This is the pre-publication submitted version of the following paper:

Barnett, C. (2012). Situating the geographies of injustice in democratic theory. *Geoforum* 43, 677-686.

ABSTRACT

Post-Marxist and poststructuralist ontologies of the political have been important reference points for recent discussions of democracy in critical human geography and related fields. This paper considers the conceptual placement of contestation in a strand of democratic theory often denigrated by these approaches, namely theories of deliberative democracy informed by post-Habermasian Critical Theory. It is argued that this concern with contestation derives from a focus on the relationships between different rationalities of action. It is proposed that this tradition of thought informs a distinctively phenomenological approach to understanding the situations out of which democratic energies emerge. In elaborating on this phenomenological understanding of the emergence of political space, the paper proceeds in three stages. First, it is argued that the strong affinities between ontological conceptualisations of 'the political' and the ontological register of canonical spatial theory squeezes out any serious consideration of the plural rationalities of ordinary political action. Second, debates between deliberative and agonistic theorists of democracy are relocated away from questions of ontology. These are centred instead on disputed understandings of 'normativity'. This move opens up conceptual space for the analysis of phenomenologies of injustice. Third, using the example of debates about transnational democracy in which critical theorists of deliberative democracy explicitly address the reconfigurations of the space of 'the political', it is argued that this Critical Theory tradition can contribute to a distinctively 'topological' sense of political space which follows from thinking of political action as emerging from worldly situations of injustice. In bringing into focus this phenomenological approach to political action, the paper has lessons for both geographers and political theorists. Rather than continuing to resort to *a priori* models of what is properly political or authentically democratic, geographers would do well to acknowledge the ordinary dynamics and disappointments which shape political action. On the other hand, political theorists might do well to acknowledge the limits of the 'methodological globalism' that characterises so much recent work on the re-scaling of democracy.

Situating the geographies of injustice in democratic theory

"There is no transitivity between ontology and politics".

Simon Critchley (2007, 105).

1). Introduction: who's afraid of 'the political'?

Engagement with democratic theory in human geography and related spatial disciplines such as urban studies and urban planning remains faithful to the terms of a contrast between theories of deliberative democracy on the one hand, and post-structuralist theories of radical democracy and agonistic pluralism on the other. In this framing, the consensual orientations of deliberative democrats, personified in the avuncular figures of Jürgen Habermas or perhaps John Rawls, are off-set against the more worldly perspectives of those for whom human affairs are ineradicably shaped by 'power' and 'difference' and 'violence' (personified in turn by Foucault, Derrida, and Agamben). The framing of theories of deliberative democracy as universalising, rationalist, idealist and overwhelmingly consensual is central to the increasing theoretical saliency of the concept of 'the political'. For adherents of post-Marxist ontologies of 'the political' in particular, various intellectual traditions are accused of fostering a 'post-political' vision, by telling stories about the historical redundancy of fundamental axes of political conflict (see Mouffe 2005). While post-Marxist approaches free politics from its subordination to class antagonism, they also contribute to a diagnosis of the contemporary conjuncture as 'post-political' by virtue of not conforming to a model of clear-cut of well-defined conflict. The decline of class cleavages that shaped academic understandings of politics in post-War North America and Western Europe comes to be seen as tantamount to de-politicization

itself. The diagnosis of 'post-political' depends on a specifically ontologized view of 'the political' as a contestatory field of fundamental antagonisms. This view has become increasingly visible in geography and related spatial disciplines (e.g. Hillier 2009, Swyngedouw 2009), as part of a broader emphasis on the disorderly dimensions of democratic politics (Staeheli 2010). In these fields, post-Marxist ontologies of 'the political' have become increasingly prominent in the reception of political theory (e.g. Dewsbury 2007, Dikeç 2007, Ettlinger 2007, Gibson-Graham 2006, Purcell 2007).

One of the recurrent features of ontologies of 'the political' is an ambivalence concerning the relationship between 'the political' and democracy. Sometimes, democracy is understood as a specific expression of 'the political'; but often the content (democracy) and the form (the political) are conflated, so that the two terms are merged together. In post-Marxist political ontologies, given the emphasis on 'the political' as a field of conflict and struggle, this slippage leads to radical democracy being defined as primarily a regime of action concerned with contestation. The prevalent strains of radical democratic theory in human geography have drawn on post-structuralist understandings of hegemonic politics, autonomous movements, and democracy-to-come, informed by ontologies of antagonism, abundance, and lack (see Tonder and Thomassen 2005). These approaches reserve the normative energies of democratic politics for contesting identities, disrupting hegemonies, and inventing new practices. In their different varieties, post-structuralist versions of radical democracy share a deep wariness of drawing too close to issues of institutional design or programmatic reflection (see Kioupliolis 2010). In short, the ontologization of 'the political' leads to democracy being understood in a rather one-sided way (see Karagiannis and Wagner 2008). Ontologies of the political abjure themselves from any serious consideration of the problem of how to translate diffuse opinions and

concerns into binding, legitimate decisions. At best they reduce this half of the democratic problematic to a scene for the wilful assertion of punctual, sovereign 'decision' in the enactment of hegemonic closure.

My argument here is that it is perfectly possible to acknowledge the centrality of conflict, antagonism, and contestation in political affairs without buying into the restrictive definition of 'the political' developed by post-structuralist theories of radical democracy and Post-Marxist ontologies of 'the political'. The claim that appreciation of contestation in political processes is the special preserve of poststructuralist and post-Marxist ontologies of 'the political' is belied by the centrality of this topic to critical theories of deliberative democracy. Critical theories of deliberative democracy need to be located squarely within what Pettit (1999, 185) calls "the contestatory turn in democratic theory" (e.g. Young 2000, Dryzek 2000, Pettit 1997). My starting premise is that democracy is best thought of as a complex form containing both agonistic and deliberative moments, belying the all-or-nothing interpretation provided by ontologies of 'the political', and restoring to view the sense that democracy has (at least) two dimensions, or twin-tracks, in Habermas's terms (e.g. Karagiannis and Wagner 2005, 2008; Dryzek 2005, Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006, Pettit 2004, Schaap 2006). In Critical Theory approaches to democratic theory, contestation is understood as one amongst a variety of rationalities of action shaping political processes. I argue here that this treatment of contestation is related to a more *modest* framing of the relation between politics and space than is found in other variants of radical democratic thought.

