THE MULTITUDE AND HEGEMONY

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**ABSTRACT**

This project critically interrogates the conceptualisation of the multitude in the works of Hardt and Negri. It challenges two of their central claims. Firstly, their assertion that early modernity is best understood through the lens of the conceptual battle between Hobbes and Spinoza, in terms of the people versus the multitude. Secondly, their contention that the multitude is the primary agent of radical politics in the twenty-first century.

In terms of early modernity, this project examines the role the multitude plays in the thought of three republican theorists, Marsilius of Padua, Machiavelli and Spinoza. These theorists provide an equivocal account of the multitude, but also develop a coherent political project. This involves placing *articulation* – through consent, communication and the common notions – at the forefront of a new, mass, participatory and egalitarian politics. These three theorists do not oppose the people to the multitude, nor sovereignty to democracy, as Hardt and Negri claim. Rather, they develop a *mobile account of political sovereign power* founded on *articulation*.

Hardt and Negri identify the multitude as the emergent agent of a contemporary communist politics. This identification is based on their reading of Spinoza’s conceptualisation of the multitude, alongside broad historical developments in the second half of the twentieth century. They again oppose democracy to sovereignty, and express this opposition through hostility towards traditional organisational forms of the left, in particular, political parties and trade unions. Instead, they embrace the network as the appropriate form of organisation for the multitude.

As in my discussion of the early modern period, this project argues that contemporary politics cannot be understood through the sovereignty-democracy dichotomy theorised by Hardt and Negri. Instead I defend an account of hegemony, which draws on Laclau’s
conceptualisation of *articulation* in political struggles. This entails developing a *mobile account of sovereign power*, allied to the development of Gramsci’s account of hegemony. I demonstrate the conceptual links between Machiavelli’s account of *consent* and more recent accounts of hegemony. Machiavelli’s account of consent, in turn, is indebted to Marsilius’ earlier contribution to this debate, and serves as a guide for Spinoza’s subsequent development of a new form of politics based on communication and the common notions.
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I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

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INTRODUCTION

This project critically interrogates the Hardt and Negri account of ‘the multitude’ in two parts. Part I examines historical accounts of the multitude, considering the deployment of the term in three early modern republican theorists, Marsilius of Padua, Niccolò Machiavelli and Baruch Spinoza. It then turns to the contemporary account of the multitude provided by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in Part II.¹ The historical examination provides an account of the multitude that differs from that provided by Hardt and Negri in the early modern period. I contend that they have misread – or, better still, engaged in a partial reading of – the role that the multitude plays in early modern thought. Their reading is inspired by an inversion of Hobbes’ account of the multitude, rather than a careful reading of the role the multitude plays in the thought of Spinoza, whose political thought should be understood as a continuation of Marsilius and Machiavelli, rather than as a reaction to Hobbes. Their reading, inspired by an inversion of Hobbes, develops a simplified account of the multitude in early modern thought. This simplified historical misreading serves as the foundation for their contemporary political project. Their project insists that we should not only break with the key political subjects of modernity – the people and the proletariat – but also to abandon political subjects tout court. Political subjects, for Hardt and Negri, are closed, rigid and immobile entities. They contrast these qualities with the open, plural, inclusive, mobile characteristics that comprise the multitude. Their multitude, in other words, is always in excess of itself, and its activity constitutes an infinite process of political subjectivation. It is this continual process that Hardt and Negri conceive will initiate a thoroughgoing political transformation in the ‘time-to-come’.²

The partial reading that Hardt and Negri provide of the multitude at the outset of modernity centres around a series of
contrasting choices, which essentially amount to one and the same choice: Hobbes or Spinoza; transcendence or immanence; the people or the multitude; sovereignty or democracy. An exploration of the role of the multitude and other political subjects in Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza allows us to recognise that Hardt and Negri provide a partial reading that fits with their contemporary political intervention.

More importantly, what emerges from an examination of these three theorists’ political thought is a common concern with how to forward a republican politics. This is where the second term of the title of this project enters. This second term is hegemony. Hegemony is not a term that features in the language of any of these three theorists. Yet, key phrases emerge that are pivotal to their thought, and can be understood as a precursor to, or anticipation of, the concept of hegemony. These key phrases are consent in Marsilius, the contrast between consent and force in Machiavelli, and communication and the common notions in Spinoza. Hegemony is most closely associated with Antonio Gramsci. This theory will be briefly introduced later in this chapter, and expanded on in II.2.

The history of ‘the multitude’ predates the early modern period, yet it has received scant attention in commentaries. This project represents a step towards addressing this lack. The long history of the multitude can be traced back as far as ancient Egypt; it also features in classical Greek texts – Aristotle deployed the term, for example; it appears regularly in the bible. The focus of this project is on two periods: the transitional period between the medieval era and modernity; and the contemporary one. Within modernity, however, the multitude disappears from view – despite occasional vivid cameos, such as the “swinish multitude” of Edmund Burke – as the dominant political subjects of this period (the individual, the people and the proletariat) garnered increasing
attention. It is only in the contemporary era – or what in *Empire*, Hardt and Negri refer to as postmodernity – that the multitude returns to political discourses.

How, then, are we to understand the multitude? The four theorists under consideration – Marsilius, Machiavelli, Spinoza and the collaboration of Hardt and Negri – provide markedly different accounts. While Hardt and Negri are contemporary theorists, the first three provide accounts of politics in early modernity. A brief summary of these three theorists’ view of the multitude is as follows. Marsilius is a clear advocate of the multitude. Machiavelli envisions only a limited and occasional role for the multitude, and is an advocate of the people. Spinoza is a qualified advocate of the multitude, but not a celebrant as Hardt and Negri present him. All three, however, present an account of politics in which *articulation* – considered broadly – is central. Marsilius achieves this through the concept of consent, Machiavelli through the force-consent couplet, and Spinoza through the common notions and his philosophy of communication.

Linked in to both articulation and hegemony is the account of sovereignty that emerges from these three early modern republican theorists. I have termed this account a *mobile account of sovereign power*. This has been formulated to avoid and move beyond the problematic presentation of sovereignty provided by Hardt and Negri, which contrasts democracy with sovereignty (a contrast which operates in a similar manner to a number of others in their theory, including immanence-transcendence, multitude-people and Hobbes-Spinoza). The *mobile account of sovereign power* that features in Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza is an alternative account to the fixed account of sovereignty that Hobbes develops in the seventeenth century. It also differs from the vehement opposition to sovereignty that is characteristic of Hardt and Negri,
alongside their allegation that such an anti-sovereign approach can be found in both Machiavelli and Spinoza.

A mobile account of sovereign power, then, has been formulated to avoid and go beyond a simple opposition between anti-sovereignty and a rigid, fixed account of sovereignty. It is perhaps best expressed through the concept of the Citizen Subject. This figure is proposed by Étienne Balibar to theorise the transformation in political subjectivity that occurs with and after the French Revolution. It can also be read, to a certain extent, as the instantiation of the political subject that Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza earlier theorise. The Citizen Subject, for Balibar, is an antimony that is at one and the same time above the law and under the law. The Citizen Subject is above the law in the sense that (s)he makes new laws and has the capacity to legislate. The Citizen Subject is under the law in the sense that (s)he is subjected to it, a subject of it. As Balibar writes:

it is because of the dissymmetry that is introduced into the idea of sovereignty from the moment that it has devolved to the “citizens”: until then the idea of sovereignty had always been inseparable from a hierarchy, from an eminence; from this point forward the paradox of a sovereign equality, something radically new, must be thought (Balibar 1991: 45).

And again:

the citizen can be simultaneously considered as the constitutive element of the State and as the actor of a revolution. Not only the actor of a founding revolution, a tabula rasa whence a State emerges, but the actor of a permanent revolution (ibid.: 54).

The ‘constitutive element’ that is, at the same time, the ‘permanent’ actor that Balibar develops – along with related notions such as the Citizen Subject, and sovereign equality – portrays exactly the same duality as a mobile account of sovereign power expresses. To accept a mobile account of sovereign power is to accept the role
that forms of organisation play within politics. This contrasts with the hostility expressed towards forms of political organisation by Hardt and Negri. Against this hostile view, the mobile account of sovereign power that features in Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza takes the question of political organisation seriously. The Citizen Subject identified by Balibar, and the mobile account of sovereign power, can be found in all three of these theorists. In Marsilius, it subsists in the separation of powers between the pars principans (executive) and the legislator humanus (legislature), and the ultimate subordination of the former to the latter. In Machiavelli, it can be found in the movement of sovereignty from the prince to the people – what I term the ‘becoming-people of the prince’ and the ‘becoming-prince of the people’ – and its internal mobility thereafter. In Spinoza, it involves the democratic movement within sovereignty. This democratisation is tied in with the expansion of the common notions and the realm of communication.

i. Political subjects, subjectivation and the multitude

In recent decades, the question of political subjects has attracted growing attention. Two quotations from Metapolitics by Alain Badiou indicate the importance of this question for contemporary political theory. The first is contained in the essay ‘Truths and Justice’, and reads:

the category of justice designates the contemporary figure of a political subject... This political subject has gone under various names. He used to be referred to as a ‘citizen’... in the sense of the Jacobin of 1793. He used to be called ‘professional revolutionary’. He used to be called ‘grassroots militant’. We seem to be living in a time when his name is suspended, a time when we must find a new name for him (Badiou 2005: 102, emphasis added).

The next is from the second of two essays that considers the work of Jacques Rancière. This examines the “essential motifs” of
Rancière’s thought developed in Disagreement. The fourth ‘motif’ is:

A theory of names. Politics presupposes the sudden appearance of a name, in which case the nothing is counted as a gap [écart] between the whole and itself. This is the case with the name ‘proletarian’. The downfall of a name, as with the political significance of the name ‘worker’ nowadays, amounts to a termination of the politics bound to this name. Rancière will say that our time is nameless. In this respect the community as a whole declares itself effectively total or without remainder, which means that it declares itself without politics (ibid.: 115).

The names of three political subjects have dominated modernity: the people, the individual and the proletariat (or working-class). Hobbes is associated with the first two, but particularly the people; Locke and later liberal thinkers with the individual; and Marx with the proletariat. As Badiou and Rancière note, it appears that all three of these political subjects are in crisis. The ‘individual’ is in crisis because it is a thoroughly anti-social conception, one that appears increasingly dangerous in a world of finite resources and climate change on the one hand, and a world population moving beyond seven billion that is subjected to continual invocations to increase consumption, on the other hand. The ‘people’ is in crisis because its usage increased alongside, and is associated with, the nation state, which itself is being transformed by many of the processes that go under the banner of globalisation. The ‘proletariat’ is in crisis because it was formulated in a period that stressed industry and production, whereas the current economic paradigm is characterised by communication, circulation and distribution.

It is not only that these three modern political subjects are in crisis, but a broader theoretical threat has been posed to the concept of the subject itself. Yet, while ‘the death of the subject’ has been announced in post-structuralist and other strains of
thought, the question of the subject has, if anything, intensified. As Caroline Williams notes, ‘the death of the subject’ has been accompanied by ‘the persistence of the subject’; her response to this antinomy is to investigate ‘subjectivity without the subject’. Hardt and Negri provide a different approach to this crisis. They have excavated the concept of the multitude from Spinoza and the early modern period, and announced its pertinence to the contemporary political scene. Their account of the multitude is a recognition of this crisis, while at the same time an attempt to go beyond the notion of the modern political subject. Each of the dominant political subjects of modernity – the people, the individual and the proletariat – were readily identifiable at certain locations of the social. The Hardt and Negri account of the multitude, by contrast, seeks to avoid such ready identification. Identification, for them, amounts to the operation of closure, to the domestication of a political subject. As infinite, as excessive of itself, the multitude resists such closure and domestication. It is a (non-)subject that exceeds itself and, as such, it is an open process of subjectivation. The multitude, for Hardt and Negri, announces not only the death of the political subjects of modernity, but the end of political subjects *tout court*, and the emergence of this continual, open process of subjectivation. The multitude in Hardt and Negri, then, resists definition as it continues to be redefined – they continually supplement their conceptualisation of the multitude in response to its developing activity, it constantly displaces and redefines itself.

As a consequence of this displacement and redefinition, it is perhaps best to illustrate the multitude mathematically: the multitude is infinite. Hardt and Negri contrast the infinity of the multitude with the One of the people. This One of the people derives from Hobbes’ account in which the multitude is the political subject of the state of nature, and the people is the political subject of civil society and the Leviathan. The political body of the Leviathan
– within which the people exists – has one will, one law and effectively moves in one direction as a consequence of this singular will and law, which derives from the sovereign. This enables the people to be measured, quantified and, most importantly, demarcated – it is a closed and exclusive political entity. The infinity of the multitude is defined by the absence of a singular law and will, and by its openness and inclusivity. As such it is immeasurable and unquantifiable.

The infinity of the multitude can also be contrasted with the duality – or the Two – of class. Many accounts of class isolate more than two classes, but never tend to go too far beyond a handful, as this makes the classificatory system less comprehensible. The potency of Marx’s account of class, by contrast, is precisely in its duality, in the fact that it pits two classes that are directly opposed to one another. It is this opposition – the duel of the dual – that ultimately defines considerations of class. The infinity of the multitude as proposed by Hardt and Negri, then, is perhaps the best starting-point to understand the multitude, which contrasts with the One of the people and the Two of class.

Returning to the question of the people in modernity, a few words on another early modern philosopher of the multitude, the aforementioned Thomas Hobbes. A direct consideration of Hobbes is absent from this project, as its focus is restricted to republican political thought in the early modern period. Yet, despite this direct absence, Hobbes’ presence haunts much of this project. This is because Hobbes, in turn, exerts enormous influence over the political project of Hardt and Negri. I argue, in 1.3 for instance, that these contemporary theorists are wrong in their presentation of Spinoza’s multitude, and that their presentation is informed more by Hobbes than by Spinoza. They present Spinoza’s multitude as an inversion of Hobbes’ people, whereas I argue that Spinoza’s multitude is better understood as both a subversion of Hobbes, and
as a continuation of the *mobile account of sovereign power* as developed by both Marsilius and Machiavelli. In II.1, we find the intervention by Hardt and Negri in the contemporary political scene. This intervention proposes the contemporary multitude on the basis of their reading of Hobbes and Spinoza, and they depict its political project as precisely an attempt to reverse the direction of travel initiated earlier by Hobbes.

