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**The Subject of Politics: Non-Identificational Politics and Occupy Wall Street**
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**Abstract**
The main focus of the paper is the conceptualization of the *political subject*. By political subject I mean here the subject of emancipatory politics, a subject that would be capable of resistance; that would be capable of self-organization outside the identitarian structure of power in society. Moreover, a political subject has to have the ability to disrupt the social power relations – this is the main reason that makes a subject political. Identity here is meant as a tool and a technique of power that fixes the bodies in society in their "correct" positions; identity is not a person's private conception of the self. So, the main question: how can a political subject emerge by not being reduced to acquiring an identity? I will use the theoretical writings of Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière to move towards an answer to the question. The most important concepts used are *whatever singularity* and *distribution of the sensible*. However, as we will see as we confront the empirical material from Occupy Wall Street movement, the postulation of communicative equality and the constitution of public perceptibility of the subject are in themselves not enough. We need also to think through the *temporality* of the political subject. This necessity guides us towards Alain Badiou and his concepts of *event* and *fidelity*. This is the focus towards which I will move in my future research.
**Keywords:** *Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Rancière, Occupy Wall Street, political subject, resistance*

**Introduction**
The main hypothesis of the paper is that, in order to conceptualize a *political subject*, we need to put under suspicion the whole discourse of identity. The creation and production of new identities is of no use if we want to think the possibility of resistance and emancipative politics. Why? Any kind of identity – be it as radical as can be – is always-already captured within the structures of power, dominant/hegemonic significational systems and regimes of sensibilities. Identity, in this perspective, is an element in the techniques of power, a tool for ordering the social, distributing bodies and assigning them position within that order. As Alain Badiou (2012: 76-77) says, identities are abstractions and "separating names": identities establish a differential system that prohibits the political subject to emerge: to use Agamben's words: what the state cannot tolerate in any way is the coming together of beings without identities. The State (understood here as a structure of power) is based on identities and the "prohibition of unbinding" this "separating structure" – and this is why we need to turn to *non-identificational* politics in search for a possible resistance.

Paraphrasing Saskia Sassen (2005: 187), we can say that as long as equality is based on belonging, the status of the subject forms a ground for exclusive politics and identity. As long as society is seen as a compilation of groups and bodies, which can be counted and be made to count for the society as a whole, there will always be those who are excluded, those who do not belong. This kind of exclusion does not simply mean the differentiation of one group from another, but, more fundamentally, that the non-identificational, non-positioned *does not exist* – is not a *part* of the distribution of society.

By excluding the non-significant, that, which does not belong to the structure of society, the politics of similarity and difference does not enable *politics*. Politics is reduced to the production of *representations*, through which the bodies in society can be governed, can be subjected to techniques of power. What do we mean here by *politics*, then, politics which would not be merely representational and dealing with the government of bodies? I will take the definition of politics from Jacques Rancière (2011: 4) who writes: "Political activity reconfigures the distribution of the perceptible. It introduces new objects and subjects onto the common stage. It makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals." We need to add here that those who before could not speak, but now find a voice that is powerful enough to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible, may be called properly *political subjects*.

This means, of course, that their insertion to the distribution of the sensible cannot be the result of the structure of power, they cannot be constituted by power relations but *in a relation to* the structure of power, which the political subject destabilizes. Politics, then, is the making visible and audible those that are not – and can not – be counted as parts of society. And this simultaneous elusion from the count and intrusion into the collective sensible constitutes the subject as political – the subject as that which brings into full view the illegitimacy of the current distribution as an operation of power. *Political subject*, then, cannot be confused with the *social subject*, which can be understood as an element, as a body which finds its proper place in the division of social identities and positions. In the following discussion we will try to elaborate this difference using Giorgio Agamben's and Jacques Rancière's theoretical writings and, as empirical material, the Occupy Wall Street movement. We will try to conceptualize OWS as a political subject.