The next section focuses on how ontological conceptualisations of 'the political' have strong affinities with the ontological register of recent spatial theory. Section 3 relocates debates between deliberative and agonistic theorists of democracy away

from questions of ontology, centring them instead on different understandings of the meaning of 'normativity'. Section 4 and 5 will discuss how Critical Theory's placement of contestation in democratic politics has been developed in relation to specifically geographical problems of theorising the changing spatialities of democratic agency. I argue that by focussing on contestation as one rationality which guides worldly political action, this tradition of thought informs a phenomenological approach to understanding the situations out of which democratic energies emerge. I show that this Critical Theory tradition underwrites the distinctively 'topological' sense of political space which follows from thinking of democratic political action as emerging from worldly situations of injustice. Geographers might do well to take more notice of the potential for this tradition of thought to inform investigation of the ordinary dynamics and disappointments of democratization. At the same time, by reading this tradition with an eye to its deployment of spatial concepts, I also suggest that political theorists might do well to avoid lapsing into 'methodological globalism'.

2). Against ontology

The post-Marxist ontologization of 'the political' stands in a longer tradition of political interpretations of Heidegger's analysis of ontological difference. In this tradition, Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological is mapped onto a distinction between politics and 'the political' (Barnett 2004a). The critical authority of ontologies of 'the political' depends on two related conceptual moves. First, they consistently misconstrue ontological difference as a difference between different 'levels' of existence in which the ontological level is given an ill-defined priority. Second, this splitting into two levels is then presented as the very form of politicization itself, so that the mundane affairs of worldly politics are always open to

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a style of critique in which these affairs are interpreted as *symptoms*: a symptom of the covering over of genuinely political energies; a symptom of the stabilization of the properly contingent forces; or a symptom of the perversion of authentically robust virtues of political contestation. From this perspective, 'democracy' comes to serve as the utopian name for a style of politics in which the authentically disruptive energies of 'the political' would be allowed to play themselves out agonistically.

For four decades now, spatial theorists have asserted their place in the social sciences and humanities by making strong claims about the ontological significance of their conceptualisations of space and place. The strongest claim has been that other strands of social science are either guilty of being 'aspatial' or hold to overly simplistic views of space and spatiality. The 'political' significance of the 'spatial turn' is presented as lying in providing critical tools that help to 'de-naturalize' views of space that are taken to have political effects by virtue of their purely formal qualities – as bounded, territorialized, stable, or topographical (e.g. Spaces of Democracy 2009, Sparke 2005). Critical spatial theory has developed an elective affinity with styles of political theory that have also 'gone ontological', particularly those which share the assumption that political criticism is best served by working up refined ontologies of contingency, relationality, and vitality. These ontologies are deployed to unmask the naturalized, essentialised, exclusionary foundations of hegemonic practices as merely contingent, and therefore open to being reconstructed, re-made, or re-ordered all over again. In this shared genre of theory, it turns out that 'proper' politics is all about having the better ontology.

The accusation of 'post-political' levelled by post-Marxist theorists is, in fact, just one example of a more general worry that the precious force of 'politics' is always in danger of being lost or forgotten. This worry is evident in the work of Hannah Arendt

(1958), or more prosaically, that of Bernard Crick (1962); it informs the agonistic pluralism of writers such as Connolly (1991), Honig (1995), and Tully (2008a), as well as Bellamy's (1999) post-liberal vision of the politics of compromise. And the idea of the political as a fragile, vulnerable aspect of human relations, provides the constant theme of Sheldon Wolin's sense of democracy as a properly 'fugitive' energy increasingly at risk from being incorporated into managed, commodified systems of administration and bureaucracy (Wolin 1994, 2008). All of these thinkers locate the true source of 'politics' as arising from the fact of pluralism, a view shared by 'liberals' of various stripes. Just *what sort of fact* pluralism is understood to be is actually rather varied. Most often it is thought of in terms of disputes over fundamental values. But amongst this range of thinkers, pluralism is never elevated into anything as grand as an 'ontological' level, nor reduced to anything as restrictive as merely an expression of deeper antagonism. Rather, 'the political' emerges from this varied field as the name for the activity of learning to live together by addressing shared matters of common concern; and conflict and disagreement are understood as integral aspects of this type of activity.

In contrast to these traditions, post-Marxist ontologies of 'the political' make politics derivative of some more fundamental ontological energy. Under the weight of emergentist understandings of immanence or of purely strategic understandings of political identification, they squeeze from view any sense of politics as a type of *action* (see Freeden 2005). Rather than developing more and more elaborate *ontologies* of the political, I want to develop an argument for focussing attention on the *phenomenologies* of political action. In making this distinction, I am following Rosanvallon's (2006, 51-52) description of distinctive conceptualization of the political that is inaugurated by Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort through their

critiques of totalitarianism. For this line of thought on the meaning of 'the political', politics is understood as a form of activity concerned with addressing problems of living together in a shared world of plurality and difference. The idea that 'the political' refers to the problematic of coexistence and association, and that the space of this sharing is constituted by active agents, is central to Arendt's understanding of politics. From her perspective, any account of the political which has no space for this sort of action would itself be open to the charge of being 'unpolitical' (see Arendt 2005, 93-99). This strand of thought is concerned with the phenomenologies of politics in so far as it focuses in on the processes and activities by which shared worlds of association and co-existence are constituted. This is expressed in Arendt in terms of the idea of 'the space of appearance' (1958, 186-190). In Lefort, combining both Arendt and Merleu-Ponty, it is expressed in terms of the shaping and forging of meaning (Lefort 1986).