For Hobbes, one will, one law invested in the sovereign provides the people with security and direction, which, in turn, supplies the conditions in which they can safely undergo their daily activities and flourish. This entails the formation of a political body, in which functions are spread among the body politic and between the people, as the frontispiece of *Leviathan* so amply illustrates. The alternative to the people, security, the body politic, sovereignty and the leviathan, for Hobbes, is stark. It is a scenario in which there is neither law nor will providing direction – or, in the inversion of Hardt and Negri, an infinity of wills and laws. This is what Hobbes terms the state of nature, in which the multitude is the political subject, and where:

\[
\text{there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death (Hobbes 1996: XIII.9, 84).}
\]

He continues to comment that within such conditions, “the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (ibid.). In sum, a politics of the multitude as proposed by Hardt and Negri is, for Hobbes, the most calamitous and preposterous proposal that could be uttered.
The stark dichotomy that Hobbes proposes between the state of nature and civil society, however, is open to challenge. For the energy of the multitude and the state of nature is not merely nullified with the shift to civil society; it is transferred to, and invested in, the sovereign. The multitude thereby persists within the sovereign (or the people). It is not fully expunged from the Leviathan, as the stark dichotomy affirms to be the case. The One of the Leviathan or the One of the people – the sovereign shorn of the energy, the wild excess that the multitude provides it with – would amount to not the dawn of politics proper but, rather, its eclipse. It would initiate the eternal iteration of the same or, to put this slightly differently, an immobilised politics in which the sovereign is neutered. Politics would amount to Order alone. It is only the wild excess of the multitude invested in the sovereign that provides mobility, that is, enables the pursuit of politics. Hobbes, in other words, is unable to fully extinguish the multitude. In their inversion of Hobbes, Hardt and Negri remain trapped within his theoretical apparatus. Their account of the multitude is merely the other side of the same problem.

Hardt and Negri express this inversion of Hobbes through hostility towards sovereign power and forms of political organisation; it also disables any account of articulation in politics. This disablement limits their ability to engage in the possibility of an alternative politics: they present an impossible politics. Political possibility involves establishing the alternative routes that are available, the distance that can be travelled down these various routes over different time-scales, and how to mobilise opinion to support the route of travel. Two secondary quotations that appear in *Debating Empire* illustrate concerns over the Hardt and Negri consideration of political possibility perfectly. The first is the epigraph to the essay written by Timothy Brennan, who selects the following passage from Raymond Williams:
Possibility, seriously considered... is not what with luck might happen. It is what we can believe in enough to want, and then, by active wanting, make possible... [A]fter defeats and failures, and both within and after certain profound disillusions, it is not recovery or return but direct practical possibility... Possibility as a different order, which no longer from simple assumptions, or from known discontents and negations, but on our own responsibility, in an actual world, we must prove (Brennan 2003: 97).

The second quotation is by Daniel Bensaïd, and appears in Alex Callinicos’ article. It reads:

The art of decision, of the right moment, of the alternatives open to hope, is a strategic art of the possible. Not the dream of an abstract possibility, where everything that isn’t impossible will be possible, but the art of a possibility determined by the concrete situation: each situation being singular, the instant of the decision is always relative to this situation, adjusted to the goal to be achieved (Callinicos 2003: 138).

The possibility that these two quotations refer to can only become actualised through a long, slow conflictual process, wherein a series of demands coalesce within an equivalential chain which, in turn, undergoes a lengthy process of articulation and rearticulation. The Hardt and Negri rejection of articulation and hegemony as crucial categories of politics, coupled with their hostility to political forms of organisation, increasingly detaches them and their account of the multitude from political possibility.

The theory of hegemony was developed by Gramsci in order to express the world-view that predominates during a particular moment in history. Since his death, Gramsci’s theory has loomed large over Italian politics, and much of Negri’s political theory and practice has been conducted against the pervasive influence of Gramsci on the Italian left, and on the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in particular. In this opposition, Negri has ignored Gramsci’s crucial insight that contemporary politics should be conceptualised through an account of hegemony.
There are two implications for their project in failing to take the theory of hegemony seriously. The first is the role that forms of organisation play within politics, and the second is a ‘realistic’ assessment of the possibilities for an alternative politics. A politics that is conceptualised through an account of hegemony recognises the necessity of political forms of organisation, while refusing to fetishise them. It also recognises the similarly crucial role played by less formal and more local – we might say, cultural – organisations, alongside quotidian activity. These all combine in the process of the construction of a hegemony, or – what is more important for the possibility of an alternative politics – the construction of an alternative or counter-hegemony. Because such a politics engages in – and with – the dominant world-view, it fosters an acute awareness both of the opportunities that are available for politics, and of the very real threats that lie on the horizon. It is alive to the potentiality for politics at one moment, while also recognising its limitations at the next. In Gramsci’s terminology, it provides the opportunity to assess whether a ‘war of movement’ or a ‘war of position’ is the right political strategy within a particular historical conjuncture.

The theory of hegemony, in turn, presupposes the centrality of the concept of articulation. I consider this through its conceptualisation by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, and subsequent contributions by Laclau. For them, hegemony is the key theory of politics in modernity, and this theory “supposes a theoretical field dominated by the category of articulation” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 93). Articulation dominates the theoretical field because of the openness of the social. This condition prevails because of the incomplete and unstable character of both society itself and the subjects that comprise it. These are not full and complete identities, as they are characterised by an original lack, and articulation fills in this lack. Articulation, as a
consequence, is constitutive of the social. But because the condition of articulation is open and continual, society and the subjects that comprise it are always precarious, that is, they are liable to be transformed through the processes of disarticulation and rearticulation. As Laclau and Mouffe put it, “we will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such as their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (ibid.: 105), and “[t]he practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning” (ibid.: 113).

Another way to approach this is through some of Laclau’s more recent contributions. In the preface to On Populist Reason, he sketches out his approach to the question of “the formation of collective identities” (Laclau 2005a: ix), a methodology he contrasts with functionalism and structuralism and, even more so, methodological individualism. Rather than to commence with groups within a whole (as is the case with functionalism and structuralism) or with individuals as complete identities (as is the case with methodological individualism), Laclau’s entry-point – “[t]he smallest unit from which we will start” (ibid.: 73) – is a demand. Due to the complexity and plurality of the social in modernity, one demand can never constitute society, but always co-exists with a heterogeneity of other demands. Each demand attempts to combine with other demands in an equivalential chain, that jostles with (usually) another equivalential chain of demands, in order to form the dominant world-view. These demands and equivalential chains can only succeed by being articulated. The articulation of demands constitutes the group – “the group would only be the result of an articulation of social practices” (Laclau 2005b: 102). This is the reverse of the process indicated by structuralism and functionalism, whereby pre-constituted groups articulate demands. For Laclau,
rather, it is the demands – and their articulation – that is constitutive of the group.

While the conceptualisation of the multitude and immanence by Hardt and Negri recognises the constitutive lack in the social, they eschew any valid account of articulation. In Laclau’s terms, articulation is an essential feature of the political: without articulation, there can be no politics; and, because Hardt and Negri eschew articulation, their multitude withdraws from politics. Laclau and Mouffe insist that articulation only becomes important with modernity, because in modernity the “area of articulatory practices is immensely broadened” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 138).

A politics considered through articulation, in addition, can resolve the dichotomous presentation of sovereignty that Hardt and Negri propose between the One of the people and the infinity of the multitude. Such a politics accepts the obdurate yet partial persistence of the One in politics. This has been well demonstrated by Laclau, where ‘order’ stands in for One and ‘disorder’ for infinity. He insists that in a situation of radical disorder, the articulation of order – irrespective of the actual contents proposed by the articulating force – will attract widespread adherence to the cause:

when people are confronted with radical anomie, the need for some kind of order becomes more important than the actual ontic order that brings it about. The Hobbesian universe is the extreme version of this gap: because society is faced with a situation of total disorder (the state of nature), whatever the Leviathan does is legitimate – irrespective of its content – as long as order is the result (Laclau 2005a: 88).

This is perhaps articulation at its most stark, but the example provides the ineluctability of its operation, and its centrality to politics. Politically, Hardt and Negri express the infinity of the multitude in *Empire* through disconnected “vertical struggles” that strike at the heart of empire, as is shown in II.1. They appear to
rein back from this position in *Commonwealth* where they develop the concept of ‘the common’. This is contrasted with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in II.2, and is found wanting and insufficient to challenge what hegemony has already adequately theorised. To begin with, however, we now turn to the three early modern republican theorists: Marsilius of Padua (in I.1), Machiavelli (in I.2) and Spinoza (in I.3).
PART I
I.1 MARSILIUS OF PADUA

This chapter presents Marsilius of Padua as an advocate of the multitude. Such advocacy represents a major departure from earlier political philosophy, in which the multitude has both a marginal and negative status. This is the case with those political philosophers – such as Aristotle and Cicero – to whom Marsilius regularly refers in *Defensor Pacis*, his major work. The multitude is a term Marsilius deploys as the plural of citizen; this group founds the political community, and endorses all laws taken by the community. Marsilius, then, regards the multitude as central to politics. The account of the multitude presented by Marsilius is different to the one discussed by Hardt and Negri as operating in the late medieval and early modern period. It is interesting to note that Hardt and Negri ignore earlier accounts of the multitude – Marsilius included – when they align the multitude with Spinoza. In contrast to their presentation of the multitude as opposed to constituted sovereign power, the multitude for Marsilius is internal to and defensive of the polity: it is, in Balibar’s phrase, at one and the same time *above the law* while being *under the law*. The multitude founds the political community and maintains ultimate control over it, through appropriate institutional forms of political organisation. These institutions are organised so that the political community can endure. Endurance is guaranteed through the mechanism of consent. The operation of consent produces a *mobile form of sovereign power*, within which the balance between the various forces that comprise the political community shifts. Marsilius proposes a *mobile account of sovereign power* through the multitude, in contrast to both a static account of sovereignty, which Hobbes would eventually adopt, and the anti-sovereign stance...
taken by Hardt and Negri. In making this move, Marsilius transforms our understanding of the relationship between the state and the law: the state no longer flows from the (fixed) law, but rather the law flows from the (mobile) state. The final decision on the law is provided by the *legislator humanus*, that is, the political community. Marsilius also refers to this *legislator humanus*, this political community, as the multitude: the law ultimately flows from the consent of the multitude. Here two key terms that run through this project – the multitude and consent – combine in Marsilius to produce a *mobile account of sovereign power*. In doing so, Marsilius provides an alternative account of sovereignty – or, more accurately, sovereign power – to that which Hobbes will later elaborate. It is Hobbes’ account that exerts enormous influence on subsequent theorisations of sovereignty. In sum, Marsilius outlines a *mobile account of sovereign power* in theorising the multitude and consent. The pivotal role that consent plays in Marsilius’ account of politics anticipates the theory of hegemony that Gramsci develops in the early twentieth century. The consent of the multitude in Marsilius should be viewed as a precursor to Gramsci’s claim that politics should be conceptualised through an account of hegemony.

The multitude, for Marsilius, is a complex political subject, whose members’ identity is produced at three different strata. The first stratum is the household, in which the will is primary; the second is the economic ‘part’ or ‘office’ – inspired by Aristotle’s classification, Marsilius identifies six economic ‘parts’ which exert considerable influence on its members’ political identities; and the third is the political community itself, which constitutes the seat of reason for Marsilius. As a result of the combination of these strata, the multitude in Marsilius is a complex, dynamic entity. These three strata are explicated in this chapter, which comprises three sections. It begins by surveying the various political subjects that feature within Marsilius’ terminology. It then explores wider themes
in Marsilius’ political philosophy, before focusing on the role that consent plays within his thought.

**i. Political subjects**

The aim of politics for Marsilius can be summed up in one word: peace. As the title of his major work suggests – *Defensor Pacis*, ‘The Defender of the Peace’ – he styled himself as a proponent and guardian of peace.³ He begins this work by declaring: “we must desire peace, seek to acquire it when we do not have it, keep it once acquired, and fight off its opposite, strife, with every effort” (I.1.4, 6). Peace, for Marsilius, guarantees the security and solidity of a regime and, therefore, its preservation and continuation; it is the pillar that enables political regimes to endure. War and strife, on the other hand, inaugurate instability and, ultimately, the downfall of prevailing regimes. The *Defensor Pacis* identifies the papacy and the Church as the primary threat to peace in fourteenth century Europe.

It is therefore important to read Marsilius’ socio-political terminology alongside the role that different political subjects play in promoting or undermining the *polis*.⁴ In *Defensor Pacis*, Marsilius identifies four political subjects: citizen, subject, the people and the multitude. Broadly speaking, he uses the people and subjects in a negative manner, and the multitude and citizens in a positive manner. In fact, the multitude should be viewed as the plural signification of citizen for Marsilius: it is the term he uses to designate the active political community. He refers to “the universal multitude of the citizens” (I.12.6, 70; I.13.6, 78; I.15.2, 88; I.15.4, 90), “the entire multitude of citizens” (I.13.5, 77), and “the multitude or legislator” (III.3, 557).

Marsilius’ deployment of the terms citizen and subject is largely informed by his consideration of the qualities of different
regimes, and is again taken from Aristotle. These are divided into two groups, which he terms ‘tempered’ and ‘flawed’. The tempered regimes are monarchy, aristocracy and polity, while the flawed are tyranny (the domination of one), oligarchy (the domination of the rich) and democracy (the domination of the poor).\(^5\) Within this schema, Marsilius predominantly uses subject – as in ‘the subjected’ – alongside flawed regimes, and citizen when speaking of tempered regimes. Citizen appears most consistently alongside polity, his preferred regime, in which the (indigenous, adult male) citizens are most active and participatory. Similarly, subject appears most consistently alongside his most despised regime, tyranny, ”in which what dominates is a single man to his own advantage and beyond the will of those subject” (I.8.3, 41).