**Escape from power: the coming community**
Let us commence by trying to figure out the (emancipatory) politics of Giorgio Agamben, who pits against the (bio)political structure of power[1] *whatever singularities* or *forms-of-life*. The two concepts are largely interchangeable: whatever singularity (*singoliarità qualunque*) "is not 'being, it does not matter which,' but rather

'being such that it always matters'" (Agamben 2005: 1); and "[b]y the term *form-of-life* […] I mean a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something as naked life" (Agamben 2000: 3-4). Irreducible to specific ways of life, presenting, in each of its act(ion)s, the whole potentiality of life, the singular form-of-life escapes from the identifying and defining gaze of power, refuses to act as a signifier that could be assigned a definite position. "A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake in its way of living is living itself. […] It defines a life […] in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power" (*ibid*: 4).

Whatever singularity is non-identificational, without identity – "it is not determinate with respect to a concept" (Agamben 2005: 67), it is not classifiable by belonging to a social or political group. In other words: it cannot be made into an abstraction (but identity is, first and foremost, an abstraction).

The fundamental act of the (bio)political structure is to make *bios* and *zoe* coincide with one another, make them inseparable. This act results in, first, making the political identity indistinguishable from the simple fact of life, and second, rendering the latter dependent on the political way of life. Conceptualizing the form-of-life and whatever singularity, Agamben turns this formula on its head by saying that political existence has to originate from the potentiality of the being of human, his capacity and not from structural power. But this capacity does not originate from the essence of the human, his biological power to mold his environment. Capacity, potentiality, originates above all from communication, commonality – from the mediation of language. Therefore, human being's capacity of action is essentially (if this is a suitable word in this context) political – it is the capacity to model a *collective space*.

But, it must be said that Agamben's *coming community* of singularities is above all a *politics of impotence*, that is, the disruption of the work of identificational politics, and its goal is to demonstrate the possibility of existence without political identity. "These pure singularities communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity. They are expropriated of all identity, so as to appropriate belonging to itself [...]" (*ibid*: 10-11). By demonstrating belonging *as such*, without any qualifying feature, the coming community cannot appropriate any kind of discourse that would create any *specific* commonality. In this respect, Agamben's political commonality is wholly desubjectified, without subject – objective communicability that is defined by unworking, the *absence of production*; communicability, which, by itself, by its pure being undermines the (bio)political structure.[2]

In quite an astonishing way, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) applies as its foundational principle an almost identical idea: the *indifference of identity*. OWS took to the streets without any specific demands that could be answered. This kind of gathering, unity, commonality without specific goals precludes the possibility of dialogue. By an attitude that stresses the fact that "we are our demands"[3], they refuse an inscription within a concrete project or a policy;[4] they refuse to define themselves according to the dominant discourse of identity. When a Demands Working Group – that strove to develop the specific goals of OWS – was set up in Zuccotti Park,[5] a statement quickly appeared on OWS's webpage saying that the group does not represent anybody but themselves.[6] Demands allow to position, define and identify the protesters; "demands demand an aswer," as one occupier said: they need *an other's action directed to the enunciator*, that is, they need an application of a relation of power. An observation from one of the participants says all of the above and more very clearly:

> Amin Husain took this reasoning further, asserting, "This movement is post-identity. It opens space for a co-existence of various critiques, whether it is the military-industrial complex, or the Man, or the system or patriarchy, or racism, or all of the above. It isn't about having good ideas; it's about freeing up people's imaginations. A beautiful thing about Occupy is that it said, 'We're not going to deal with "isms." We don't know what those mean. We're interested in how we live and how we relate to one another.'" (Lewis *et al.* 2013: 24)

The aim is to create a space in which *everybody* can gather, irrespective of their social belonging and previous relations; to create a world that is based on equality. This is what Alain Badiou (2008: 35) calls the *communist idea* or *hypothesis*, "a pure Idea of equality, with a regulatory function, rather than a programme." OWS tries, then, to move towards a *post-representative* politics, one that would be based on direct action – and for this reason it is crucial *not to engage in dialogue*; it is crucial to speak without giving the opportunity of answer, that is, of positioning and defining.

It is therefore a politics that is in opposition to the State as a representational and identitarian structure; it is a politics that does not aim to create unity (as distinguished from equality) or a subject. From Agamben's perspective, it is quite enough to elude the positioning of representation, to become *ungovernable*. The success (undermining State politics) of a political mass without any inner organization would then originate from itself, from the simple fact of its existence – there is no need for a *political subject*.