Here, then, we have a sense of the relationship between politics and space that is not restricted to relations of disruption and contingency, but is concerned with the spaces which enact and mediate the self-representation of common, shared worlds to affected parties. From this perspective, political space is inherently theatrical: "political activity itself is a form of staging, insofar as it is an aspect of society's self-representation. It requires a public space in which exchanges and confrontation can take place" (Rosanvallon 2008, 237). On this understanding of the phenomenology of political activity, the fundamental questions about space and spatiality are not concerned with specifying the correct ontology in order to disrupt settled territorializations and boundaries. They are concerned with understanding the variable constitution of the spaces for the sort of communicative activity in and through which 'the political' is made available as a field of activity (see Howell 1992). In order to

bring this alternative sense of 'the political' and of its specific spatial concerns into view, we need to relocate debates between deliberative and agonistic theorists of democracy upon which critical spatial theory's engagement with political theory has depended. The terrain of these debates might be more fruitfully located not around questions of ontology, but instead around different and contested understandings of the meaning of 'normativity' in different intellectual traditions.

3). From ontologies of 'the political' to moral grammars of conflict

Ontologies of the political have an easy affinity with accounts of the social in which the rationalities of action, interaction and coordination are reduced to the dynamics of subjectification, governmentalized direction, or affective priming of actors (Barnett 2008a). This affinity between ontologies of the political and reductionist accounts of action is an index of a more fundamental fault-line running across the field of critical social theory regarding the possibilities of theorising transformative political agency. In the classical Marxist heritage, it is assumed that the proletariat is the bearer of universal values by virtue of its inherent interest in overthrowing capitalism. As Axel Honneth (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 239) observes, for as long as it could be assumed that the proletariat was the bearer of universalization, no further attention was required on which experiences and practices might guarantee this transcendence. Honneth suggests that there have been two different routes out of the 'production paradigm', in which possibilities for the emergence of transformative political agency are relocated. First, in what he calls 'normatively charged' accounts of the human psyche, drives, or the vitalism of the bodies, transformative agencies are relocated to deeper ontological levels of one sort or other. Second, emancipatory and transformative potentials are relocated to different sorts of action, other than labour,

the form of action privileged in Marxist social theory – here, the main reference point is Jürgen Habermas' reconstruction of critical social theory around an action-theoretic model of communicatively mediated interaction.

Honneth's genealogy of critical social theory's relocation of its' own normative force helps to clarify where the really significant difference between 'agonistic' and 'deliberative' approaches to democratic theory might actually lie. If critical social theory seeks to find, as Nancy Fraser puts it, "a foothold in the social world that simultaneously points beyond it" (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 203), then the question dividing these strands of critical social theory is over the type of foothold required: whether finding common cause with subaltern struggles of the moment will do, or whether a stronger, more justifiable account of why some struggles might be considered more or less emancipatory than others is required (see Anderson 2005, Cooke 2006). Even this might be overstating the difference, since both styles of thought are concerned with providing some general account of the sources out of which subversive and transformative energies emerge. What a reconstruction of the normative commitments of communicative action does in Habermas's work (and in more or less diluted or purified form for other deliberative theorists), ontologies of lack, absence, the vitalism of life, antagonism, or even Truth do for different versions of poststructuralism: they provide, if not the foundations, then at least the putative reasons for believing that current harms can and might be challenged, transformed and overcome.

In short, the key differences between ontologies of 'the political' and more deliberative styles of political theory are better located in different visions of norms and normativity. There are two aspects to this. First, there is a difference over the degree to which the critical dimensions of social thought require some sort of

normative justification. Thinkers working in a vein of Critical Theory tend to think that they do, but they differ on what form, and what strength, this normative justification can and should take. Poststructuralist ontologies tend to presume that this sort of normative justification is not necessary, or at least not a task to which theoretical reason is equal. Second, these approaches differ over how they understand the force of norms to operate in practice. Here, Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005, xxiv-xxv) discussion of two distinctive metaphysics of the social world that underwrite contemporary critical social theory augments Honneth's narrative. In one approach, the focus is on diverse relations of force that shape institutions and practices. From this perspective, the social is understood to exist on a single plane of immanence, which means that for this style of theory "the question as to why human beings in society seem to attach so much importance to normativity if, in fact, it plays no role in determining their actions, has remained unresolved, no satisfactory response being offered" (ibid., xxiv). The elision of the question of why things matter to people in this first style of political theory squeezes normativity out of the social and political fields entirely. This style of theory locates the animating force of transformative politics in dynamic ontologies of immanence. But this ontologization of politics is really an evasion, a failure to think through the conditions of politics as an ordinary form of action once belief in a privileged agent of universalization (the proletariat) has become untenable (see Critchley 2007, 103-105, Laclau 2001). By contrast, the second approach identified by Boltanski and Chiapello, again associated with Habermas, but also with other action-theorists such as Paul Ricouer, does integrate the determinative role of normative practices into its view of the social field. This second approach has a two-tier view of the social world: "the first of which is occupied by singular entities - in particular, people - while the second is composed of principles of

parity that make it possible to compare singular entities, to constitute them as categories or classes, and to make normative judgements about the relations between them" (ibid., xxiv-xxv). The 'two-tier' view of the world provides an analytical opening to understanding the ordinary forms of action through which politics is enacted around matters of shared concern, rather than being understood as merely an expression of subterranean ontological energies.

The distinctions that Honneth as well as Boltanski and Chiapello sketch capture an important cleavage in contemporary social theory around the understanding of normative practices. Of the two trajectories of critical social theory above, it should be said that critical human geography has cleaved more closely to the 'immanentist' tradition, institutionalized in the Anglo-American academy as 'French Theory' (Cusset 2008). One reason for this is because the ontologized register of this tradition lends itself to the existing conventions of inventing alternative spatial ontologies. The 'action-theoretic' strand (see Dosse 1999, Joas and Knöbl. 2009) has played a subordinate role in Anglo-American geography's recent theoretical adventures. My argument here is that conceptualisations of the relationship between politics and space might be reconfigured in a more modest way if the insights of this latter strand of thought were once again brought more clearly into view.

