Egypt, Badiou says that what is perceptible in the most successful square-taking movements is something of grand historical significance (the title of his book is *The Rebirth of History*). Following what he terms the ‘unprecedented regression’ (2013: 4) in which the forces of capital have moved to undo the advances of the workers movement and twentieth century socialism – a regression whose dynamics are captured in terms such as ‘globalisation’, ‘modernisation’ or ‘the West’ – Badiou sees, in the indignant squares the re-opening of possibility. Identifying this as ‘the time of riots’, he argues that while this is the awakening of historic potential, this is not enough. For immediate insurgent events to attain the status of the truly ‘historical riot’ requires a level of organisation, which is largely lacking: ‘The present moment is in fact the first stirrings of a global
popular uprising against this regression. As yet blind, naïve, scattered and lacking a powerful concept of durable organization’ (2013: 5). Badiou is tentative about the potential development of historical riots from the current moment, stating that ‘an era has opened, if not of their possibility, then at last of the possibility of their possibility’ (2013: 28).

Badiou recognises the intensification of productive desire that accompanies the many combinations of a new political body’s assembling. Stating that such a new configuration at first ‘wants to want’ is an indication of the self-constitution of a desiring collectivity engaged in a protean and fragile coming-to-subjectivity. The ongoing desire of Occupy London to speak, to announce itself, and to make pronouncements and demands must be understood in this light. However, there was a clear weakness of collectivity and organisation, which meant that demands were not pursued once they were stated, and collective pronouncements tended toward an ‘inclusivity’ that was not a strong basis for ongoing action. For this reason Badiou’s analysis is useful as a reminder of how Occupy’s modes of collective speech embodied an inchoate moment of historic potential, which was unable to extend as a movement.

In summary, the statements and demands of Occupy London were among the most concrete pieces of collective speech, agreed through the consensus process of the GA, and written down with agreed wording. There were two principal ways in which this might extend the Occupy project and constitute a particular type of speaking collective. Where they articulated demands, these tended toward a liberal reformism which suggested not only the significant presence of liberal positions, often from those with no prior experience of social movement activity, but also the willingness of those with more radical critiques to accept this as useful to the ongoing project of inclusion. While this hinted at the possibility of Occupy London’s reorganisation as a reform-seeking campaign, in truth these were not pursued as such, revealing the limitations of this compromise. An aversion to confrontation and exclusion came at the expense of commitment. The more diffuse statements, which captured a range of positions, sought to extend Occupy through rendering possible the ongoing amassing of the ‘99 percent’. This must be measured against that pragmatic concern with what it allowed Occupy London to do. The picture that emerges is one where, rather than forming the basis for an ongoing, active creative extension of Occupy, this stalled in the moment of speaking.
6.5 Conclusion

To conclude, moments of collective speech were fundamental to the experience of Occupy London and a vital means through which Occupy London was constituted. Despite the problematic nature of such moments in a movement professing a suspicion of representation, the collectivity of Occupy London was thrown together as a ‘collective assemblage of enunciation’ through speech acts that produced and presumed particular modes of being. What had made Occupy politically interesting and potent had been the connections and entanglements of the occupied square, as people brought together their varying capacities, voices and located experiences of constraining social, political and economic systems. From the potentially cacophonous clamour of the indignant crowd – united more by shared negation than positive political programmes – the nascent possibility of organisation was suggested in the chorus of the People’s Mic, but while this provided an immediate, affective experience of collectivity, and an important aesthetic event, it was no basis for the ongoing extension of Occupy’s projects. The many voices of Occupy were in part disciplined and negotiated through the consensus process of the GA, as the ‘conversation’ so central to Occupy London developed into moments of collective will and an agreed ‘message’. The approach to consensus, however, revealed the emergence of certain limited liberal and individualistic modes, as exemplified in the use of the block. Meanwhile a stifling vision of ‘unity’ was overseen by an increasingly bureaucratic GA. Considering the pragmatics of speech, either of these might have been understandable if they had made possible the extension of Occupy by empowering participants to act, but the incompatibility of these features held back the capacities of active corners of the movement. The Press Team, drawn inevitably into a dynamic of representation sought to hold space for a movement still finding its feet, but in such a way that revealed its own biases as to what was permissible, and reproducing the aversion to productive conflict seen also in the GA.