"By rejecting the articulable OWS eludes one part of that technique of power, giving it a certain kind of strength."[7] But the pure community of singularities without identity (desubjectified acts of communication, presenting belonging as such) cannot provide us with the figure of the political subject. The universality of communicability disperses the political, at the same time, to everywhere and nowhere in particular, the political is not localized in any concrete statement or context. The universal community of singularities, then, is in danger of returning to where it strove to escape: to individualism, to the constitution of the individual identity, that is, to the private sphere – which would make the communicability again apolitical. That does not mean, of course, that communication which is capable of eluding the grasp of discourses constituted in power relations is not important – even crucial – for non-

identificational politics. What we have to recognize is the fact that this kind of potentiality of communication alone is not enough: non-identificational politics does not equal non-subjectivity – it is founded on *subjectivation*.

**The redistribution of the sensible: constitution of a political subject**
Agamben's communicability remained *pure*, because it refused to acquire *any* meaning and declined to refer to *anything* outside of itself: it was limited to a singular communicational event. For Rancière, what becomes important is that which becomes perceptible in the act of political communication: the subjects and objects – and their configurations and assemblages – that appear on the political arena, that is, in the common experience of the people.

According to Agamben, we could conceptualize OWS as a phenomenon which *necessarily*, by its own fact of existence, undermines the dominant structure of power. According to Rancière, however, we need to think the activity of relating to the structure of power relations, that is, the *demonstration* and *presentation* of this eluding from the capture of power. And it is this presentation, this active *acting out* that is capable of producing the democratic *supplement*, or, *demos*.

For Rancière, *police* is the distribution of the sensible according to "actually existing bodies", that is, the practice of power that constitutes the obvious, the 'there is' of society; *police* is the structuring of the sensible in such a way that nothing lies outside of it; *police* says: "Move along! There's nothing to see here!" (Rancière 2010: 37). *Politics*, on the other hand, „means the supplementation of all qualifications by the power of the unqualified" (*ibid.*: 53). In other words, politics unravels the qualifications, relations, and positions admitted to actually existing bodies in the logic of *police*. Politics, we could say, tells us that there is, in fact, very much to see *in addition* to the obvious that we are so used to. The goal of politics is, then, to undermine the distribution of society by demonstrating that everything that is visible, everything that can be talked about, is not yet everything that exists. *The limits of the perceptible are not the limits of existence*.

The political subject that would be capable of expanding the limits of the perceptible society is the *demos*, which "is not the population, the majority, the political body or the lower classes. It is the surplus community made up of those who have no qualification to rule, which means at once everybody and anyone at all" (*ibid*: 53). Again, we see that the political subject is not qualified in any way by properties or by the position it has in the structure of society: anyone at all can become a political subject. This subject is generated or constituted by demonstrating the democratic presupposition of equality: the demonstration (making perceptible) of the existence of the supplement constitutes the existence of the political subject.

Before the OWS, for example, poverty and unemployment were, first of all, statistical figures that categorized the US population that distributed it into perceptible units. Only based on these units could poverty and unemployment be transformed into an object of *representative politics*. The poor and the unemployed are transformed into the *object* of *police* (management, government) by inserting them into the social encyclopedia, by turning them into the objects of knowledge. Representative politics functions, exactly, by objectifying: a certain group of individuals is constituted as an object of knowledge and as a locus of intervention. We can envisage a "world without poverty" only through the intervention in the lives of "the poor" (increasing productivity, improvement of healthcare, etc.). In other words, the social subject is constituted through objectification of political and governmental techniques.[8]

OWS, by occupying Zuccotti Park, by restoring its previous name – Liberty Plaza –, and by dividing the society crudely into two – the 99 percent and the one percent –, changed the way how the governmental statistics had so far distributed social existence. By using privately owned public property to constitute the rights of the *demos*, OWS called into question the privatization of public space. Now, we should understand public space here both literally and metaphorically. Literally of course because of the actual occupation of space; but metaphorically because of the constant de-politicization of issues that (should) concern the public, the common experience of the social. For example, economic inequality is presented a social fact, as a way things should be; by naturalizing this phenomenon, the issue is excluded from the political: economic inequality is a consensual fact. By the occupation of *privately owned public property*, not only the public space, but also the formerly de-politicized issues again gained their dissensual quality.