In order to elaborate on the argument that a focus on action-theoretic approaches to social theory might assist in developing an understanding of the phenomenologies of political action, it is useful to start by focussing on Axel Honneth's reconstruction of the normative foundations of Critical Theory. Honneth's project is just one example of various strands of contemporary critical social theory which seek to integrate aspects of the two post-Marxist trajectories discussed above. A defining feature of these integrative projects is the foregrounding of issues of normativity in social

science, in ways which situate conflict as arising from the confrontation and coordination of different rationalities of action. Honneth synthesizes the emphasis on affective dimensions of subjectivity developed by theorists of immanence with the Habermasian emphasis on the rationalization of different forms of action. What Honneth retains from Habermas is the emphasis on the normative expectations built into the relationships through which social life is coordinated. Where he departs from Habermas is in arguing that we should not equate "the normative potential of social interaction with the linguistic conditions of reaching understanding free from domination" (Honneth 2007, 70). He re-centres the normative core of critical social theory on the dynamics of *recognition*, and in so doing restores the dynamics of conflict and contestation to the centre of a critical theory of deliberative democracy (cf. McNay 2007).

The concept of recognition which Honneth develops is rooted in the history of class analysis. The model which Honneth draws on is Hegel's account of labour as the scene for recognition and misrecognition, further developed by Marx and the first generation Frankfurt School. He pluralizes the struggle for recognition beyond the social relations of work and labour to which it has been classically contained by Marxist theory, to include multiple forms of disrespect. Honneth argues that the potential sources of transformative political agency are found in the experience of humiliation and disrespect. There is, Honneth argues, "a core of expectations of recognition that all subjects bring to social interaction" (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 247). Social conflict emerges when these expectations are systematically flouted. Crucially, Honneth affirms that recognition has affective, embodied aspects which the Habermasian emphasis on the cognitive dimensions of communication fails to credit.

Honneth's programme therefore re-centres critical social theory on understanding "the moral feelings that accompany the experience of disrespect - shame, anger, or indignation" (Honneth 2007, 73). His aim is nothing short of producing the philosophical grounds for a phenomenology of multiple sources of harm out of which struggles against injustice emerge, building on Barrington Moore's earlier argument that transformative political action emerges against a background of broadly shared 'senses of injustice' (see Moore 1978). The central claim of Honneth's approach is that felt experiences of disrespect draw on "intuitive notions of justice violated" (Honneth 2007, 11), and it this relationship which animates transformative political action.

Honneth (1995, 160-170) sets out to reconstruct what he calls 'the moral grammar' of social conflicts. He argues that there are three analytically distinct dimensions of recognition which are essential to identity-formation: emotional concerns, such as love or friendship; rights-based concerns, associated with membership in a social body as an accountable self; and social esteem, focussing on recognition of individual achievements and abilities. This framework informs a diagnosis of the multiple social pathologies generated by contemporary capitalist modernity, which revolve around multiple forms of disrespect: violations of the body, denials of rights, and denigrations of ways of life (Honneth 1995, 131-139; Hartmann and Honneth 2006; Fraser and Honneth 2003). Crucially for the argument being developed here, while Honneth emphases the affective dimensions of recognition and disrespect, this analysis does not remain on a single plane of immanence. He insists that the affective dimensions of disrespect have 'cognitive potential': "the injustice of disrespect does not inevitably *have to* reveal itself but merely *can*" (2005, 138). Honneth's argument is that analysis

of political agency needs to be attentive to the role of political movements in articulating the moral experiences which animate social conflicts (cf. Joas 2002).

Honneth's insistence on thinking in terms of the relationships between *experiences* of harm and injustice and their *articulation* as political action is exemplary of the kind of phenomenological understanding of 'the political' I am recommending here. It places the analytical emphasis on understanding the ways in which shared worlds of association are constituted through contestatory action which seeks redress against various felt senses of injustice. In the next two sections, I want to elaborate on how other theorists working the same Habermasian vein of thought also help open up the investigation of the ways in which the 'cognitive potentials' of experiences of injustice are politically articulated in and through the complex spatialities of contesatory political action. By looking at debates about transnational democracy in which critical theorists of deliberative democracy have explicitly addressed the changing geographies of 'the political', I want to draw into focus the way in which a phenomenological understanding of 'the political' is elaborated through the reconfiguration of the concept of 'all affected interests' as a worldly register of contentious claims-making.

4). Extending democratic agency

The central problem of democratic theory from a critical-theoretic perspective is how to render the exercise of coercion legitimate and rational, a concern which acknowledges the necessarily double-sided quality of democracy as a form of *rule*. In the Critical Theory tradition of conceptualising radical democracy, it is presumed that it is possible to acknowledge the ineradicability of 'power' in politics while also distinguishing 'the use of force by a powerful actor' from 'the legitimate use of

force': "Many doubt that there is such a distinction, but they cannot be democrats" (Young 2005, 498; see also Barnett 2009). The following section focuses on the way in which recent theories of transnational democratic politics bring into view a specific value, that of non-domination, as the primary reference around which this distinction might be established.

The analysis of the re-spatialization of domination under 'globalization' in contemporary Critical Theory is connected to an explicitly geographical register of analysis, focussed on a key principle of democratic inclusion, the idea of 'all affected interests'. The idea that that "what affects all must be agreed to by all" is a basic rule of democratic legitimacy from which contemporary democratic theories of various stripes – Rawlsian, Habermasian, ecological – depart in different ways (Tully 2008b, 74). In critical theories of deliberative democracy, the "all affected interest" principle of democratic participation is translated, via Habermas's discourse ethics and theory of communicative action, into a norm of inclusive communicative action. On this understanding, normatively acceptable, legitimate decisions are those which meet with the agreement of all affected parties who have the opportunity of subjecting them to critical debate and discussion (Habermas 1996, 107). The immediate implication of this 'desubstantialization' of the concept of popular sovereignty into 'subjectless flows of communication' (see Barnett 2004b) seems to be the extension of the spatial scope over which norms of democratic universalism should be applied. However, as this implication is worked out in various post-Habermasian accounts of transnational democracy, we can identify a morphing of the spatial imaginaries through which issues of democratic agency are imagined. What emerges is a more nuanced sense of the geographies of democratic action as both emplaced and extensive.