In terms of ‘the people’, prior to Marsilius, there are two key derivations of the term. The first is inspired by the ancient Greek tradition. Here, the people are those that naturally lack virtue and, as a consequence of this disposition, are deprived of membership and participation in the decision-making process of the *polis*. The ancient Greek version of ‘the people’, then, is contrasted with the citizens. The people are all those that exist outside of citizenship. The second understanding is inspired by the Roman tradition.\(^6\) Here the people is not contrasted to, but serves as a synonym for, citizens. The Roman citizen body is more numerous than its Greek counterpart. That is, Roman citizens – or, indeed, the Roman people – include not only those ‘virtuous’ Greek citizens, but also the ‘non-virtuous’ Greek people, too. In Roman terminology, the people – that is, the citizens – is comprised of both patricians and plebs.

Marsilius largely uses the people in the first sense, inspired by the ancient Greek – and, more precisely, Aristotelian – tradition. In adopting this usage, the people is viewed as a threat to the continuation of the polity. This is because the relationship of the people with its other ‘class’ is necessarily conflictual and
antagonistic. The existence of such antagonism within a polity inevitably leads to its downfall. Marsilius’ deployment of the people is often alongside sedition and civil war:

it is likely that civil war would have arisen as a result; and this would have caused the polity to disintegrate because of the sedition stirred up among the people by the said conspirators against the consul and others in the position of prince (I.14.3, 82).

in order to stir up all people universally to envy and rebellion and war and discord against the said prince (II.26.12, 459).

Marsilius’ conception of different political subjects has not featured in commentaries. Some commentators, such as Gewirth, ignore the multitude in Marsilius, and conflate its attributes with those of the people. Others, such as Nederman, intermittently acknowledge the presence of the multitude, as is the case here:

he responds explicitly in Chapter 13 to the claim that a few wise people are, by virtue of their superior knowledge, more competent to rule than the “multitude”. He counters this view with the claim that the “multitude”, which he construes as the totality of segments within the civil body, enjoys a greater degree of competence (Nederman 1993: 65).

The inverted commas, wrapped around the multitude in this quotation, indicate the strange political status of this subject for Nederman.

**Marsilius’ use of the term multitude**

Marsilius adopts – and, to a limited extent, adapts – Aristotle’s view on the emergence of the *polis*, presented in Book I of *Politics*. For current purposes, this means that the *polis* emerges at the third of three different “levels of association”. These start at the level of the household, move through the village community and eventually reach the level of the city-state, or *polis*. It is only alongside
discussions of the *polis* that Marsilius deploys the term the multitude. That is, the multitude is activated by, or arises alongside, the formation of the city-state. In other words, for Marsilius, the multitude is the name of the subject within the *polis*; it is internal to the state. It does not exist outside of or prior to political forms of organisation. It is the subject of politics.

Marsilius’ adoption of the multitude is noteworthy due to its marginal use in earlier political philosophy, which is laden with negative connotations. Within this tradition, citizens or the people are the most widely deployed terms. This is the case, moreover, with the key influences on Marsilius, namely Aristotle and Cicero. In adopting the multitude and ascribing to it positive connotations, Marsilius announces his departure from all past and present political philosophy. Its use is intended to signify a new manner of conceptualising politics and the state.

As an alternative to the exclusive and conflictual signification in which he deploys the term ‘people’, Marsilius uses the multitude in an inclusive sense. That is, the multitude constitutes the entirety of the political community. The multitude is a synonym for the *legislator humanus* – the body that Marsilius designates as guaranteeing the stability of the polity, and its long-term orientation. While the multitude is inclusive, it is not entirely harmonious: conflict exists within the multitude, but this is a *contained conflict*. A harmonious political community requires an absolutist understanding of the ‘common good’. Marsilius retains the notion of the ‘common good’, but rejects an absolutist account of it, and *historicises* it. Each political community in history contests the meaning of the ‘common good’: the multitude discursively constructs its definition.

This mobility is secured by the complex account of the multitude, which flows from the three strata that inform the activity of the multitude. The three strata refer to the household, the ‘part’
or office, and the state. The interaction *between and within* these three strata produces the historical understanding of the political community which, in turn, constructs their account of the ‘common good’. In this account, conflict operates *between* the first two strata (the household and the ‘parts’, respectively) and *within* the second, but is contained by the third (the state). This is a form of politics that recognises the inevitability of conflict and, hence, the necessity to contain this conflict, so that the state can endure. The effect of a polity oriented towards the containment of conflict produces a *mobile account of sovereign power*: a Leviathan does not grasp *sovereignty*, retain the right to declare the exception, and exercise power over life and death; instead, *sovereign power* is contested – through a contained conflict – which provides mobility. This *mobile account of sovereign power* will be explicated further through the distinction Marsilius draws between the *legislator humanus* and the *pars principans*. To return to Balibar’s antinomy, the *pars principans* ensures that the multitude is under the law, while its role as the *legislator humanus* ensures that it makes the law, such that it is above the law.

Having made these claims, it is necessary to tackle two potential objections to this presentation of the multitude in the works of Marsilius. The first objection concerns his initial uses of the term. Early in *Defensor Pacis*, the multitude acts as a synonym for the ancient Greek understanding of the people, or the manner in which the plebs is deployed in Roman terminology, as was discussed earlier. Yet on each of the four occasions in which the multitude is so deployed, it is clear that it is not Marsilius’ view that is being aired but, rather, the view of Aristotle. The first occasion in which Marsilius deploys the term the multitude, it is done “according to the opinion of Aristotle” (I.5.1, 23). The second usage associates the multitude with flawed regimes, and particularly
democracy – the rule of the poor, the plebs, the people, or the multitude:

democracy... is a principate in which the plebs or multitude or the poor has established the principate and rules by itself beyond the will or consent of the other citizens, and not unqualifiedly for the common advantage in appropriate proportion (I.8.3, 42).

This is consistent with Aristotle’s definition of democracy, and Marsilius does indicate that this specific usage is “in accordance with Aristotle’s understanding”. The final two of these four early uses of the multitude (as made in I.9.4, 46) continue the association with Aristotle, as each passage in which they feature contains direct reference to the Politics. Thereafter, Marsilius’ deployment of the term the multitude is no longer couched in Aristotelian terms. As there are no further references to Aristotle when Marsilius discusses the multitude, these later deployments must be viewed as Marsilius’ own understanding of the multitude.

The second objection concerns the extent to which the multitude was an inclusive category. It is not fully inclusive as Marsilus, following Aristotle, explicitly excludes four categories from citizenship and, hence, the multitude: boys, slaves, foreigners and women (I.12.4, 67). However, Marsilius redefines slavery, a redefinition that largely eliminates it from his account of politics. As with Aristotle, boys are only temporarily excluded; they are potential citizens. In terms of females and foreigners, Marsilius is committed to the standard understanding of both current and earlier political philosophy, in regarding these social groups as inferior, and therefore unworthy of politics. With slaves, however, Marsilius departs significantly from Aristotle. For the latter, there was an innate difference between freemen or rulers and slaves: “just as some are by nature free, so others are by nature slaves” (Aristotle 1998: 1254b39, 17). These ‘natural’ slaves include those
employed in agriculture and manufacture, and such employment precludes them from any participatory role within Aristotle’s polity. For Marsilius, by contrast, the ‘parts’ of agriculture and manufacture are integral to the organic whole: they are therefore internal to the state and, hence, politics.

This, in turn, poses the question of how Marsilius understands slaves. He rarely invokes them, but does outline two circumstances in which slavery exists. The first circumstance is a permanent though numerically insignificant feature of benign regimes. Here, slaves are contrasted with citizens: they are those individuals or groups opposed to the continued survival of a ‘tempered’ polity: “those not-willing the polity to survive are counted as slaves, not citizens” (I.13.2, 74). Slaves in Marsilius, then, are not ‘natural’ as is the case with Aristotle. Their status as slaves results from a political decision: they have chosen to reject a ‘tempered’ polity and, as such, should not be considered as citizens but rather as slaves; they do not understand or appreciate the nature of the freedom and peace that has been inaugurated by a ‘tempered’ polity and, in rejecting it, they become slaves in Marsilius’ eyes. It is for this reason that Gewirth describes Marsilius’ account of slavery as “political and volitional” (Gewirth 1951: 179). The second form of slavery that Marsilius describes affects greater numbers. It occurs in two circumstances, both of which occur when a ‘tempered’ regime transforms into a ‘flawed’ one. The first of these circumstances is when a state has been invaded and its inhabitants are subjected to external control. The second occurs when the laws of a state become iniquitous, and are against the will of its inhabitants. Marsilius’ account of slavery is significant for politics: far from being a ‘natural’ condition as it was for Aristotle, slavery is a political condition that can be escaped if the multitude makes an active decision to engage in politics.
This account of slavery highlights two further qualities of the multitude for Marsilius: inclusivity and activity. In terms of inclusivity, this is not thoroughgoing, as exclusions still remain in the form of women, foreigners, and minors. Yet Marsilius’ redefinition of slavery means that his political subject – the multitude, the *legislator humanus* or citizens – comprises a substantially revised and expanded group to that proposed by prior accounts. In effect, the multitude for Marsilius comprises the entirety of the indigenous, adult male inhabitants of a community. This will be explored through an examination of the six ‘parts’ or offices of the state, in the following section.

In terms of activity, the multitude is involved in and ultimately enforces key decisions within the polity. Laws are proposed by the executive (*pars principans*). Thereafter, these laws are circulated to the multitude, who then debate them – and amend them if they deem fit – before, finally, ratifying or rejecting them. What’s more, the multitude can remove and replace this executive body if it acts against the law. This status ensures that the multitude is – to use Balibar’s antinomy – is at once and the same time, *under and above the law*; this antinomic status, in turn, provides a *mobile form of sovereign power*. As Nederman argues, this conception of active citizenship resolves the perceived gulf between individual and communal activity:

Since a community for Marsiglio can exist only where its individual members have cooperated actively with each other (and with their own natures) in its creation, citizenship acquires an inherently participatory connotation: The citizen must be involved directly in the political process to be a citizen. Passive citizenship is meaningless... The *Defensor Pacis* demonstrates that public good and individual consent should not be viewed as opposite poles on either end of a spectrum but rather should be regarded as two aspects of the same phenomenon of civic community (Nederman 1995: 92).
Due to these levels of inclusivity and participation, the multitude is oriented towards the stabilisation and continuation of the regime. They provide the conditions in which peace and tranquillity are secured. The inclusivity and participation of the multitude are also buttresses against the appearance of social and political strife, discord, and war: they militate against the development of antagonistic factions (which, in turn, produce conflict resulting in civil war and the downfall of the state) on the one hand, and produce an internal unity that is sufficiently strong to repel external invasion, on the other hand. We can, thus, closely associate the flexibility of the multitude with Marsilius’ primary political goal of peace. The multitude is indeed the Defensor Pacis, the defender of the peace.

Thus far Marsilius’ consideration has been restricted to politics, the subject of Discourse I of the Defensor Pacis. Discourse II is concerned with religion, and here we get a more-or-less similar presentation of the multitude. The multitude remains integral to the decision to inaugurate both religious and political institutions, and is active within these as the key power in their electoral processes. The multitude in Discourse II is only more-or-less similar to that in Discourse I due to the differences between the membership of political and religious institutions. When Marsilius refers to this ’religious’ multitude, he is referring to “the whole multitude of the faithful”. This is a larger grouping than the ’political’ multitude encountered in the first discourse, as four groups were explicitly excluded from this, namely boys, slaves, women and foreigners. By contrast, the requirement for inclusion in the ’religious’ multitude is merely the commitment of faith, and the political exclusions do not apply.

Marsilius’ deployment of the term the multitude in the third and final discourse is significant. Discourse III has two important aims. First, it is a recapitulation of the argument contained in the
first two discourses. Next, and more importantly for our purposes, it is a call to arms. As Brett argues:

Marsilius opens the work with a direct appeal to Ludwig of Bavaria to fulfil this calling and so to write the ultimate ending of the *Defensor Pacis*. But its interim conclusion, Discourse III, is addressed not to the emperor but to all citizens, princes and subjects, handing them a series of distilled theses for them to make their own. Their brevity and apparent lack of exact correspondence with the two main discourses are precisely the point. Discourse III is text detextualised, text stripped for action, the moment of the transition between the work and the world. Marsilius is saying to all his readers, now *you* do something: for you too are called to be a defender of the peace (Brett 2005: xxxi).

It is no surprise then, that in the address that closes the *Defensor Pacis*, the multitude is accorded prominence. Having constructed a radical and positive vision of and for the multitude, Marsilius addresses them directly in Discourse III. It is worth concluding this section by quoting the final passage of the third discourse at length:

For the first citizen or part of a civil regime, sc. the princely – be it one man or several – will understand from the human and divine truths written down in this book that they alone have the authority to command the subject multitude, collectively or individually, and to constrain any individual, if it is expedient to do so, according to the laws that have been laid down. They will also understand that they can do nothing more than this, particularly anything involving difficulty, without the consent of the subject multitude or the legislator; and that the multitude or legislator should not be provoked by injustice, because the force and authority of principate consists in the express will of the same multitude. The subject multitude and each of its individuals can, for its part, learn from this book what kind of man or men it should institute to exercise the function of prince... Finally, it will learn to keep as close a watch as possible that the princely or any other part of the community does not presume to be its own arbiter, by judging or taking any other action in the city against or outside the laws.

Once these things have been understood, committed to memory and carefully guarded or stored, a realm and any other temperate civil community shall be preserved in its peaceable or tranquil existence: through which those who live in a civil manner obtain a sufficient earthly life (III.3.1, 557-558).
This quotation features a number of the themes addressed thus far, including: the multitude as Marsilius’ political subject; its role as the legislator; the authority of its will; and the necessity of the endurance of the state through contained conflict, in short, a mobile account of sovereign power. The theme of consent is also raised, which will be considered in the final section. Prior to this, three key features of Marsilius’ political thought – historical development, the six economic ‘parts’ and the rule of law – are elaborated in order to enrich an understanding of the multitude in Marsilius.

### ii. Key features of Marsilius’ politics

It has already been shown that, for Marsilius, three different inputs constitute the multitude: the household; the ‘part’ or office; and, the state. These inputs also correspond to three different aspects of the multitude: will, class, and reason respectively. The role of the household will be explored through the manner in which the political community developed historically for Marsilius – this is the locus of the will. The ‘parts’ or offices correspond to the six economic categories that comprise the state – this is the locus of class. Finally, the legislator humanus corresponds to the manner in which Marsilius considered the relationship between the rule of law and the rule of man – this is where reason operates. An examination of these three corresponding inputs and aspects allows a more complex picture of Marsilius’ multitude to emerge.