A concrete (urban) space, therefore, localizes political discourse, localizes the political itself. It is important to stress here that the political, of course, does not reside in any one specific space: a space emerges as political if its existence as a self-evident (non-significant) space is put under question, if it is inserted into the common (public) experience as a problematic space, a space of dispute. We saw that in Agamben the communication of singularities remained disembodied and unfathomable, never reaching to the common experience, but, once localized and embodied, the *political potentiality* so crucial for Agamben, becomes perceptible and starts to influence the self-evident character of the logic of *police*. The occupation of Zuccotti Park and the restoration of its name was a gesture that brought to the common experience, made sensible a new subject that managed to assemble dispersed statements and acts into a new *political body* in the distribution of the sensible.

The name of this body became The 99 Percent and it did not by any means stay inside the heavily guarded boundaries of Zuccotti Park. On 17. September 2011, only around a thousand people gathered in the Park, of whom only about an hundred stayed the night. By mid-November there were over 1600 occupations around the world.[9] An explosive expansion around the globe – 99 Percent gained global perceptibility as a political body. The 99 Percent is a non-identificational political name that does not prescribe the conditions of belonging by qualities or properties. It is a *democratic* name, which is "an empty, supplementary part that separates the community out from the sum of the parts

of the social body. This initial separation founds politics as the action of supplementary subjects, inscribed as a surplus in relation to every count of the parts of society" (*ibid.*: 33).

The 99 Percent is not a member of the social body, it is uncounted; with its appearance to the public experience it disrupts the social count. The goal of the 99 Percent is therefore to demonstrate that society *is not the sum of its parts* that is constituted as an actually existing society. By being present as an uncounted political body, the 99 Percent have managed to introduce new issues to public discourse, or, more exactly, they have managed to transform some previously de-politicized issues in political (that is, dissensual) issues. The first and foremost is of course the issue of economic inequality.

Sarah Kendzior[10] discusses the problem of "management of expectation": in a situation of continuous crisis, people's expectation remain lower in relation to their economic situation; it *seems natural* that in a time of crisis one *must* earn lower wages and one *must* acquire lower standards of living. For this reason, the preservation of the state of crisis, the normalization of the exceptional, can become an important governmental strategy. Even if the economy is growing, the people's welfare remains – more precisely, is kept – at the level of the crisis situation. One of the most important political acts of the 99 Percent is the un-naturalizing of this kind of "normality".

And it is exactly in this kind of space of dissensus, on the border of the "normal order" and the political litigation of this order, in the shifting of the borders of the social and the political, that the 99 Percent as a political subject emerges. We must keep in mind here that this politics *is not* legitimated by any kind of institution; it gains its legitimacy exactly from the illegitimizing of those institutions that structure the un-natural as natural. So, the 99 Percent has gone farther than just postulating its *potentiality* and acquired a body, *perceptibility* as a subject that is capable of enacting this potentiality. The fact that the 99 Percent gained a world-wide perceptibility so quickly, directs us to think that we cannot indeed understand the political subject as an "actually existing" body, a concrete group in society: a political subject is an open body, which is capable of assembling virtual, physical, immediate, mediated, etc. communicational acts. The political subject is defined by its operation on the borders of the structure of power relations; it cannot be defined by its physical configuration.[11]

### In place of a conclusion: a short remark on temporality

But, as Zuccotti Park was "cleaned" by the city in November of 2011, the 99 Percent gradually lost its coverage in the media, its global "space of residence"; the movement was faced with the question, what now? By gaining global attention, by gaining visibility with the occupation, OWS asserted the *possibility* of the political subject; it constituted itself as a subject. But now the question is – can the movement go through the whole process of *subjectivation*? In other words, can there be any continuity of the disruption of the structure of power? For this to happen, the movement needs to maintain an internal organization, and it cannot depend on the institutional media's attention to assert their existence. To gain perceptibility is completely other than to *maintain existence*; that is to live on the borders of the structure of power.