The break-out of geographical concerns in debates on global justice, cosmopolitanism, and transnational democracy can be thought of a response by political theorists and political philosophers to the acknowledgement of their own 'methodological nationalism' (e.g. Brock 2009, Gould 2004, Held 2005, Pogge 2001). The spatial grammar in and through which issues of accountability, citizenship, membership, participation are now discussed is the medium for a recurrent methodological operation: 'globalization' has become the preconstructed 'real-world' event which provokes what Cohen (1999) refers to as the *disaggregation* of the different normative values covered by the term democracy: values such as autonomy, freedom, legitimacy, solidarity, and sovereignty. If we follow this line of normative Critical Theory through this path of analytical disaggregation, we might find resources for a geographically sensitive but normatively robust investigation of the ways in which different components of democratic agency are contingently assembled in relation to situated contexts of domination and injustice, which generate contentious politics of variable spatial extension and reach. In order to develop this argument, I want to focus in this Section on the work of critical theorists of deliberative democracy for whom the key agents of democratization are movements, advocacy coalitions and NGOs (see Cochran 2002, Scheuerman 2006).

In elaborating the geographical potential of this strand of democratic theory, it is useful to start with John Dryzek's account of transnational democracy. In Dryzek's view, it is the oppositional role of civil society and the public sphere that are understood to be the primary sources of 'democratic critique and renewal' (see Dryzek 1996). This argument follows from a social-theoretical claim that the international system is integrated by particular rationalities of action: global political processes are understood to be effectively steered by "global constellations of

discourses" (Dryzek 2006, 93; see also Berejikian and Dryzek 2000). Dryzek's claim about the communicative, reflexive coordination of international interactions informs the argument that the international system is steered by a variety of discourses with causal power, including discourses of human rights, market liberalism, sustainable development, and the rules of war. An important aspect of this argument is the claim that discourses "cannot be governed, but they can be engaged" (Dryzek 2006, 93). It is this claim about the type of action through which global processes are integrated, and the types of interventions which such processes are therefore most susceptible to, which underwrites Dryzek's argument that the dynamics of transnational democratization lie in the contestatory practices of social movements, rather than in the search for new institutional configurations. In short, if discourses are the effective mediums of international politics, the relevant agents of democratization are those actors with the capacity to engage in certain sorts of discursive contestation.

Dryzek presents a strongly contestatory vision of transnational democracy, one which is rooted in the reconceptualization of deliberative democracy as *discursive* democracy (see Dryzek 2000, Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). Nancy Fraser's recent work on transnational politics also invests heavily in an understanding of the democratizating potential of communicative action that builds critically on Habermasian themes. But in contrast to Dryzek's account of transnational democratization, Fraser is much more concerned with thinking through the problem of the legitimacy of transnational public action, and also puts greater emphasis on the development of new institutional configurations. Fraser focuses on the democratic potential of various 'post-Westphalian' configurations of power, solidarity, and organization. Fraser (1997, Fraser and Honneth 2003) has previously argued that there are two axes of injustice, one economic, one cultural: the *politics of redistribution* is

analytically distinct from, but politically indissoluble from, the *politics of recognition*. More recently, Fraser (2008) has added a third strand to her understanding of democratic justice, an explicitly 'political' strand focused on the *politics of representation* which is implicated in both the politics of redistribution and recognition. It is with the emergence in Fraser's work of this third strand of justice that the geographies of justice become a direct concern. Globalization and the associated decline of the 'Westphalian-Keynsian' order are, for Fraser, the occasions which bring into view the central analytical and normative problem of *framing*: the question of what jurisdiction and what criteria are appropriate ones through which claims of justice should be processed. These questions are classically conceptualised within the imaginary of the nation-state. It has been citizens of nation-states who are understood to be the subjects of social justice claims, and the agencies of the nation-state that are the addressees of such claims. What is most distinctive about Fraser's contribution to debates about the 'post-national constellation' (Habermas 2001) and 'global justice' (Pogge 2001) is that she identifies social movements as key agents in problematizing the exclusively national-territorial framings of questions of justice. Rather than thinking of globalization as an exogenous process to which adjustments have to be made, Fraser argues that contemporary global justice activism articulates a 'new grammar of claims-making' which presents national-territorial framings of justice as themselves a source of injustice. They do so by deploying the intuitive sense of 'all affected interests' to assert that national-territorial framings of justice amount to a kind of gerrymandering, disempowering some affected parties from participation in decisions which impact upon them, by arbitrarily denying them recourse to avenues of accountability and redress.

Fraser uses the 'geographical fact' of globalization to specify fine-grained analytical distinctions in a key normative concept of contemporary democratic theory, the idea of the public sphere. The classical Habermasian notion of the public sphere combines two forms of rationality: an emphasis on the normative legitimacy of public opinion, and the political efficacy of public opinion. The distinction between *legitimacy* and *efficacy*, and the question of their relationship, forms the centrepiece of Fraser's conceptualisation of the democratic potential and limits of transnational public spheres. Fraser moves on to further disaggregate and reconstruct the relations between different component parts of these integral concepts of legitimacy and efficacy. There are two steps to this disaggregation. In a first move, Fraser argues that the principle of legitimacy in public sphere theory, which rests on the value of inclusiveness and participatory parity, conflates two analytically distinct issues: *membership* and *affectedness*. For Fraser (2008, 95), "globalization is driving a widening wedge between affectedness and political membership". In Fraser's view, in a globalized world, the principle of affectedness trumps membership as a normative criterion of democratic inclusion: "public opinion is legitimate if and only if it results from a communicative process in which all potentially affected can participate as peers, *regardless of political citizenship*" (Fraser 2008, 96).