The making of concrete demands and statements could similarly have extended Occupy in two ways: either by aiding the ongoing amassing of more people, ‘included’ by the emerging claims; or by laying out the goals and directions of a campaigning organisation. While some of these fairly expressed the problems and possible solutions identified by the Occupiers, in large part they tended toward the blandly inclusive or toward concrete liberal reforms that were not pursued as such. What emerges from this is a picture of a movement that wanted to speak but found
it hard to build from this. To that degree, the ongoing desire to make statements in fact largely prolonged the level of collectivity experienced in the People’s Mic: a sense of potential, of many voices vibrating as one, but stalling here, unable to organise that speaking collectivity into a politically and historically significant force.
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

Through a deep and critical ethnographic engagement with Occupy London, this thesis has produced a nuanced and cogently theorised analysis of this significant moment of social movement struggle in the contemporary period. It provides an empirical account of how the unfolding of this complex collective project was handled by three central features, or problems: the uneven processes and tensions at the heart of the territories of occupation; the discursive negotiation of what it meant to say 'We Are The 99 Percent', variously producing a non-identitarian breach, while also drawing Occupiers into dynamics of representation; and the navigation of the problem of collective speech, and of organising collectivity itself. These points of tension and dispute have been followed through the long arc from Occupy London’s first effervescent eruption in a city square, through the loss of its sites and the long period of reflection, redirection and movement breakdown that followed. Throughout this account, the thesis has interwoven rich empirical discussion with critical insights, offering a politically orientated intervention on the matter of the possibilities and limitations of the Occupy phenomenon.

7.1 Contributions to knowledge

At the heart of the original contribution of this thesis is the depth and breadth of its empirical engagement. My level of observant participation in Occupy London has meant that I have been able to understand the complex and granular dynamics that lie within and behind features whose significance to the movement has often seemed deceptively apparent. An engagement with these surface meanings had been the basis for much of the most influential analysis of Occupy, most of which has focused on the earliest and most visible moments of the movement. The depth of my empirical work has created a sensitivity to the complexities and ambiguities through which Occupy, and collective projects more broadly, actually took place. This is further enhanced by the length of time of my research, as I follow the way that particular dynamics played out in the often more analytically interesting period after the last of the camps were evicted.
My own prior participation in Occupy London means that this thesis can provide a level of analysis from within the organising spaces and informal settings that come with a certain degree of ‘authentic’ participation; a problematic idea, but one that matters to many activists. Again, this participation was profound and enduring. As such, the tensions that drive the thesis are ones that I myself navigated through the course of the research, providing a level of appreciation that is absent in almost all work on Occupy. Much of the scholarly work is sympathetic to the movement, and many researchers were able to participate on some level in these spaces that were so self-consciously open, but the real substance of the movement’s dynamics only reveal themselves in the long-term.

The contribution made by this thesis is also based on the interrogation of the three questions with which I began. To briefly restate these, they were:

1. The problem of occupation: How did Occupy London’s practice of occupation navigate two conflicting modes of territory: the embedding of the movement in the occupation camp form and location; and the desire to extend the occupation and overcome the fixity of the site?

2. The problem of ‘the 99 percent’: How did Occupiers’ negotiate the different interpretations and understandings of the claim that ‘We Are The 99 Percent’? How did this stage a tension between, on the one hand, a critique of inequality – with no necessary reference to identities or representation – and, on the other a claim to representing ‘the people’?