We need, then, to add a third dimension to our conception of the political subject: temporal organization. From Agamben we took the *potentiality*, the *virtuality* of the political, of the "outside of power". From Rancière we took the perceptibility, the sensible dimension: a political subject must be inserted within the common experience in order to, literally and metaphorically, make a difference: to alter the perceptual conditions of the public. Now, lastly, from Alain Badiou I borrow the concept of fidelity, which enables us to add a *temporal* do dimension to the political subject. But the conceptualization of fidelity of OWS to the event that it created has to be a subject for more thorough research project. For now, let us simply conclude that OWS has fulfilled two dimension required for the existence of a political subject: 1) the assertion of a virtuality, potentiality of equality, and 2) the perceptibility in the common social experience. The third, fidelity, that is, the inner organization and operation of the political subject will have to be evaluated more thoroughly in the future. Then we can say if OWS is indeed a political subject or simply, again, a potentiality of a subject whose existence found its end even before the process of subjectivation.

### Notes

[1] I do not have time here to go into details with Agamben's biopolitical structure of power, but one important thing to remember is that for him, individuals are always embedded in the game of inclusion and exclusion: individuals are included within the State by exclusion. „The living being has *logos* by taking away and conserving its own voice in it, even as it dwells in the polis  by letting its own bare life be excluded, as an exception, within it" (Agamben 1998: 12). Man can be political only if he submits his life (*zoe*) to the government of *logos*. It is the political sphere that decides on humanity, the political qualifies life, but in order to so, bare life has to be excluded from the political; it has to become *the outside of politics*, on which the political can found itself.

[2] One can think here also of Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's concept of *multitude*, which also, by its very existence, immanently, undermines the Empire; and Jean-Luc Nancy's (2006) *inoperative community*, which functions by not functioning, by inoperation.

[3] OccupyWallSt.org, 19.10.2011, http://occupywallst.org/article/ows-snapshot/

[4] Here we come to a crucial distinction, that of *politics* and *policy*. Politics does not aim to solve concrete problems, it is first and foremost a question of existence; existence within a State that is „*is not founded upon the social bond, which it would express, but rather upon un-binding, which it prohibits*" (Badiou 2005: 109). The existential question of politics would then be: how to create a social bond *between equals*, that would be founded on solidarity rather than on prohibition?

[5] NYTimes.com, 17.10.2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/17/nyregion/occupy-wall-street-trying-to-settle-on-demands.html?_r=0

[6] OccupyWallSt.org, 21.10.211, http://occupywallst.org/article/so-called-demands-working-group/

[7] Theoretical Living, 07.06.2012, http://theoreticalliving.tumblr.com/post/24623875291/-occupy-wall-street-and-the-visibly-invisible

[8] This is also the critique that Rancière directs to humanitarian programs: the presupposition of humanitarian aid is that the people who need help are themselves not capable of action; therefore it is necessary to intervene in their lives and act on behalf of them. But this kind of action, again, objectifies the subject, makes it dependent on outside intervention. Instead of acting *with* subjects, humanitarian programs act *for* the subjects. Through this action, human rights become humanitarian rights, that is, the rights of those who are not capable of performing their rights. (see Rancière 2010: 62-75)

[9] Jeff Sharlet, „Inside Occupy Wall Street", Rolling Stone 17.11.2013; http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/occupy-wall-street-welcome-to-the-occupation-20111110.

[10] Sarah Kendzior, „Managed expectations in post-employment economy", Al Jazeera, 12.03.2013; http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/03/201331116423560886.html

[11] This is one of the reasons why I haven't dealt here with the critique that the 99 Percent is essentially a movement for young, white and educated (see Lewis *et al.* 2013). It simply does not define itself by those parameters, it does not limit its actions to the assertion of specific national, racial, gender, etc. Identities. By its non-identificational character, it eludes the definition as an assemblage of physical bodies. In short, the political subject does not equal a population, as Rancière would say.

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