We should pause here to consider the precise purchase of Fraser's argument. Fraser's expansive sense of affectedness would appear to run into the problem identified by Goodin (2007): the all affected principle risks incoherence in so far as it seems to require either an unlimited expansion of the franchise or an increasing restriction of the power of any *demos*. The apparent incoherence of the all affected principle arises in part by focusing on this idea as a criterion for establishing the contours of the *demos* in advance. One of the features of Fraser's account, in contrast,

is the reframing of normative reasoning in a more modest, less legislative fashion. From this perspective, the all affected principle emerges less as an abstract causal criterion, and is understood more like an animating political intuition, as a worldly normative force generating political claims and counter-claims. As already suggested, according to Fraser transnational activists themselves apply the all affected principle directly to the framing of justice claims "without going through the detour of state-territoriality" (2008, 25). They do so, she argues, by engaging in contestatory politics of representation which seeks to re-frame the geographical scales at which the subjects, objects and agents of justice-claims. In a sense, this argument about affectedness as a register of claims-making returns the all affected principle to the more pragmatic interpretation provided by Robert Dahl, for whom the affected interest is not likely to settle the question of the scope and identity of the demos, but it is "not such a bad principle to start with" (Dahl 1970, 66).

Having disaggregated the principle of legitimacy, in a second conceptual move, Fraser argues that globalization allows us to distinguish two aspects of the efficacy principle as well. In this case, the relevant analytical distinction is between the conditions of the *translation* of public opinion and the *capacity* to act on this direction. In classical public sphere theory, the medium for the translation of public opinion is binding laws. The capacity question has been assumed to be met by the administrative capacities of the sovereign state to transform public into effective public action. Fraser argues that the key challenge presented to democratic theory by globalization revolves around this second issue, that of capacity. She concludes that any legitimately generated transnational networks of public opinion must be matched by the creation of new 'transnational public powers' at the same scale, and with the *capacity* to act and which can be held accountable by those publics. Fraser's argument

is that transnational democracy necessarily requires more than just an expanded scope of contestation. It also requires new, transnational regulatory, policing, and legal powers as well as transnational mechanisms of accountability (Fraser 2008, 57).

Just at the point where the conceptual disaggregation of legitimacy and efficacy seems to offer a more plural image of the geographies through which public will might be legitimately formed, translated, and made effective, Fraser's recourse to a strong claim that the 'scales' of different aspects of justice must be aligned seems to close down this pluralism. The sense of balance that she installs through reference to 'scale' presumes in advance the sorts of spatio-temporal relations that might articulate legitimacy and efficacy. Part of the problem here is an empirical one. Fraser tends to underestimate the degree to which a great deal of transnational public mobilisation is both 'rooted' in national contexts and oriented towards addressing both nationally embedded as well as transnational agents (e.g. Appadurai 2001, Diani 2005, Sassen 2006, Stark et al 2006, Tarrow 2005). Fraser in fact acknowledges that the two aspects of democratic publics, legitimacy and efficacy, were never actually perfectly aligned, but argues that now the gap between them is becoming ever wider. But if public spheres have always been geographically messy assemblages of national and transnational legitimacy claims and effective agency, then there seems no reason to suppose that contemporary configurations of transnational politics might not in principle be able to approximate criteria of democratic legitimacy and/or efficacy without necessarily meeting Fraser's stringent interpretation.

Fraser's recourse to an imagery of scale, combining a sense of both geographical scope and balance, derives from her refusal to over-estimate the democratic potential of purely contestatory political action. Her approach to theorising global justice and transnational democracy insists that contestation must be linked conceptually and

practically to new styles of legitimate decision-making, an emphasis lacking in Dryzek's account. In a riposte to radical pluralist accounts which reserve 'democracy' for the energies of contestation, Fraser argues that democratic justice requires a consideration of both contestation and legitimate decision-making (Fraser 2008, 71-75). On its own, expanding the spatial scope of contestation is not an adequate way of addressing claims of injustice if, as Fraser (2008, 75) puts it, 'subaltern' actors are not enabled 'to speak in authoritative terms'. Crucially, for Fraser, binding decision-making is understood as a core aspect of the normative value of democratic justice, not a contingent suspension of democratic energy through a morally arbitrary act of hegemonic closure. The implication of this argument is that resolutions of what political theorists conceptualise as 'boundary problems' can be thought of as internal to democratic practice (see Hurley 1999), not the limit point at which democratic values are suspended. Like Benhabib's (2004) account of 'democratic iterations' though which equally compelling imperatives of universalist human rights and solidaristic membership can be negotiated, Fraser presents the relationships between these different aspects of democratic politics strung-out in a reflexive relationship of decision, challenge, revision, and learning (cf. Barnett 2005).

In the development of her account of the scales of justice, Fraser shifts from affirming that the inclusive principle of all-affected should be 'directly applied' towards a more refined principle of 'all-subjected' (Fraser 2008, 65-67). This idea refers to situations in which claims for inclusion are shaped by experiences of being subjected to the 'arbitrary interference' of others on the basis of interests or opinions not shared by those so affected. Implicit in the notion of all-subjected is a specific normative principle in which the primary value of democratic politics is understood to be non-domination, as distinct from the liberal principle of non-interference. It is this

emphasis on non-domination as the normative energy around which democratic political action forms that James Bohman makes explicit in his account of transnational democracy. For him, democratic political action is generated by shared experiences of domination, where domination refers not just to tyranny or arbitrary interference, but also specifically modern situations of 'rule by another' "who is able prescribe the terms of cooperation" (Bohman 2007, 9). Bohman's re-centring of affectedness around the articulation of experiences of domination illustrates what I am here referring to as a phenomenological account of how spaces of political community emerge through the contentious articulation of shared senses of harm and injustice.