*Historical development*

Marsilius adopts – and adapts – his understanding of historical development from Aristotle. The Greek philosopher proposed a linear evolution for human association, beginning with the family or household as the primary unit, passing through the village community before arriving at the city-state. For Aristotle, each new
stage in the development of human association corresponds to the achievement of particular ends: the household to satisfy everyday economic needs; the village for defence and security; and the state for both self-sufficiency and the good life – “while it comes into existence for the sake of mere life, it exists for the sake of a good life” (Aristotle 1998: 1252b27, 10).

Marsilius departs from Aristotle in regarding the village – and not the household – as the first community, in which two significant developments occur. First, the expanded form involves a more complex economic organisation, with an increasing specialisation of function: this is, in effect, an emergent division of labour. Second, semi-official notions of justice begin to emerge. Within the household, Marsilius stipulates that the will and decision of the “elder” – or head of the household – prevails. The combined rule of the elders spreads to the village level with the emergence of this second level of organisation. At this stage, there is neither a codification of the rules of living nor an established legal framework, and the decisions made by these elders are arbitrary. Marsilius describes this as “quasi-natural law” (I.3.4, 16). As the village community develops, these elders become more practiced at dealing with disputes but these, in turn, become more complex as the division of labour advances and different economic categories begin to solidify, increasingly influencing the viewpoint of the members of each economic category. The need to control these proliferating disputes at the economic level imposes on the inhabitants the recognition of the need for an external standard of justice, and the codification of the law. In other words, these conditions prompt the passage into the next form of association, the polis or city-state.

With the formation of the polis, however, the individuals existing in the household retain some of the earlier powers that were evident during the two prior stages. In other words, the
formation of the *polis* does not involve a total transfer of power to the sovereign, as is the case in social contract theory. Each member of the state retains many aspects of their conscience and will developed at the levels of the household and the village; they do not blindly submit to the laws proposed by the *polis*. This, in other words, is the site of the operation of the will. When conceiving of the multitude, it is crucial to insist on the existence of this (partial) level of autonomy. This autonomy — alongside further levels of difference provided by the six economic ‘parts’ or offices — ensures that the polity is open, plural, and dynamic; it provides for a *mobile form of sovereign power*.

There is one final point to consider on the matter of historical development, namely, the question of whether Marsilius considers the city-state to be the optimal level of organisation, or whether it could be extended further. On this point, Gewirth argues that Marsilius adopts Aristotle’s view that the city-state is the perfect level of organisation. This is an erroneous position, however, for two reasons, one textual, the other contextual. The textual explanation concerns Marsilius’ use of the phrase “realm or city” to mean that organisation could occur at either the level of the city-state or one beyond this level. In this discussion, Marsilius proposes four different significations for the term realm, before settling on the fourth of these:

> The fourth sense is something common to every type of temperate regime, *whether in a single city or in several cities*... and it is in this same sense that we too shall use the term in determining the answers to our questions (I.2.2, 12; emphasis added).

The contextual explanation concerns Marsilius’ own experience (not shared with Aristotle) of the incipient nation-state. Although his formative years were spent in Padua, a city-state *par excellence*, the remainder of his life was spent first in Paris, which was
developing into a capital city of the embryonic nation-state of France. The publication of the *Defensor Pacis* forced Marsilius into exile, and he fled to the German empire of King Ludwig. At the same time, the papacy continued to claim universal jurisdiction for the church. Marsilius, thus, was aware of a plurality of political and jurisdictional bodies staking claim over a range of territories. Additionally, fourteenth century political thought was beginning to question what level constituted the ideal political community. Dante, for instance, had recently proposed a universal state or *monarchia* as the only body capable of securing justice and resolving the proliferation of disputes that continued to spread around the globe.\(^{12}\)

*The six economic ‘parts’*

For Marsilius, the six economic ‘parts’ or offices – from the Latin, *pars* – are the combined force that founds the state and, thereafter, comprise the *legislator humanus*. He derives the division of these parts from book VII of Aristotle’s *Politics* (1998: 1328b2, 269-270).\(^{13}\) The six parts are agriculture, manufacture, finance, priesthood, military and judicial.\(^{14}\) One of the key benefits of this classification, for Marsilius, is that it allows a clear separation between the political community or legislature on the one hand, and the governmental part – *pars principans* in Latin – on the other, which in contemporary terms fulfils both executive and judicial functions. The latter is merely a part of, and consequently subordinate to, the former, which constitutes the entirety of the political community, that is the multitude. This divide between the *pars principans* and the *legislator humanus*, alongside the internal economic divisions within the latter, provides the polity with dynamism – it enables a mobile form of sovereign power.
It is only after the formation of the *polis* or state that these (previously incipient) six economic parts are confirmed. Thereafter, specialisation of function and division of labour become a permanent feature of economic life. This also marks the formal shift from economic independence to economic interdependence which, in turn, requires the presence of a mediating power – this is the function of the *pars principans*. Each member of the community is allocated to their respective ‘part’ according to two factors: natural disposition and the decision of the judicial office (which is the first of the six parts to be formed). Nederman has described these parts and their interaction as ‘communal functionalism’:

At the heart of communal functionalism is the claim that the community is in the first instance composed neither of individuals nor of citizens but rather of functional groupings or parts, arranged according to the nature of their contribution to the communal whole. This is essentially an organic conception of social life (Nederman 1995: 55).

This comment, which accords priority to the economic parts within Marsilius’ thought, implies that they play a pivotal role in Nederman’s account of Marsilius’ political subject. Yet, Nederman understands Marsilius’ political subject to operate according to just two inputs – will (at the level of household) and reason (at the level of the *legislator humanus*). The above quotation, however, indicates the necessity of including a third – the economic parts themselves – to provide a more accurate understanding of this political subject. The multitude for Marsilius, then, is a complex subject drawing on three different inputs: will, economic part, and reason. The emphasis placed on economics and sufficiency (which, in turn, necessitates the inclusion of the economic parts as an input in the composition of the multitude) indicates that politics, for Marsilius, is grounded in necessity – as opposed to ethics or theology: politics, for Marsilius, is oriented towards ‘living’ as much
as to ‘living well’. In Marsilius, then, economics – and labour, in particular – is central to his account of the multitude.

There are two points to emphasise regarding the effect that these six economic parts have on our understanding of the multitude. First, it highlights the inclusive character of the multitude, as Marsilius adopts the six Aristotelian economic categories, and then adapts this by including those categories that Aristotle regards as slaves – agriculture, manufacture and finance – within the polis, thereby providing an expanded version of citizenship and the multitude. Second, it provides a further layer of complexity in his account of the multitude, as the economic part – alongside will and reason – influences the decisions that each of its members take at the level of the state.

The rule of law and the legislator humanus
Law, for Marsilius, consists of a codified set of rules, and consequently the rule of law only becomes operable with the formation of the polis, or city-state. The rule of law represents an outgrowth from “quasi-natural law”, which operates at the level of the village community. It is important to recognise the role of the village elders in the establishment of the rule of law and, as a consequence, the polis or city-state. In such a scenario, the elders play a prominent role in persuading the other members of the community to simultaneously institute the rule of law and the state, in order to settle the growing number of disputes that arise as society became more complex. This, however, is merely an act of persuasion on behalf of the elders, because the rule of law and the state is activated by the entirety of the indigenous, adult male community. In other words, rhetoric was instrumental to the formation of the state, for Marsilius which, in turn, indicates the influence of Cicero. In sum, the state for Marsilius is the outcome
of a combination of persuasion by and the rhetoric of a few and the consent of the community.\textsuperscript{18}

In all likelihood, these elders go on to form the governmental part – the \textit{pars principans} – of the state after its inception.\textsuperscript{19} This is the first ‘part’ – or, more appropriately in this instance, office – of the state to be formed. This part brings the five other parts of the state into being, and codifies the law for subsequent ratification. Once formed, these six (economic) parts constitute the multitude for Marsilius. In contrast to the multitude of Hardt and Negri, however, this multitude does not merely possess a \textit{constituent} function it also possesses a \textit{continual legislative} function.\textsuperscript{20} In other words, it not only forms the state, but also remains the ultimate authority within it and, as a consequence, is concerned to guarantee the state’s endurance. The multitude, for Marsilius, defends the peace that the state provides: it is the \textit{Defensor Pacis}. In short, the multitude in Marsilius is internal to the state, and its goal is to maintain the state. It will be shown in this chapter’s final section that \textit{consent} is central to this goal.

In resting ultimate authority in the multitude and providing a reduced role for the \textit{pars principans}, Marsilius separates power within the state. This separation of power is between the governmental part on the one hand, and the legislative body – known by Marsilius as both the multitude and the \textit{legislator humanus} – on the other.\textsuperscript{21} This separation, however, does not establish two powers of equal weight or worth: ultimately, the governmental part is subordinate to the legislature, for three reasons. First, the \textit{pars principans} is elected by the multitude, and can be recalled by the multitude.\textsuperscript{22} Second, its functions are restricted by the constitution that inaugurates the state. These functions involve: interpreting the law to adjudicate on disputes that arose within the polity – this is the judicial function; to propose the laws that are to be instituted, and to ensure that these
proposed laws are disseminated to the multitude – this is the executive function. In terms of policy formation, Marsilius writes:

It is more convenient for the execution of legal matters to take place through him than through the universal multitude of citizens, since one or a few persons exercising the function of prince are enough for this business, in which the universal community would be unnecessarily occupied and would moreover be distracted from other necessary tasks (I.15.4, 90).

Once these laws have been proposed and disseminated, however, it is the multitude or *legislator humanus* that authorises them via a vote:

For although it [the less learned multitude] would not by itself be able to discover the true and useful things that ought to be established it can nonetheless discern them once they have been discovered by others and put before it, and judge whether there is anything in what has been proposed which seems to need being added or taken away, completely changed or rejected. For a man can understand many things after they have been stated by another and can be active in bringing to completion many things, the origins or discovery of which he could not have arrived at by himself (I.13.7, 78).

This is because each ‘part’ of the multitude, once engaged in a process of deliberation is best placed to consider whether each and every law is in accord with the general interest – it decides what constitutes the common good: 23

the multitude of all of these, gathered together, can more fully perceive and will what is just and advantageous for the community than any of these parts by itself, however prudent it may be. (I.13.6, 78)

Before these discovered laws are authorised, however, each citizen can propose their amendment or rejection:

When once... the future laws, have been discovered and diligently scrutinised, they should be laid before the assembled citizen-body for
approval or rejection, so that if any citizen thinks that anything needs to be added to them or taken away, changed or totally repudiated, he can say so: because as a result of this process the law can be more expediently framed (I.13.8, 79).

In the third place, the governmental part is subordinate to the multitude through the existence and operation of the law. It is bound by the law itself, and cannot operate outside it. It is through such checks that Marsilius’ governmental part should be regarded as the delegates – and not the representatives – of the multitude, as Nederman argues. It also serves to displace the dichotomy within political philosophy between the rule of law on the one hand, and the rule of (one) man – or monarchy – on the other. For Marsilius, rather, the rule of law entails the rule of men (plural), which is the rule of the legislator humanus or the multitude. The multitude, then, is the law. They become conjoined with one another after the formation of the polity. This is contrary to Negri’s account of the multitude as the practitioners of constituent power, that is, outside of and against the law.

As a consequence of this displacement, the legislature has the power to survey, inspect and judge the activity of the pars principans. In other words, the presence of the legislator humanus ensures an open form of government. Yet Marsilius does not stop there, as he also grants the multitude the power to remove the pars principans where necessary:

the efficient power to institute or to elect a principate belongs to the legislator or the universal body of the citizens... and any correction of the principate... likewise belongs to it. For this is one of those great matters that... belong to the universal multitude of the citizens... For it belongs to whatever generates a form also to determine the subject in which it inheres (I.15.2-3, 88-89)

In summary, then, the multitude in Marsilius has three different aspects operating at corresponding levels: will (household), pars (economic office or corporative function), and
reason (the state). These features both interrelate and overlap with one another, thereby providing a complex and, ultimately, shifting picture of the multitude. Here, in the first place, the retention of powers at the level of the household results in the recurrent appearance of the will and conscience of the individual. Second, the six economic parts ensure that there is a corporative character to the multitude. Finally, the role of the *legislator humanus* and the survival of the state force the multitude to constantly consider the whole that is the state, and what constitutes justice and the common good for the community. The separation that Marsilius adopts between the *pars principans* and the *legislator humanus* ensures that the multitude is, at one and the same time, *above and under the law* which, in turn, provides for a *mobile form of sovereign power*.

### iii. Consent

Marsilius’ primary political aim is peace and, as a consequence, his political philosophy should be viewed as an attempt to define the conditions which enable peace to prevail. Ultimately, for Marsilius, peace is dependent on the consent of the community. As a result, how consent is achieved becomes the central question of his work. Here, we have a re-writing of political philosophy vis-à-vis not only his contemporaries, but also his predecessors. In placing consent – and the consent of the majority of adult indigenous males – at the forefront of his political philosophy, Marsilius provides an embryonic account of what Gramsci would later theorise as hegemony. It also points to the centrality of articulation, as conceptualised by Laclau. Crucially, for the argument of this thesis, Marsilius links consent to the multitude. The role of consent in Marsilius’ thought has attracted increasing attention in secondary literature, as can be gleaned from the title of the best recent commentary, *Community and Consent*. Consent is integral to the manner in which Marsilius
positions himself within the debate over the best way a state should be organised. Here, he follows Aristotle in favouring ‘tempered’ regimes – monarchy, aristocracy and polity – and rejects the ‘flawed’ regimes of tyranny, oligarchy and democracy.²⁷ Beyond this, however, he refuses to explicitly express a preference. When Marsilius invokes ‘regime’ here, it should be understood that he is referring to the manner in which the pars principans or governmental part should be organised, as it is clear within his theory that this should remain subordinate to the legislator humanus.

Marsilius’ privileging of consent is mapped out in three stages: first, as a rejection of the prevailing form of politics; next, as grounding the new politics within and upon consent; and, finally, ensuring the perseverance of this new politics.