3. The problem of collective speech: How were moments of collective speech constituted in a movement that explicitly problematised modes of representation? What types of collectivity were produced through such moments?

I have developed rich answers to each of these questions, and through this, contributed to knowledge in the following ways.

Chapter 4 deployed the concept of the refrain from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to emphasise the expressive nature of occupation territory and the fundamentally processual nature of social movement territoriality. While I am not the first to use Deleuze-Guattarian conceptions of territories and refrains to describe social movements (for example, Chesters 2007; Thoburn 2015), my engagement with,
and application of, the idea of the refrain has entailed a level of depth that has not occurred before. In being used to describe the territoriality of occupation, this has contributed to a better understanding of Occupy and occupation, but also to the operations of refrain-like dynamics in the material world. By bringing this concept into dialogue with my deep ethnographic engagement, this chapter identified the defining tension of occupation, between embedding in the fixed relations of a ‘home’, and the desire to extend outward. While each of these dynamics have been noted, their presentation as immanent features of territory is unique. I have also provided an analysis of the ultimate failure of the desire to move the territory and the project along, as reflecting the importance of a ‘common ground’ in a movement that found other forms of collectivity and coordination difficult (which I pick up in detail in Chapter 6).

This chapter also made extended use of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. This is a significant contribution in two ways. First the concept leads to a better analysis of occupation, attuned not only to its productive elements, but also to the weird and problematic ones, depicting these not simply as ‘bad’ features, but implicating them in a wider dynamic of staging wrongness in the square. Further to this, I have advanced a critique of dominant uses of heterotopia (Foucault 1984) to describe social movements (Hetherington 1998; 1999), which focus too much on positive expressions of movement ideology.

Chapter 5 identified a defining tension at the heart of the figure of ‘the 99 percent’: on the one hand a critique of inequality, seeking to advance a politicising breach in social relations; and on the other hand, a reference to the unity and identity of ‘the people’. The central argument of the chapter also clarified the potentially problematic nature of conceptions of social relations within Occupy London, and social movements more broadly (particularly those oriented toward autonomy and a rejection of representation). My discussion of the way in which this tension was navigated by Occupiers is the first to do so. Having established the rise of a dynamic of representation in Occupy London, I have identified the ways in which Occupy’s mode of representation sought to find ways around this. As such I have shown how discursive features which emerge as part of anti-representation stances – the presentation as ‘ordinary people’, the ongoing folding in of the represented into the assembly – actually act as rationales for persisting claims to representation (though forms of representation that provide interesting possibilities for avoiding the
problem of usurpation). Finally this chapter’s use of Rancière’s (1999) concept of ‘disagreement’ as a ‘bridge’ between the politicisation of inequality and the articulation of a people, is unique, and provides a novel analysis of the way in which ‘the 99 percent’ brought these together.

Chapter 6 identified the relationship between seemingly disparate moments of movement speech to show how Occupy London’s mode of collectively was handled through the negotiation of the need to make collective pronouncements. This involves a deep empirical engagement with the tension between two privileged forms of speech in Occupy London: the ‘conversation’ and the ‘message’. My use of the concept of ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) has allowed me to emphasise the moment of speech as a fragile moment in which the many gathers as one. This provided the basis for an empirical discussion of the forms of collectively advanced through Occupy London. Through this I identify how one important factor in the eventual breakdown of Occupy London was an unhappy combination of some of the most interesting and radical features of the alter-globalisation movement – consensus decision-making, a rejection of all forms of coercion – with a new centralising drive, which asserted the sovereign power of the General Assembly in such a way that only stifled action, and could eventually only propose the kinds of unity that drives out those who feel stifled. This marks the continuities and divergences between Occupy and previous waves of protest, in particular the alter-globalisation movement.