The emphasis on situations of domination underwrites Bohman's analysis of the both the *problem* and the *promise* generated by globalization for democratic politics. In specifying the *problem* that globalization presents to received understandings of democratic political agency, Bohman (2007, 7) argues that globalization generates situations in which more and more people are exposed to domination: "the circumstances of global politics emerge through nonvoluntary inclusion in indefinite cooperative schemes" (ibid, 25). Although substantively his argument is similar to that made by Fraser, Bohman presents a more exact statement of the specifically anti-democratic harm generated by globalization. Crucial to Bohman's account is his reconceptualization of the all affected principle in terms of indeterminate effects. Bohman presents global activities not as primarily characterized by their spatial and temporal scope: "a normative theory is better served by seeing how global activities do not necessarily affect everyone, or even the majority of people, in the same way. Rather, the sort of social activities in question affect *indefinite* numbers of people" (ibid., 24). From Bohman's perspective, the indefinite character of consequences under globalization means that some actors are implicated in the activities of others

without having consented to their inclusion, but in such a way that affected actors cannot be easily individuated. This means the conditions for transnational democratic agency cannot be deduced monologically or causally, simply by discerning a kind of 'global' basic structure based on freely entered into cooperative activity of the kind envisaged in post-Rawlsian accounts of global egalitarian justice.

If globalization expands and multiples situations of domination, then Bohman also finds in it the *promise* of expanded and reconfigured styles of democratic political agency. On this view, the globalization of communications offers opportunities for people to recognize each other and communicate as participants in various public spheres, and therefore presents expanded possibilities for challenging domination. Bohman's argument is that the democratic institutions required to secure non-domination require cannot just be scaled-up to create a global *demos*, but are already nascent in the communicative infrastructures of an already globalized world: "capacity to initiate deliberation about the terms of democracy itself is distributed among the *dêmoi* of various units and levels" (ibid., 2007, 174). The idea of multiple *dêmoi* is related to the concept of the *distributive public sphere*, which stands in contrast to the image of a unified public sphere encompassing all participants in democratic communication.

Bohman's image of decentred *dêmoi* and distributive publics lends itself to an interpretation in which public communication enacts a democratic function primarily through seeking to influence authority rather than exercise authority (see Cohen and Fung 2004, Fung 2010, Scheuermann 2006). Like Dryzek, Bohman's view reflects an understanding of democracy that leans towards the communicative criteria of democratic control, and away from the authoritative criteria of administrative efficacy that Fraser insists must also play an important role in a critical theory of democracy.

This emphasis is evident in the work of both Dryzek and Bohman in the presence of spatial figures modelled on open communicative practices, such as the network or distributed fields of public formation. But Bohman certainly has more to say than Dryzek about the question of how claims of democratic justice need to be converted into effective political power by being institutionally entrenched, and like Fraser he insists that there is more to democratic agency than just contestation (Bohman 2007, 43). For Bohman, the dynamic of democratization lies in the relationship between the generative freedom of initiation in deliberation, and democratic accountability of institutions. For both Bohman and for Fraser, this relationship is poorly acknowledged in a purely contestatory model of democratization.

5). Situating democratic agency

The previous section traced how the reformulation of the all affected principle in contemporary Critical Theories renders the spaces of democratic action contingent on patterns of inclusion and participation in effective communicative practices. There are two consequences of this conceptual translation. First, the translation of the all affected principle into a deliberative norm implies a methodological focus on the variable enactment of affectedness as a register of claims making, reflected in an emphasis on the dynamic role of contestation in democratization processes. However, there is a second consequence of the communicative translation of the all affected principle which requires some specification, because it interrupts the shared assumptions underwriting the analysis of transnational democracy surveyed in the previous section. One important social theory reference point for the 'deliberative' theories of transnational democracy discussed in the previous section is Ulrich Beck's account of globalization as a process of generalised reflexive modernization. The

implication of this account of the progressive individualization of identities and solidarities is that social integration is becoming less dependent on territorialization. Or, in short, 'methodological globalism' is the obvious end-point of a conflation of the critique of 'methodological nationalism' with the dismissal of the ongoing significance of nationalism as a force in the world and of the nation-state as an agent of social integration. In this section, I want to outline why the communicative translation of the all affected principle should not be interpreted as a warrant for a type of 'methodological globalism' that presumes that the emplaced contexts of social integration – cities, nations, places - have lost their significance as sites of democratizing energies.

Critical Theory itself provides grounds internal to this tradition of thought on deliberative democracy for reconsidering the intrinsically democratic value of less-extensive, more 'localised' spaces of action. These spaces might be understood as key locations for innovating practices which enable and enhance the sorts of expansive democratic imaginations that theorists of transnational democracy promote (see Bridge 2005, Entrikin 1999). As we have seen, in critical theories of deliberative democracy the translation of the all affected principle into a communicative register is crucial to a geographically expansive sense of the scope of political community. However, it should be acknowledged that in this tradition of Critical Theory, informed as it is by American pragmatism, affectedness is understood as a condition that combines situated responses with a movement towards universalism. Drawing in particular on the theory of self-formation developed by George Herbert Mead (Habermas 1993, 49-50), universalization is understood in relation to the practice of perspective-taking (see Benhabib 1992). The communicative translation of the all affected principle is further developed in post-Habermasian Critical Theory through

the downplaying of the strongly epistemological inflection of rationality that is retained by Habermas. This is supplemented by a more expansive sense of the communicative and affective conditions of experiences of harm, disrespect, and injustice (e.g. Dryzek 2000, Honneth 2007, Young 1993, 2001). Critical elaboration of theories of deliberative democracy into accounts of 'discursive democracy' (by Dryzek) or 'communicative democracy' (by Iris Marion Young) have emphasised the necessarily partial and situated qualities of communicative action through which political communities are formed. These elaborations support, I would contend, a distinctively 'topological' understanding of political space. This topological view emphasises that politics is a worldly practice that emerges from situated, emplaced contexts of action (Yeatman 2010). There are two aspects to the emphasis on situated contexts of action for understanding the generation of spatially extensive forms of political action. First, the communicative translation of the all affected principle implies a focus on the situations in and through which felt senses of 'justice violated' are generated, experienced and articulated as political claims. Second, understanding the 'reach' of these contestatory processes of claims-making also requires an analysis of the situated contexts in which responsive capacities to care at a distance, develop solidaristic identifications, and engage with strangers are worked up and sustained.