*Enter consent*

Marsilius advocates a repositioning of politics, and proposes a new form of politics to achieve this. In the fourteenth century, politics was subordinate to religion. It is his intention to reverse this centuries-long condition. Only a new form of politics is able to realise such a transformation. His first task is to “lift the veil” that religion had constructed. He regards this veil to be the “singular cause of strife” for politics:

> It is therefore my purpose... to expose only this singular cause of strife... it is our will to lift the veil in such a way that it can hereafter be easily excluded from all realms and civil orders, and once excluded, virtuous princes and subjects can live in tranquillity more securely (I.1.7, 9)

Consent is integral to this strategy of repositioning politics. With the notable exception of Italian city-states such as Padua, consent is absent from politics in the fourteenth century: monarchical rule and the claims of papal jurisdiction are achieved through the isolation
and dispersal of the subject population. It was this isolation and dispersal that enables ‘flawed’ regimes to thrive, for Marsilius. Instead, his goal is to activate communication and consent throughout this isolated and dispersed population in order to conduct a new form of politics. That is, Marsilius attempts to extend the form of politics conducted in Italian city-states to other jurisdictions within Europe. Once this had been achieved, he advocates the *deepening* of politics within such jurisdictions, which he understands as both broadening the participatory base and intensifying the level of participation. He views this to be the task of those with heightened rational and rhetorical powers, whose role it is to persuade the population of the necessity of establishing this new form of politics. As Nederman writes:

According to Marsiglio, the natural disposition to associate is constituted as an implicit feature of human nature, requiring reasoned persuasion to stimulate and direct it toward realization. Marsiglio believes that the success or failure of this process of socialization is dependent largely upon the presence of one or a few individuals who are particularly well endowed with the rational and rhetorical faculties necessary to convince the mass of human beings to assemble as a community... his description of the process of association... has its source in Cicero. In *De officiis*, Cicero explained that a universal, natural sociability arises from the native human powers of reason and speech (Nederman 1995: 44).

In writing and publishing the *Defensor Pacis*, Marsilius assumes the position of the village elder, “endowed with the requisite rhetorical and rational faculties”, with the aim of initiating this new form of politics. But its achievement is entirely dependent on the consent of this population. In other words, there is no new politics without articulation and the consent of the multitude; articulation and consent form the very basis of this new mode of politics.

*Consent and the state*
Alongside the founding of the state, a series of related entities come into being: the multitude, and the communication that is internal to it; the rule of law – “an understanding forged by the understanding of the many” (I.11.3, 60); and the six economic parts. The state and these entities represent, for Marsilius, a new and enhanced form of politics, in which political participation is both extended and intensified through election:

the unelected rule for the most part over less willing subjects, and govern them with laws that are less political... The elected, by contrast, rule over the more willing, and govern them with laws that are more political, i.e those that we said have been passed for common advantage (I.9.6, 48, emphasis added).

The importance of bringing the multitude, electoral politics and the rule of law into being is that this combination solidifies the state so that it can endure. This is the combination that secures the longevity of the state, and thus provides the conditions in which peace, security and tranquillity can be achieved:

the elected kind of principate is superior to the non-elected... this mode of institution is, in perfect communities, more enduring. For all the other modes must of necessity sometimes revert to this one, but not the other way round: for example, if linear succession should fail, or if that kind of principate should for some other reason become intolerable to the multitude because of the excessive evil of its regime, the multitude must then have recourse to election (I.9.7, 48).

It is worth noting that Marsilius expounds an expanded notion of peace – one that outlines the conditions in which peace can prosper. Such an expanded notion will also be found in Spinoza (see I.3), and is in contrast to “the absence of war” – the more limited notion later expressed by Hobbes. Peace, for Marsilius, is dependent upon two factors:
the mutual interaction of the citizens and the common exchange of their work, their mutual aid and help, and generally the power, unhindered from outside, to carry out both their own and the common tasks; and also their sharing in common conveniences and burdens in a measure appropriate to each (I.19.2, 128).

In order for peace to be established, the state enables communication between the parts. This allows the six parts to converse with each other, so that each part’s viewpoint is aired and understood by all the other parts. The institution of this internal communication enhances the long-term survival of the state. Referring to the six parts of the state, Marsilius insists: “it is in their action and perfect mutual intercommunication... that the tranquillity of the city consists” (I.5.1, 22). Marsilius uses his medical knowledge gained at Padua to draw an analogy between a fully functioning animal and a state in which such “perfect mutual intercommunication” exists:

the city is like a kind of animate or animal nature. For an animal which is in good condition in respect of its nature is composed of certain proportionate parts arranged in respect of each other, all communicating their actions between themselves and towards the whole; likewise too the city which is in a good condition and established in accordance with reason is made up of certain such parts (I.2.3, 12).

The establishment of this internal communication creates the conditions in which the best laws are proposed and instituted. It provides further benefits too. Due to the “audience and command of the multitude” in the framing of these laws, their participation inevitably results in a knowledge of these laws and, hence, their enforcement is considerably improved. The multitude knows the law and, therefore, acts within its bounds. In other words, laws that are articulated by the pars principans and then disseminated, discussed and voted on by the multitude will be better understood, and therefore easier to enforce:
any citizen will better observe a law that he seems to have imposed on himself... such is a law that has been passed as a result of an audience and command on the part of the universal multitude of citizens... every citizen would happily obey and accept a law passed as a result of an audience or consent on the part of all the multitude, even if it were less useful; in that with a law of this kind, each can be seen to have laid it upon himself (I.12.6, 70). 28

Within the state, the very existence of the six parts affects the conception of the common good. Due to the requirements of each of the parts, this notion shifts as the state develops. This shifting understanding of the state, or the state’s non-fixity, results in a greater role for plurality within the state. This is not a wholesale relativisation, as all the parts recognise that peace is the goal of politics – a recognition that is secured by reason – but it allows for a shifting understanding of the common good. The legislative process is deliberative, for Marsilius. Each ‘part’ is afforded the opportunity to air their views and concerns, and this process enables a richer understanding of the needs of the different parts of the polity to develop. This, in turn, results in improved legislation. This mobile account of sovereign power and the formation of consent developed by Marsilius is in keeping with contemporary understandings of the concept of hegemony. As Nederman argues:

Marsiglio is weakening the conditions of a conception of the common good. Where for Aristotle, the common good must be essentially the same good for all citizens, for Marsiglio the common good is filtered through the prism of multiple specialised dispositions, all of which contribute in particular and discrete ways to the realization of the public benefit. Consequently, Marsiglio’s notions of the public welfare and its construction are far more pluralistic than anything envisaged by Aristotle: community is defined not strictly by identity but rather difference within identity. Virtue, which is general, gives way to function, which is specialized. (Nederman 1995: 61)
Nederman’s argument in this quotation once again points to the three different inputs – will, class and reason – that operate in Marsilius’ account of the multitude. This is in contrast to the two factors – will and reason – he identifies as crucial for an understanding of Marsilius. He writes, “[c]onsent is precisely the agreement to limit the will in accordance with rational principles” (ibid.: 66). Nederman’s presentation of Marsilius’ “weakened conception of the common good” which is “filtered through the prism of multiple specialised dispositions” and that “community is defined not strictly by identity but rather difference within identity” suggests that consent in Marsilius is more nuanced and complex than Nederman’s analysis – which just stresses will and reason, neglecting the role of the economic parts – allows.

The continual polity
For Marsilius, the continual polity is inextricably connected with the maintenance of peace: each is the sign of the other. Peace and the continual polity are the goals of the multitude: the multitude is intimately linked to political institutions and the endurance of such organisation; it is internal to politics. The continual polity is explored through two mechanisms: the aim of the separation of powers; and, the role of political education.

Marsilius theorises the separation of powers in order to secure the continual polity. In his account, the legislator humanus is established to persevere; the pars principans, meanwhile, is subject to change. This is why Marsilius likens the state to the soul of a body, because for him the soul is eternal. Just as the soul is eternal, the state – that is the multitude or legislator humanus – is also eternal once instigated. It is the dynamism of the legislator humanus ensured by the dual role played by the will and the economic parts, coupled with the subordination of the pars principans to the legislator humanus, that provides a mobile form of
sovereign power. The only part that Marsilius explicitly considers in terms of change in Discourse I is the *pars principans*.\(^{29}\) Here, the *pars principans* is bound on two fronts. First, it must act within the law. If the law is contravened, then the *pars principans* is subject to correction as the law declares. In the second place, if an action is committed outside the boundaries of the law, but it is against the benefit of the state, then the *pars principans* is subject “to the sentence of the legislator” (I.18.4, 125).\(^{30}\)

The second feature of the continual polity to consider is political education, which Marsilius regards as crucial to the state’s survival. The improvement of political understanding is an important pillar in the state’s ability to endure. For Marsilius, effective knowledge leads to effective action and, ultimately, to effective decision-making. He considers knowledge to be cumulative, and an accumulation of knowledge to lead to a concomitant improvement in the state. It is no over-statement to claim that the development of an enhanced and widespread political knowledge is intimately connected to Marsilius’ politics *per se*. The wider distribution of learning and knowledge throughout society is vital for the formation of the best laws. The development of collective knowledge is better than restricting knowledge to the wise few. Referring to the understanding of the many, Marsilius says:

> the number of the less learned[‘s understanding] may be increased to the point where they can judge of these matters equally well or better than a few of the most learned. (I.13.4, 77)

For Marsilius, however, it was not just a case of lifting the level of understanding of all, but of prioritising the improvement of the education of the *vulgaris*. The *vulgaris* consists of three of the state’s six parts (agriculture, manufacture and finance) and is contrasted with the *honorabilitas* – those who performed the military, priestly and governmental functions.\(^{31}\) Marsilius introduces
this classification in order to reduce its significance. It is a classification that exists in its starkest form at the moment of the state’s foundation. Thereafter, Marsilius seeks to limit this divide through two mechanisms. First, the very experience of politics itself. As all adult indigenous males are politically active, they are all equally exposed to the debates within politics. This process serves to disproportionately raise the understanding of the vulgaris as against the honorabilitas thereby reducing the intellectual distinction between them. Next, in the Defensor minor, there is a further development where Marsilius proposes a precursor to affirmative action. Here, Marsilius indicates that the decision to restrain or remove the pars principans is best placed in the hands of the vulgaris: 

the power and authority to correct rulers who are negligent or irresponsible in performing their duties by restraining them through punishment of their persons or property belongs solely to the human legislator, as is demonstrated in Defensor pacis, Discourse I, chapters 15 and 18. And I say furthermore that if such correction pertains to some particular part or office of the civic body, then under no circumstances does it pertain to the priests, but instead to the men of prudence [prudentes] or learned teachers, indeed preferably to the workmen or craftsmen or the rest of the labourers [mechanicis] (1993: 2.7, 6; emphasis added).

iv. Conclusion
In summary, the multitude is the saviour of politics, for Marsilius. He assigns it the task of overturning the subordination of politics to religion. In so doing, he aims to salvage politics from its phase of monarchical passivity, and instigate an alternative time of republican activity. The introduction of the multitude signifies the reversal of these two weaknesses. Its arrival entails the extension and intensification of politics: extension in terms of the spread of politics to the indigenous adult male community; intensification in terms of the multitude’s constant vigilance over, and ratification of,
each and every law. The multitude for Marsilius, then, is both inclusive and active vis-à-vis prior political subjects. This account of the multitude ensures that it is intimately linked to the *polis*, its institutional structures, and their survival: the multitude’s primary task is the endurance of the state. In order to achieve this, consent is central to the new politics: only through articulation and the consent of the multitude can the continuation of the polity be guaranteed. Consent, articulation, political organisation and the multitude go hand-in-hand for Marsilius; they usher in a *mobile form of sovereign power*. In emphasising consent and inserting the multitude within sovereign power, Marsilius presents a different version of the multitude to how Hardt and Negri characterise the multitude at the outset of modernity. They insist that the multitude is opposed to sovereignty. As a result, Hardt and Negri are unable to forward an account of politics in which articulation and the consent of the multitude are central, as is the case with Marsilius.

In terms of its composition, the multitude in Marsilius is a complex political subject. This complexity, in turn, provides an internal dynamism to the state. This dynamism is secured by the three different levels that form the multitude – the household, the ‘part’ and the state – alongside three corresponding factors – the will, class, and reason. As such, “difference within unity” and “simple whole with complex parts” aptly describe Marsilius’ multitude, and connect it to a *mobile account of sovereign power*.

One final point concerning Marsilius’ account of politics and the multitude: they are at odds with his contemporary historical scene. Marsilius’ politics is entirely concerned with ‘what ought to be’, rather than describing ‘what is’ or, more importantly, formulating a bridge between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’. He never addresses how this historical scene can be transformed so that politics becomes a politics of consent and the multitude. There is no consideration of force or domination. These factors – force and
'what is' (and their relations to consent and 'what ought to be', respectively) are theorised in the thought of Machiavelli, to whom we now turn.
I.2 MACHIAVELLI

While Machiavelli and Marsilius are both republicans, their accounts of politics are worlds apart. Marsilius addresses ‘what ought to be’, avoids ‘what is’ and, by extension, fails to consider how to travel from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’. With Machiavelli, however, ‘what is’ and the movement from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’ become paramount.

Both advocate a clear commitment to the role of activity in politics, but they prioritise different subjects. As with Marsilius, the multitude features in Machiavelli’s thought but, for the Florentine, this political subject has a substantially reduced role to play. The multitude for Machiavelli has a different referent to the multitude in Marsilius. For Machiavelli, the multitude is an occasional, spontaneous and insurrectionary force. As such, it is an insubstantial political subject, incapable of performing the real tasks Machiavelli deems necessary to restore politics to the heights it last achieved during the Roman Empire. Machiavelli even conceives that his preferred political subject – the people – in its predicament in early sixteenth century Italy, is powerless to carry out this task. The unification of Italy and the formation of a nation-state, one strand of ‘what ought to be’ for Machiavelli, can only be inaugurated through the ingenuity and ruthlessness of a solitary figure. This solitary figure explains the function of The Prince in Machiavelli’s thought. An emergent prince would have to unite Italy, form a nation-state and, in so doing, quell fortuna and reinstate virtù across the Apennine peninsula.