Empirically, this chapter includes the first academic discussion of several important aspects of the post-eviction landscape: attempts to circumvent the centralising General Assembly; the dispute surrounding the Future of Occupy meetings; the partial resurgence of the GA; the break with the Occupied Times over irreconcilable political differences. This builds on the discussion of post-eviction era occupation attempts in Chapter 4, which similarly, have had no considerable academic treatment. Indeed, it is in this sense that I make a tentative claim that this thesis describes a previously undocumented empirical site. While a small amount of literature has emerged around Occupy London, I was present, participating and observing, in moments during the long tail-end of Occupy, which is itself a new territory of research.
7.2 Future research

The thesis identifies several empirical, methodological and theoretical areas that merit further investigation and interrogation in the future.

Empirically, it was necessary to delimit my focus, and in particular this meant cleaving to Occupy London, even as the post-eviction period dispersed many of the energies of Occupy in different directions. My decision made sense within the aims of this thesis, as I was especially interested in how Occupy London persisted as a terrain of struggle in which the dynamics of the early period unfolded and played out over time, and reconstituted *that* space and *that* collective. A fruitful further line of empirical investigation would be to follow more of the routes out of Occupy London, as the various discourses, practices and features that underpin this thesis moved into other areas, particularly other areas of activism, political engagement and so on. Following their participation in Occupy London, Occupiers moved into many other areas of activity, most prominently the anti-fracking movement, the squatting movement, and a series of campaigns against debt, against trans-national trade deals, and in favour of things like a basic income or a return to the commons. Understanding the ways in which particular practices and debates move between movement spaces is an interesting line of possible future investigation.

In the case of the anti-fracking movement, of particular interest is the continuation of protest camping, but this time as ‘protection camps’ to block access to fracking sites. Occupiers, and those aware of Occupy were a vital organising force in this movement, especially early on, and the continuities and ruptures with its Occupy past would be a worthwhile study.

My data-gathering could only last so long. One month after I returned from the field, leaving London, the events of Occupy Democracy seemed, for a few weeks in October/November 2014 to be reinvigorating the Occupy project in London. It returned to many of the visual, organisational and rhetorical features that I have described in this thesis. Ultimately this was short-lived and limited. While the moment of real fieldwork is passed, research should be conducted as to how these events played out, and the ways in which the problems articulated in this thesis were reproduced or overcome. Such patterns might provide useful avenues for understanding the possible outcomes of particular configurations in movements.
The use of the ‘refrain’ and ‘heterotopia’ in describing social movement spaces needs to be taken further, past the case of this thesis. I found these to be excellent concepts for describing and analysing Occupy London, whose modes of territoriality – the tension between fixity and movement, and the modes of juxtaposition which were so central to the effect of occupation – align quite neatly with the sensitivities of these concepts. However, this is not to say that other movement territorialities can be as well described in this way. It will be important, particularly in future movements for whom space-taking is significant, to attend to the particularities of these spaces and what is done in and to them. Where heterotopia is used, this must remain conscious of the equivocal and ambivalent dimensions the concept points to.

My insistence on the importance of speech as a moment of gathering a collectivity will remain an important point to consider, particularly in assessing movements that have no or little official, institutional mechanisms of centralisation.

The figure of ‘the 99 percent’ must be slightly reimagined and interrogated in the current moment of rising populism, largely on the right. In some senses the Occupy moment – not Occupy London in particular but the wider moods and discourses of that time – were an intensification and coming-out of a range of anti-establishment, anti-elite passions which articulated the intolerability of things as they stood. On a political level it is vital that we seek to understand the development of this discourse since, and especially the recombination of the figure of the people, not with a radical critique of the inequality that underpins capitalist relations, but instead with a pernicious ethno-nationalism.

The pursuit of that problem as it unfurls is for a different project than this thesis, which has contributed a unique and critical ethnographic analysis of this significant moment of social movement activity in the contemporary period. It has delineated a series of problems that were especially salient in this particular configuration of action and history – in Occupy London and the wider occupation movements – but which represent longer running themes in the attempts to articulate radical projects, and to understand them.
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