One shared assumption of both deliberative and agonistic approaches to political theory is that democratic contestation must be 'steered' by some apparatus of shared culture of commitments and values. These approaches differ in how to imagine this space, from more procedural versions such as overlapping consensus, to thicker 'cultural' visions of constitutional patriotism or affective ethos. But in both cases, what is being registered is a concern with thinking through how the necessarily partial conditions of socialization and social reproduction condition the more 'transcendent'

aspects of the cosmopolitan, transnational imagination. The emphasis on the situations that generate political action requires us to supplement the emphasis upon processes of spatial extension that underwrites the work of Fraser, Dryzek, and Bohman, with a consideration of contexts which shape the modes of transnational agency they focus upon. For example, Benhabib's (2004, 2006) account of the iterative reconstitution of cosmopolitan democratic legitimacy at the national scale, and the cautious defence of nationalism and nation-states provided by Craig Calhoun (2007), both emphasise that there are territorialized cultural formations which provide resources for solidarity and integration upon which the capacities to imaginatively identify with and practically engage in the politics of humanitarian concern, cosmopolitan rights, or global justice depend.

While the communicative translation of the all affected principle might in theory extend the scope of any potential demos beyond territorial limits, it therefore also presumes a heightened concern for the contexts of social integration through which communicative capacities are worked-up. Once we factor in the importance of what, after Latour (2004), we might call 'learning to be affected' in enabling spatially extensive political action, then understanding the situated contexts in which the 'cognitive potential' for intuitive senses of 'justice violated' to be recognised and acted upon becomes a crucial dimension of the analysis of the geographies of democratic politics. The point here is not simply to remind ourselves that a great deal of transnational politics is generated in and through urbanization processes, or that nation-states remain primary targets of transnational activism and advocacy. It is, rather, to argue that the methodological and conceptual resources of post-Habermasian theories of deliberative democracy might help in developing a geographically sensitive investigation of the ways in which different components of

democratic politics are assembled in practice (see Barnett 2008b, Boudreau 2007, Leitner et al 2008, Saward 2003), without assuming in advance that genuine democracy or proper politics has to take a particular spatial form.

Sections 4 and 5 have shown how writers working within a broad tradition of Critical Theory have developed accounts of contemporary democratization in which democratic political action is theorised as operating across borders not beyond them, in distributed publics, or in networks of discourse. Nor is it necessarily supposed that these practices do or should constitute a distinctively global scale of activity. This strand of work is characterised by an intuitively 'topological' sense of the geographies of democratic politics. In emphasising the centrality of a re-worked understanding of affected interest as the register in which the felt sense of justice violated is spatially articulated, these two sections have also shown how post-Habermasian political theorists envisage the spaces of democratic action to be contingent assemblages of different spatializations of contention and contestation. Any particular example of political action will combine and re-compose aspects of place-based identifications, territorially-focussed claims-making and fluidly networked mobilizations, as distinctive normative claims are enacted in response to situated experiences of harm, injustice, and inequality.

6). Conclusion: contestation is ordinary

I have argued here that ontological conceptualisations of 'the political' have only a remote engagement with empirical processes, which are too readily regarded as merely ontic residues of more fundamental structures of existence. The most serious deficit that arises from this ontologization of political theory is the difficulty that these styles of thought have in acknowledging the determinative role that practices of

justification have in coordinating and ordering social practice (e.g. Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, Forst 2011). Post-Habermasian critical theorists of democracy put contestation at the heart of their accounts of the changing geographies of democratic agency, but do so without recourse to strongly metaphysical claims about the meaning of politics or the political. The concern with contestation in this Critical Theory tradition derives from the avowedly normative concern with understanding the relationships between different rationalities of action: relationships between opinion-formation, deliberation, participation, representation, aggregation, accountability, will-formation, decision-making, and so on (see Barnett 2005).

The centrality of contestation to the political imagination of critical theories of deliberative democracy is exemplified by the ongoing project of conceptualizing transnational democracy. This emphasis on contestation is part of a broadly shared concern with bringing back into view both halves of the democratic problematic – the formation of a *demos* and the exercise of rule. I have argued that the fundamental division between deliberative and post-structuralist understandings of the place of agonism in democratic politics turns on the question of how to conceptualise the generation of institutionalised and authoritative outcomes in relation to widely shared problems requiring collective action. Post-structuralist approaches are wary of drawing too close to any consideration of this issue, which tends to be presented as an arena of wilful exertions of force and hegemonic closure against which the democratizing energy of contestation, disruption, and invention constantly works. Critical theorists of deliberative democracy develop an alternative placement of the democratizing energies of contestation. They do so not by seeking to contain this force, but by rearranging the spatial and temporal imaginaries through which the relationships between different aspects of democratic politics are conceptualized.

Theorists working in this tradition focus upon the reconfiguration of the spaces in which communities of affected interest emerge. I have sought to make explicit a distinctively topological imagination of political space in this tradition, one which combines an emphasis on the spatial extension of conditions of domination with a sense of the pluralised shapes and multiple situations in which experiences of domination are felt and the potentially disempowering effects of territorially-framed citizenship rights are recognised. The purpose in developing this argument has been to bring into focus how a strand of contemporary political theory which is often denigrated in debates in human geography can provide a normatively attuned supplement to geographically sensitive accounts of democratic politics as 'ethnographically emergent' (Paley 2002), that is, as shaped by path-dependent trajectories animated by particular struggles, injustices, and compromises (Barnett 2008b). Critical theories of deliberative democracy are more attuned to the worldliness of democratic values than is often acknowledged, and for this very reason contestation is not ontologized in this tradition of thought. Contestation is understood, instead, as one ordinary feature of political activity.

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