On the realisation of an Italian state, Machiavelli envisions the new prince abandoning his solitude,¹ and becoming the people. The republican inverse of the monarchical task Machiavelli sets the prince is that, once the prince ends his solitary life, the people becomes the prince, and the recently formed Italian state assumes
a republican form. The Italian people are, initially, under the law but they accept this predicament only in order to become under and above the law as the state assumes a republican form. This mobile account of sovereign power is entirely at odds with the Hardt and Negri presentation of politics and political theory in Machiavelli and early modernity. They argue that this period should be understood through the key contest between sovereignty (which is rigid, static and closed) and democracy (which is fluid, mobile and open); or, to put this contest slightly differently, between the people and the multitude. They align Machiavelli with democracy and the multitude in this contest, whereas I argue in this chapter that Machiavelli forwards a mobile account of sovereign power and is an advocate of the people (albeit with a different formulation to Hobbes).

Machiavelli focuses intently on political institutions and forms of political organisation as a result of the enormity of the task he sets for modern politics: first prince, then people in order to establish a state that endures. This focus involves the extraction of the notion of consent that features in Marsilius’ thought, and the provision of a fuller, richer, more complex account of its role within politics. Machiavelli considers consent in relation to force or, to adopt his metaphor, the fox alongside the lion: force and consent can no longer be considered in isolation (as is the case with Marsilius), only in combination. It is Machiavelli’s development of the notion of consent, and his presentation of the lion-fox couplet, that serves as the inspiration for Gramsci to develop his theory of hegemony some four centuries later.² This serves as another factor that aligns early modern republican thought with the theoretical apparatus later developed by Gramsci and Laclau, and not with the detour taken by Hardt and Negri, through the concepts of immanence and the multitude.

Machiavelli is the theorist of the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’. Such an argument is at odds with the widespread and
popular interpretation of Machiavelli as a ‘Machiavellian’. The interpretation of Machiavelli as ‘Machiavellian’ categorises him as a realist, a political scientist, an immoralist or – at the very least – an amoralist. This interpretation is perhaps most fully developed by Croce, who views Machiavelli as introducing a clear demarcation between philosophy and ethics on the one hand, and politics on the other hand. The analysis of this chapter departs from Croce, by arguing that ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ become combined in Machiavelli. In other words, Machiavelli’s primary concern was in theorising the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’ and, as such, politics and philosophy/ethics are deeply entwined. This concern with the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’ is also central to Gramsci and his theory of hegemony.

The argument forwarded here is in line with other commentators on Machiavelli broadly within the Marxist tradition over the last century. Commentators include Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Benedetto Fontana and, in the last few years, Filippo Del Lucchese and Mikko Lahtinen. Antonio Negri is absent from this list, as his interpretation of Machiavelli in Insurgencies departs from this tradition on a number of key factors. The argument of this chapter is (supported by the analyses of Gramsci, Althusser, Fontana, Del Lucchese, and Lahtinen) that the preferred political subject of Machiavelli is the people. This presents substantive difficulties for the (Hardt and) Negri account of the multitude. In Insurgencies, Negri tacitly presents the preferred political subject of Machiavelli as the multitude, but never explicitly states as much because the textual evidence for such a claim is so threadbare. In Empire and Commonwealth, meanwhile, Hardt and Negri make this connection explicit: “in the Machiavellian project there is an ineluctable distance between the subject (the multitude) and the object (the Prince and the free state)” (Hardt & Negri 2000: 63). The role that the multitude and the people play in Machiavelli’s
political thought also indicate real problems with the Hardt and Negri presentation of these two political subjects. They claim that, at the outset of modernity, the key battle is conducted by Hobbes (as the advocate of the people) and Spinoza (as the advocate of the multitude). They claim, in addition, that a modern line of alternative thought can be traced from Machiavelli through Spinoza to Marx. The limited role Machiavelli accords to the multitude and his embrace of the people casts serious doubt on their presentation of the passage into modernity. It indicates that the people-multitude distinction is more complex than Hardt and Negri allow, and also that understandings of the multitude and the people vary in early modern thought.

This chapter has two sections. It begins with a close textual reading of Machiavelli’s deployment of the term the multitude. This enables a clear presentation of this political subject in his thought. It then moves on to an analysis of Machiavelli’s political project. This draws on: the relationship between Machiavelli’s ‘monarchical’ text, The Prince on the one hand, and the ‘republican’ texts, the Discourses and The Florentine Histories on the other; the manner in which Machiavelli relates philosophy to his account of politics; the role that other political subjects (the prince, the people) and core themes (conflict and activity) play within his thought; and his account of political institutions and forms of organisation, including the role of consent.

i. Moltitudine
Given Machiavelli’s centrality to political thought, it is surprising that so little attention is paid to the terminology he uses with respect to political subjects. Those commentaries that have tackled this theme do so only indirectly. This chapter explores the meaning and functions he attributes to different political subjects. This section focuses specifically on the role the moltitudine plays within
Machiavelli’s thought, and argues that it is an ever-present but only a minor actor. In short, the *moltitudine* is an occasional, spontaneous and insurrectionary force that emerges during periods of transition. As such, this *moltitudine* is absent from those less divisive and more tranquil moments of politics which, for Machiavelli, characterise the vast majority of the *chronos* of politics. These swathes of political time are, moreover, precisely what Machiavelli attempts to inaugurate through his political writings and activity. During his lifetime, Florence experienced four regime changes (the Medici up to 1494; Savonarola, 1494-98; the republic of 1498-1512; and the restoration of the Medici thereafter), and Machiavelli sought to escape from such instability. It follows that, due to its association with instability, Machiavelli doesn’t view the *moltitudine* in a favourable light: while a necessary though intermittent political subject, the *moltitudine* is not infused with virtù and, in fact, is incapable of it. It is the people, in contrast, who exercise virtù whereas the *moltitudine* is associated with fortuna. As with fortuna, the *moltitudine* is a wild and excessive force that Machiavelli disciplines through other political subjects – the people, the prince – that act with virtù. As Althusser writes, “in Machiavelli virtù is quintessentially the quality specific to the subjective conditions for the constitution of a state that endures” (Althusser 1999: 44). In other words, as the *moltitudine* is incapable of maintaining a state, it is devoid of virtù. Having said this, as the *moltitudine* is active – and active in this world, as opposed to contemplating some future life – and as their activity always attempts to bring into being an improved polity, Machiavelli does attribute certain positive features to the multitude.

The terminology Machiavelli uses for social and political subjects is complex. He starts from the general rule that each state has two basic groups within society, whose dispositions are summed up by the following quotation:
If we ask what it is the nobility are after and what it is the common people are after, it will be seen that in the former there is a great desire to dominate and in the latter merely the desire not to be dominated. Consequently the latter will be more keen on liberty (Machiavelli 1970: I.5, 116).

In this quotation, he uses the terms ‘nobili’ and ‘ignobili’ to designate these two basic social groups. Yet he deploys a plethora of other terms to name these two groups. These different names are largely generated by the local and historical conditions: “[j]ust as in other republics different classes go by different names, so in Venice the population is divided into ‘gentlemen’ [gentiluomini] and ‘commoners’ [popolari]” (ibid: I.55, 248). When discussing Rome and its empire, he uses the term ‘plebe’ widely, in keeping with many other histories and commentaries on this subject matter. The terms he uses to describe the lower orders include ‘pochi’, ‘moltitudine’, ‘universale’, ‘popolare’, ‘plebe’, ‘chi vuole acquistare’, ‘popolo’, ‘populi’, ‘gente’, ‘uomini’, ‘molti’, ‘communi’, ‘università’ and ‘popolare’. The aristocracy go by the following names: ‘grandi’, ‘ottimati’, ‘nobilità’, ‘chi vuole mantenere’, ‘gentiluomini’, ‘signori’, ‘potenti’, ‘capi’, ‘pochi’ and ‘patrizi’.

A general assumption in commentaries on Machiavelli is that all these terms are synonymous, and the different names merely reflect the peculiarities of the local and historical conditions to which they refer, as opposed to there being a substantial contrast between the various terms Machiavelli uses to classify the two basic groups within society. In Del Lucchese’s study of the multitude, for instance, he frequently uses the terms ‘people’ and ‘multitude’ interchangeably within the same sentence, as in the following example:

The most stable foundation for the prince’s power lies precisely in the people, in the same multitude that had traditionally been considered
a destabilizing element to be kept under control and subjugated to prevent them from doing harm (Del Lucchese 2009: 125).

The following comments – in the annotations of the current Penguin edition of the *Discourses* – by the original translator (Leslie Walker, who features first) and the editor (Bernard Crick, whose remarks follow directly on in parentheses) illustrate the difficulties translators experience with Machiavelli’s varying social and political terminology:

The terms ‘plebe’, ‘popolo’, ‘una moltitudine’ and ‘la moltitudine’ are used here as more or less synonymous. One might almost translate ‘the mob’. [Walker had translated ‘a crowd’ which is too neutral, although ‘mob’ is too pejorative. I prefer ‘masses’ (as he himself renders *moltitudine* in the next section); some shades of meaning are important: Machiavelli is really saying that ‘the masses can never become a people while they act like a mob’.] (Machiavelli 1970: I.57, 251).

Rather than treating these highlighted terms as synonyms, as Walker suggests above, Machiavelli uses *moltitudine* and *popolo* (and its associated terms, such as *populi* and *popolare*), with very different referents. This becomes apparent if – following Althusser – a *conjunctural analysis* is adopted. Althusser writes that “Machiavelli is the first theorist... if not to think the concept of conjuncture... then at least consistently... to think in the conjuncture” (Althusser 1999: 18). Such an analysis entails paying close attention to the circumstances in which Machiavelli invokes one particular political subject, alongside the changed circumstances when he shifts his terminology and mentions another political subject.

The above exchange between Walker and Crick points to a further point of confusion regarding English translations of Machiavelli’s terminology: different social terms in the Italian have been collapsed into one and rendered as a single term in the English. This is the case with translations into English of the term *moltitudine*. Walker generally translates this term as ‘crowd’.
Despite the imprecision of the translation into English of the term *moltitudine*, Walker’s rendering of the term as ‘the crowd’ does indicate the correct meaning that Machiavelli’s deployment of the term conveys, as will now be shown.

*Moltitudine* appears most regularly in those texts where Machiavelli considers broad sweeps of historical analysis, in the *Discourses* and *The Florentine Histories*. The use of the term is irregular in Machiavelli’s military text, *The Art of War*, and there are only two references to it in his more immediately political text, *The Prince*. The second usage in his most widely consulted work, nevertheless, is highly instructive:

Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus would not have been able to have their institutions respected a long time if they had been unarmed, as was the case in our time with Frà Girolamo Savonarola who came to grief with his new institutions when the crowd [*moltitudine*] started to lose faith in him, and he had no way of holding fast those who had believed or of forcing the incredulous to believe (Machiavelli 1961: VI, 20).  

In this passage, Machiavelli draws a distinction – a distinction that is recurrent throughout his work – between two types of leaders. On the one hand, there are those that endure: Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus. On the other hand, there are those whose leadership is brought to a closure by oppositional activity. Machiavelli invokes the multitude in this passage precisely at the moment when Savonarola’s grip over his subjects is challenged, and the continuation of the regime is called into question. In other words, the multitude is the social and political force that overthrows the regime that Savonarola – “the unarmed prophet” – is attempting to solidify. This characterisation of the multitude as an insurrectionary force in *The Prince* becomes more regular, more prominent and more thoroughly developed in the *Discourses* and the *Florentine Histories*. 
In the *Discourses*, Machiavelli uses the multitude as early as the second chapter of the first book, entitled ‘How many Kinds of States there are and of what Kind was that of Rome’. Here, Machiavelli draws on Polybius to provide an account of the six different forms of government – three benign (monarchy/principality, aristocracy, democracy), and their flawed counterparts (tyranny, oligarchy, ochlocracy/anarchy) – and their cyclical movement.\(^\text{14}\) He views history as a cyclical process wherein monarchy degenerates into tyranny which, in turn, inaugurates aristocracy and so on through oligarchy, democracy and ochlocracy. Mob rule creates the conditions for monarchy to return, thereby repeating the cycle, which continues to revolve. Machiavelli invokes the multitude precisely at a point of transition from one form of government to another:

> for tyranny gave rise to conspiracies and plots against princes, organized not by timid and weak men, but by men conspicuous for their liberality, magnanimity, wealth and ability, for such men could not stand the dishonourable life the prince was leading. The masses [*la moltitudine*], therefore, at the instigation of these powerful leaders, took up arms against the prince, and, when he had been liquidated, submitted to the authority of those whom they looked upon as their liberators (Machiavelli 1970: I.2, 107-108).

A little further on, when discussing the degeneration of oligarchy, Machiavelli refers to the multitude on a couple of occasions:

> for the masses [*moltitudine*], sick of their government, were ready to help anyone who had any sort of plan for attacking their rulers; and so there soon arose someone who with the aid of the masses [*moltitudine*] liquidated them (ibid.: I.2, 108).

From these passages, two further characteristics of the multitude in Machiavelli can be gleaned. First, the multitude is involved in the transition from a flawed form of government into a benign one: in the first passage, from tyranny to aristocracy; in the
second, from oligarchy to democracy. By contrast, Machiavelli never mentions the multitude when discussing the passage from good forms of government to bad. In this sense, then, Machiavelli casts the multitude in a positive light. Later, towards the end of the first book of the *Discourses*, he notes that this viewpoint represents a departure from prior accounts which overwhelmingly view the multitude negatively. Machiavelli begins chapter 58 of book I, entitled ‘The Masses [La Moltitudine] are more Knowing and more Constant than is a Prince’, as follows: “Nothing is more futile and more inconstant than are the masses [la moltitudine]. So says our author, Titus Livy, and so say all other historians” (ibid, I.58, 252, emphasis added). He then proceeds to acknowledge the significance of the rupture in thought that his rejection of this universal dismissal of the multitude entails:

I know not whether the view I am about to adopt will prove so hard to uphold and so full of difficulties that I shall have either shamefully to abandon it or laboriously maintain it; for I propose to defend a position which all writers attack... I claim, then, that for the failing for which writers blame the masses [la moltitudine], any body of men one cares to select may be blamed, and especially princes; for anyone who does not regulate his conduct by laws will make the same mistakes as the masses [la moltitudine] are guilty of (ibid.).

Alongside its role in activating an improved regime, Machiavelli’s reassessment of the multitude relates to its activity. Machiavelli believed that it is only through activity, through a reconnection with this world by significant sectors of society, that *virtù* can reassert itself and politics can return to prior highpoints, most notably during the Roman empire when the plebs became engaged in the political realm. While Machiavelli’s predecessors disparage the multitude as an unruly, disruptive, directionless mob that is antithetical to politics, Machiavelli urges that we think again. For him, the multitude’s activity is a sign of a return of the *vita activa* and, if this dynamism can be controlled and channelled
appropriately, then this points to the potential to revive the political realm. The multitude, for Machiavelli, take the first steps down the long road that leads to virtù and the reactivation of politics.

These first steps point to the second characteristic of the multitude indicated by Machiavelli’s first mentions of the term in I.2 of the Discourses: the first steps are all that the multitude can take. Thereafter, it has to be led down this long road. Machiavelli recognises the double-edged quality of the multitude: “while on the one hand there is nothing more terrible than an uncontrolled and headless multitude, on the other, there is nothing feebler” (ibid.: I.57, 251). The clearest endorsement of the necessity for a figure to rise up, control the multitude, and direct its activity is given by the opening of the title of chapter 44 of book I: ‘A Crowd [Una Moltitudine] is useless without a Head’. Machiavelli develops this theme further in chapters 54 and 57 of book I. While Hardt and Negri attempt to forward a politics conducted on the ‘plane of immanence’ and the multitude – and argue that Machiavelli is aligned with such a politics – this chapter heading stresses that Machiavelli rejected both, and sought to go beyond them. In contrast, he advocates a politics in which articulation is central. It is only through the intervention of an able articulator that the multitude’s energies can be channelled into a positive direction.

In chapter 54, entitled ‘How Great an Influence a Grave Man may have in restraining an Excited Crowd [Una Moltitudine Concitata]’, Machiavelli writes:

nothing is more suitable to restrain an excited crowd [una moltitudine concitata] than respect for some man of gravity and standing who in person confronts them.... This being so, a person who has command of an army or who finds himself in a city where a tumult has arisen should present himself before those involved with as much grace and dignity as he can muster (ibid.: I.54, 242).
In chapter 57, he explains that the multitude’s explosive activity cannot sustain itself on its own, and that alone their opposition to the authorities will be dissipated within a short time, allowing the authorities to reassert their rule:

For it should be easy to restore order, even though they [the multitude] have arms in their hands, provided you have some stronghold in which to seek refuge from their first onslaught, since, when their ardour cools off a little, and each sees the other turning back to go home, they begin to lose confidence and to look to their own safety either by taking fight or by coming to terms.

If, then, an excited crowd [una moltitudine] wants to avoid these dangers, it should at once make one of its members a leader so that he may correct this defect, keep the populace united, and look to its defence; as did the Roman plebs, when, after the death of Virginia they quitted Rome and for safety’s sake appointed twenty of their members as tribunes (ibid.: I.57, 251).

It is only by nominating an appropriate leader or, as was the case with the Roman plebs, by forming an appropriate institution that the opposition of the multitude can consolidate itself. But in this consolidation, in this moment of institutionalisation, the multitude ceases its existence. Virtù triumphs over fortuna and the multitude becomes ordered and disciplined around a leader or institution and their programme and, in so doing, abandons its activity as the multitude, and becomes something else. This ‘something else’ might be the plebs as in the Roman example that Machiavelli cites but most predominantly within his work it is the people. The appearance of a leader inaugurates a movement which results in the formation of a people, and these two political subjects – leader and people – thereafter engage in a dialectical exchange with one another. This exchange orients around precisely what form each of these two political subjects are to assume and, concomitantly, how the polity – and its institutional formations – is to be organised.15

This claim is supported by the manner in which Machiavelli shifts his terminology with regard to political subjects when
discussing the movement from a state of disorder to the consolidation of a polity and its stabilisation. In the above example Machiavelli not only highlights the centrality of the intervention of an articulator to instigate a new form of politics, but also points to the role of the articulator in challenging a situation of radical disorder. This is in line with Laclau’s position on the call for order within a situation of radical disorder. In chapter 58, Machiavelli begins by discussing a situation in which laws are absent, and then proceeds to consider another ordered situation in which laws are in operation. With this shift from one condition to another, Machiavelli also transforms the terms he uses for political subjects. He speaks of the multitude in the first situation, and the people in the second. This passage exemplifies how Machiavelli views this shift:

anyone who does not regulate his conduct by laws will make the same mistakes as the masses [la moltitudine sciolta] are guilty of. This is easily seen, for there are and have been any number of princes, but of good and wise ones there have been but few... for, should there be masses [una moltitudine] regulated by laws in the same way as they [good princes] are, there will be found in them the same goodness as we find in kings, and it will be seen that they neither ‘arrogantly dominate nor servilely obey’. Such was the Roman populace [popolo romano] which, so long as the republic remained uncorrupt, was never servilely obsequious, nor yet did it ever dominate with arrogance; on the contrary it had its own institutions and magistrates and honourably kept its own place (ibid.: I.58, 252-253).

A similar shift in terminology regarding political subjects can be found in chapter 16 of the first discourse, which specifically deals with the transition from a negative form of polity to a positive one.16

In Florentine Histories, Machiavelli retains the specific referent for the multitude developed in the Discourses. He invokes the multitude precisely at those moments of instability for a regime. He uses the term not merely during moments of transition, but also in those moments of instability, when insurrection occurs but fails to
To conclude, I want to dwell briefly on the multitude’s relation with *bene comune*, the common good. Fontana argues that the prince and the multitude look to their own private and particular interests, whereas the people look to the common good. While in agreement with Fontana on the vast majority of issues, this presentation of the multitude requires revision. It is worth quoting Fontana at length, not only to illustrate where this revision is
required, but also to demonstrate the substantial concord in our
treatments of Machiavelli:

Machiavelli makes a specific and direct connection between the 
moltitudine sciolta and the prince who looks to the private and
particular interest: in both cases, the vivere politico, as Machiavelli
understands it, is lacking. In the first instance, the masses viewed as
an “undisciplined multitude” means that the people as a collective
and purposive subject does not exist; the mass is a mere
aggregation or collection of individuals who look to their own private
interest in opposition to that of others... Such a concept of ruling
necessarily implies that the transformation of the masses into a
collective subject is at the same time the transformation of the ruler
into one who functions within a public space defined by the bene
comune; similarly, the transformation of a ruler into a “new prince”
who rules according to the new Machiavellian knowledge is
simultaneously the transformation of the moltitudine sciolta into a
populo... The common element – which is also found in the minor
political works – is the nature and role of the masses, or rather, the
problem regarding the process whereby the moltitudine or the
universale becomes the populo (Fontana 1993: 129).

While Fontana is correct to state that the multitude lacks the vivere
politico, he is wrong to suggest that it acts according to its own
private and particular interest. For Machiavelli, the multitude cannot
forge and articulate the bene comune but it can recognise its
disintegration. The multitude’s activity is not provoked by its private
and particular interest, but rather by the breakdown of the common
good (although it is never capable of constructing the bene
comune). Machiavelli writes that “[t]he brutalities of the masses [la
moltitudine] are directed against those whom they suspect of
conspiring against the common good” (Machiavelli 1970: I.58, 257).
When this quotation is considered alongside several of the themes
developed in this chapter – the multitude as a necessary and active
political force, Machiavelli’s departure from all preceding accounts
that cast the multitude in a negative light – then the multitude’s
connection with the common good is far closer than Fontana allows.
Machiavelli’s claim that the multitude cannot articulate the common
good, but can recognise it once articulated, closely parallels the
distinction that Marsilius draws between the multitude’s inability to propose laws and their ability to consider them once proposed. It also points to the centrality of *articulation* in Machiavelli’s account of politics, and the importance of an articulator defending or constructing the common good in its formation of the people. For both, the articulator of the common good channels the multitude (in the case of Marsilius) or the people (in the case of Machiavelli) in its understanding of the common good.

Other themes that are raised in the above quotation from Fontana – the role of the prince, the transformation of the multitude into a people and the operation of consent – are developed in the next section, which considers wider issues in Machiavelli’s politics and philosophy.

**ii. Machiavelli’s project**

What are Machiavelli’s political aims? The answer to this question casts additional light on how Machiavelli regards the multitude. In line with Althusser, Gramsci, Fontana and Lahtinen, I argue that his goals are national unification, republicanism, a state that endures, and that his preferred political subject is the people (although this subject is only capable of maintaining a national state, not its establishment). The multitude, in other words, only has a minor role to play for Machiavelli. This places into question two claims made by Hardt and Negri: that the early modern period should be understood through the prism of the contest between the multitude and the people; and that the case for the multitude was developed by ‘altermodern’ theorists (including Machiavelli and Spinoza). The argument first considers the relation between Machiavelli’s key texts briefly, then elaborates recent developments related to Machiavelli’s philosophy, before focusing on the role he assigns to the prince and the people – which he develops alongside the categories of conflict and activity – and, finally, through an analysis
of two core aspects in Machiavelli: consent (and force), and forms of political organisation.

Machiavelli’s politics is frequently considered through his two texts of greatest renown, *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. The former is typically viewed as Machiavelli’s endorsement of princely, monarchical or even tyrannical rule, pursued through numerous ‘Machiavellian’ techniques, demonstrating the incursion of realism and immorality into the political realm at the expense of ethics. The latter, by contrast, exemplifies a substantially different Machiavelli. This is Machiavelli as a republican – some even go as far as to classify him as a democrat\(^\text{18}\) – whose concern is to restore glory and virtù to the political realm.\(^\text{19}\) The argument in this section rejects considering the *Prince-Discourses* conundrum as an ‘either/or’ question. It maintains that ‘both/and’ is not even a sufficient response, but rather, ‘first/then’. That is to say, Machiavelli is a republican and advocate of the people, but he views them as incapable of carrying out the most pressing aim of politics in early sixteenth century Italy: namely, national unification. Only an outstanding new prince is capable of this task. But once this has been fulfilled, the new prince’s next assignment is to descend from the dizzy heights of office and become the people: this is the becoming-people of the prince. The becoming-prince of the people is the movement taking place on the other side of this arrangement.\(^\text{20}\) These movements consolidate and secure the nascent, republican Italian state, enabling it to endure. To put this slightly differently, Machiavelli elaborates a *mobile account of sovereign power*. Here, the people are placed *under the law* of the prince, on the condition that the prince uses this power to develop a republican form of politics, through the double movement of the ‘becoming-people of the prince’ and the ‘becoming-prince of the people’. With this move, the people become at one and the same time *under and above the law.*
Louis Althusser has made a substantial contribution towards our understanding of the philosophy of Machiavelli. Althusser proceeds by isolating four different philosophical accounts of history that feature in Machiavelli. Althusser describes the first three as 'theses', and the fourth as Machiavelli’s ‘position’. The first thesis declares that nature is immutable: the world – and, by extension, humanity – does not change. The second thesis is the precise opposite of the first: the world is in flux, it is in constant motion and humans are also defined by this mutability. Both of these theses can be found in the preface to Book II of the Discourses:

[Second thesis:] since human affairs are ever in a state of flux, they move either upwards or downwards.

[First thesis:] When I reflect that it is in this way that events pursue their course it seems to me that the world has always been in the same condition, and that in it there has been just as much good as there is evil (Machiavelli 1970: II.preface, 266).

The contradiction between the first and second theses requires a solution, which is provided dialectically by the third thesis, which synthesises the first and second. The third thesis can be found in the opening of the Discourses and is inspired by Polybius (and, in turn, Aristotle): it is the cyclical account of history. The third thesis insists that human affairs can be understood through a circle that constantly revolves and eternally returns. It is evident from Machiavelli’s analyses that quattrocento and cinquecento Italy is trapped within the conditions of the second (flux) and third (cyclical) theses – and, as regards the latter, within a cycle of the flawed forms of government (tyranny, oligarchy and anarchy/ochlocracy).

This brings us to the fourth thesis or, more accurately, what Althusser describes as Machiavelli’s position. Just as the first and second thesis form a couplet, so do the third and fourth thesis.
Whereas Aristotle and Polybius consider there to be three positive and three negative forms of government, Machiavelli departs from this script. For him, rather, they are all bad: the bad are flawed on account of being flawed à la Aristotle and Polybius; while the good are bad on account of being brief – monarchy, aristocracy and democracy have proved to be bad because they have failed to take hold. A response to this is, precisely, the goal Machiavelli sets politics in late medieval Italy: a state that endures. This is the point where the fourth thesis – or Machiavelli’s position – rests upon, but is opposed to, the third. Machiavelli’s position is to break the cycle, and inaugurate a state that endures.\textsuperscript{24} Althusser writes of Machiavelli’s position:

In this position there is a positive space, a vacuum, a leap into the theoretical void, an anticipation. There comes a moment when Machiavelli can no longer ‘gamble on’ classical theory, or play it off against another, to open up his own space: he must leap into the void... As far as possible, he relies on what he has previously asserted in his three theses; he retains everything they provide as so many conditions, and tightens them up as much as he can. But this is in order to take the distance that is indispensable if he is to set out alone, on the ‘untrodden path’ he opens up (Althusser 1999: 42).

The ‘untrodden path’ to which Althusser refers is a metaphor that is repeated throughout Machiavelli’s work, but is best expressed in the preface to Book I of the Discourses: “for the common benefit of all, I have decided to enter upon a new way, as yet untrodden by anyone else” (Machiavelli 1970: I.preface, 97).

This ‘new way’, this ‘untrodden path’, this alternative route aims to break the cycle of fortuna (the multitude and/or the aristocracy) and restore virtù (the people) to civic affairs:

I assert once again as a truth to which history as a whole bears witness that men may second their fortune, but cannot oppose it; that they may weave its warp, but cannot break it. Yet they should never give up, because there is always hope, though they know not the end and move towards it along roads which cross one another
and as yet are unexplored; and since there is hope, they should not despair, no matter what fortune brings or in what travail they find themselves (ibid.: II.29, 372).

For where men have but little virtue, fortune makes a great display of its power; and, since fortune changes, republics and governments frequently change; and will go on changing till someone comes along, so imbued with the love of antiquity that he regulates things in such fashion that fortune does not every time the sun turns round get a chance of showing what it can do (ibid.: II.30, 375-6).

This restoration of virtù does not entail the cessation of fortuna – they are not in a zero-sum relationship – but involves the possibility of the former to some extent controlling the latter, rather than being entirely at its mercy.

Turning to the question of Machiavelli’s ‘realism’, Croce is perhaps the best exponent of the argument that Machiavelli established a clear demarcation between politics on the one hand and philosophy and ethics on the other (Croce, 1946). This ‘realist’ interpretation of Machiavelli views him as initiating a new approach that subordinates philosophy and ethics to politics, introduces science and positivism to the study of human affairs, unleashes political science and ‘the autonomy of the political’ through the elimination of ethics and, ultimately, leads to the portrayal of Machiavelli as the ‘Machiavellian’ par excellence – as scheming, manipulative, power-hungry: at best amoral, at worst evil. Lahtinen casts considerable light on this topic in his consideration of Althusser’s study of Machiavelli. For Lahtinen, Machiavelli is a politician – or more precisely an active politician, ‘a man of action’ – in contrast to a philosopher, an historian, and a natural scientist. A philosopher, for Lahtinen, views things (or attempts to view things) from the outside, from a universal perspective. The historian’s viewpoint, meanwhile, is post-festum, that is after the event – and in this sense, it is also from the ‘outside’. The politician, in contrast to the philosopher and the
historian, is immersed in the event itself; he views things from the inside:

In the case of the man of action, the situation is different. This is due to the fact that he is and wants to be a party in the case he studies... Unlike the natural scientist, the man of action does not aim to minimise his own influence in the course of events but, on the contrary to maximise it, or, at least, to increase it. In other words, he is both the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ of his own case; both the ‘cause’ and the ‘effect’ (Lahtinen 2009: 163).

Lahtinen’s presentation here – which itself is inspired by and/or in line with Gramsci,29 Althusser and Fontana – indicates a response to how Machiavelli broke with the concerns of prior political philosophy, with special reference to the relation between ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’. Croce and the realist interpretation characterise Machiavelli as purely concerned with ‘what is’, that is entirely dismissive of those questions that relate to ‘what ought to be’. This interpretation relies upon famous passages, such as the following from The Prince:

I have thought it proper to represent things as they are in a real truth, rather than as they are imagined. Many have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done moves towards self-destruction rather than self-preservation (Machiavelli 1961: XV, 49).

Yet Croce’s position is compromised by three factors. The first involves a number of passages that appear to contradict the above, such as: “men in general are as much affected by what a thing appears to be as by what it is, indeed they are frequently influenced more by appearances than by the reality” (Machiavelli 1970: I.25, 175).30 The second factor relates to Machiavelli’s insistence that there are two different dispositions in every city: those that want to dominate, and those that don’t want to be dominated. It is
reasonable to infer that politics will be understood differently by these different dispositions. The third factor is that the ‘what ought to be’ features prominently in Machiavelli. Granted this ‘what ought to be’ is posed differently to standard approaches to this question, and Machiavelli provides a ‘political’ response as opposed to a traditionally ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ one. But it undoubtedly features in his work, whether it is the exhortation to national unity contained in the final chapter of *The Prince*, or the preference for republican over monarchical rule that is frequently outlined in *The Discourses* and *The Florentine Histories*. In other words, Machiavelli didn’t reject the ‘what ought to be’ in favour of the ‘what is’, but considered them together in order to depict the path from the ‘what is’ to the ‘what ought to be’. The metaphor of the path or road that recurs throughout his works is invoked precisely because of such concerns, and this metaphor serves as an appropriate entry-point to consider Machiavelli’s account of two further political subjects: the prince and the people.

Machiavelli sets three goals for politics in the context of the fragmentation of city-states in *cinquecento* Italy. National unification, republicanism and a state that endures constitute Machiavelli’s ‘what ought to be’. It was only through the formation of a national state, and its subsequent transformation into a republican regime, that the final goal – a state that endures – could be brought about. Only a prince could make this first step, and only a people could take the second. First nation, then republic. First prince, then people. This is the succession that ensures a state that endures.\(^{31}\) To use Balibar’s antinomy, the people move from being *under the law* during the stage of the prince, and become *above and under the law* with the republican turn. This approach to a certain extent resolves the tension between those who portray Machiavelli as a monarchist (or even as a proponent of tyrannical rule) and typically stress passages from *The Prince*, and those who
portray Machiavelli as a republican (or even as a democrat), and typically stress passages from *The Discourses*. How to portray Machiavelli, thus, shifts from an either/or question, rejects a both/and response as an alternative and, instead, proposes a first/then answer. To put this slightly differently, Machiavelli elaborates a *mobile account of sovereign power*.

The necessity that the prince take the first steps down the route to Machiavelli’s ‘what ought to be’ results from two factors. In the first place, the parlous state of the raw materials of politics: Italy is fragmented into isolated territorial units in which the nobility hold sway, the people are pacified and foreign forces invade regularly. The outcome is that *virtù*, glory and the common good are conspicuous by their absence. In the second place, national unification and the formation of an Italian state is a task too enormous for a passive, fragmented Italian people to achieve. He writes, “the many are incompetent to draw up a constitution since diversity of opinion will prevent them from discovering how best to do it” (ibid.: I.9, 132). In other words, the “many” – that is, the multitude – cannot inaugurate a new beginning and draft a new constitution. But, Machiavelli immediately adds the following: “yet when they realize it has been done, they will not agree to abandon it” (ibid.). That is, a new constitution and a new understanding of the *bene commune* have to be articulated by an outstanding politician. Once this has been achieved, the newly formed people will rally around this new articulation:

Though but one person suffices for the purpose of organization, what he has organized will not last long if it continues to rest on the shoulders of one man, but may well last if many remain in charge and many look to its maintenance (ibid.).
The dissemination and acceptance of this new articulation, in other words, is pivotal to its capacity to endure: unless it is understood and accepted by the people, it will fail to grip.

Machiavelli insists that it is a constant general\(^{22}\) in most situations that a leader is required to establish a republic, as is evidenced by chapter 9 of book I of *The Discourses*, entitled ‘That it is necessary to be the Sole Authority if one would constitute a Republic afresh or would reform it thoroughly of its Ancient Institutions’. In this chapter, he writes:

> one should take it as a general rule that rarely, if ever, does it happen that a state, whether it be a republic or a kingdom, is either well-ordered at the outset or radically transformed vis-à-vis its old institutions unless this be done by one person... Wherefore the prudent organizer of a state whose intention is to govern not in his own interests but for the common good... should contrive to be alone in his authority (ibid.: I.9, 132).\(^{33}\)

The necessity of such a prince emerging is even more the case within the context of *cinquecento* Italy – a context in which the *signori di castella* (lords who possess castles) hold power, the people are passive, and Italy is surrounded by emergent (and, often, invasive) national powers. For Machiavelli, only a new prince (as opposed to an extant prince in one of Italy’s regions) is capable of ushering in the new order of national unity. As Machiavelli laments in the final chapter of *The Prince*, Cesare Borgia was bold enough to attempt such a task but even he was struck down by *fortuna*:

> I asked myself whether in present-day Italy the times were propitious to honour a new prince, and whether the circumstances existed here which would make it possible for a prudent and capable man to introduce a new order, bringing honour to himself and prosperity to all the Italians. Well, I believe that so many things conspire to favour a new prince, that I cannot imagine there ever was a time more suitable than the present... Italy had to be brought to her present extremity... leaderless, lawless, crushed, despoiled, torn, overrun; she had to have endured every kind of desolation.
And although before now there was a man in whom some spark seemed to show that he was ordained by God to redeem the country, none the less it was seen how afterwards, at the very height of his career, he was rejected by fortune. So now, left lifeless, Italy is waiting to see who can be the one to heal her wounds... and cleanse those sores which have now been festering for so long. See how Italy beseeches God to send someone to save her from those barbarous cruelties and outrages; see how eager and willing the country is to follow a banner, if only someone will raise it... Now, in Italy the opportunities are not wanting for thorough reorganization. Here we would find greater prowess among those who follow, were it not lacking among the leaders (Machiavelli 1961: XXVI, 82-84).

In order to carry out this enormous task – a new prince in a new principality – this new prince must be alone. This loneliness, in Althusser’s phrase,\textsuperscript{34} refers to the solitude of the prince – a phrase applicable not only to this new prince, but also to Machiavelli in urging into being this new prince with his new modes and orders, in short, a new form of politics:

For, to found a new state, says Machiavelli, one must ‘be alone’; one must be alone to forge the armed forces indispensable for any politics, alone to issue the first laws, alone to lay and secure the ‘foundations’ (Althusser 1999: 120).

To which we might also add, to articulate this new vision to the people. The necessity of the new prince in this conjuncture, for Machiavelli, requires that he becomes an ‘enlightened’ ruler, exclusively interpreting, articulating and establishing the common good to the people – who, at this stage, are incapable of knowing what constitutes their own best interests. As Lahtinen indicates, both Gramsci and Althusser emphasise that:

The historical situation on the Apennine peninsula was such that a move towards the collective moment of the republic, and the collective will it required, was not possible. Before this could happen, it was necessary to go through the ‘moment of solitude’ of the new prince... In other words, the ‘organisation’ or thorough ‘reformation’ of a republic based on the law necessarily requires as a form of transition an ‘enlightened prince’ (Lahtinen 2009: 205).
Because this new principality is based upon the people (that is, against the nobility), the prince needs to order the new state appropriately. This involves the establishment of the rule of law and suitable institutions on the one hand, and the formation of a collective will on the other hand. This formation of a collective will induces the becoming-people of the prince and the becoming-prince of the people, as the principality transforms itself into a republic. It also indicates that the people must accept a transitional period in which they are *under the law* during the princely period, before the transition to the republic, in which they are at one and the same time *above and under the law*. This dynamic process indicates one of two ways in which Machiavelli’s people differs from the people in Hobbes. The inherent dynamism within Machiavelli’s politics means that his people is not a fixed entity formed into a single body – as in the frontispiece of *Leviathan* – but, rather, one that is fluid and amorphous in form. He provides a mobile account of the people, and as the people are sovereign, sovereignty itself is also mobile: *sovereignty* becomes *sovereign power*. The second difference is that Machiavelli’s people is not One – constituting the entirety of society, as in Hobbes – but one of the two basic dispositions within society: the people and the nobility or, better still, the people *against* the nobility. Once again, this serves to demonstrate that in early modernity there was far wider contestation over terms relating to political subjects than Hardt and Negri allow when they assert that the core battle at the outset of modernity was between the multitude and the people. Machiavelli not only confers different meanings on these political subjects, but also portrays a different battle: the people versus the nobles (as opposed to the people versus the multitude).

It was established in the earlier consideration of the multitude that, for Machiavelli, once a ruler appears in front of a multitude and channels its activity through articulation, this force abandons its
being as multitude and treads the first steps towards its formation as a people. Through a series of developments – the formation of a collective will, the rule of law, the establishment of political structures and related institutions such as the army – the people becomes transformed (and transforms itself), so that it understands the bene comune, and thereafter defends it, and applies this understanding to those events that emerge. Although the new prince possesses virtù and brings glory, Machiavelli tends to understand these terms in the collective sense: virtù proper can only exist when spread throughout the community and this, in turn, produces glory. Reflecting on his exemplar case, the glory of Rome, Machiavelli insists:

but most marvellous of all is to observe the greatness which Rome attained after freeing itself from its kings. The reason is easy to understand; for it is not the well-being of individuals which makes cities great, but the well-being of the community; and it is beyond question that it is only in republics that the common good is looked to properly in that all that promotes it is carried out (Machiavelli 1970: II.2, 275).

The bene comune is bound up with the ability of the rule of law to sustain itself, adapting itself to changing circumstances wherever appropriate. Here, once again, the people ensure the endurance of the state, the promotion of the common good and the prolongation of the rule of law precisely because they have respect for the law – far more so than the prince or the nobles (or, indeed, the multitude): “If princes are superior to populaces in drawing up laws, codes of civic life, statutes and new institutions, the populace is so superior in sustaining what has been instituted” (ibid.: I.58, 256). This respect for the law increases with the becoming-prince of the people (which is another way of saying the becoming-law of the people). In this respect, the people will know the law because they draft, discuss, amend and implement it – in much the same way
that Marsilius envisages the multitude or the *legislator humanus* ratifying the law, as was seen in I.1. This becoming-law of the people is a further illustration of the people being at once and the same time *above and under the law*.

The notion of the people that Machiavelli develops departs from those pejorative accounts – Livy, for example – that treat the people as passive, inert, lazy and immoral. For Machiavelli, the people when activated are the only political subject capable of spreading and protecting *virtù*. As Fontana writes:

Machiavelli the man of action, who creates an “active and operating politics” (*politica attiva e operante*), whose knowledge is the embodiment of the people – not of a people envisioned as a static, passive “mass”, but of a people that is a constantly becoming subject, a hegemonic force that initiates and carries forward a moral and intellectual reform that lays the basis for the *democrazia cittadina* (Fontana 1993: 73).

And again:

In effect the people and the collective will that defines the people as a determinate political entity are both the subject and object of Machiavelli’s *principe nuovo*: they are the object because the new prince finds them in a divided and atomistic condition that must be overcome; and they are the subject because, through the educational and hegemonic activity of the prince, they become the conscious agents that forge a new political and historical movement... whose goal is the transformation of Italian society into a superior sociopolitical and sociocultural order (ibid.: 146-7).

Machiavelli’s embrace of the people goes hand-in-hand with his insertion of conflict into political philosophy. For Del Lucchese, “[i]t is this conflictualist theory of politics that constitutes the Machiavellian revolution in the history of political thought” (Del Lucchese 2009: 83). 36 Although this theme runs throughout Machiavelli’s work, there are, nevertheless, striking examples. In the preface to the *Florentine Histories*, he contrasts his methodology with that pursued by the two most recent historians of
Florence, Bruni and Bracciolini: whereas they focus on external conflict (or foreign affairs) and ignore internal conflict, his text concentrates on both.\textsuperscript{37} Within this text, there is the famous example of the i Ciompi wool-makers, whose shocking activity Machiavelli delights in recounting. There is the chapter in the *Discourses* entitled ‘That Discord between the Plebs and the Senate of Rome made this Republic both Free and Powerful’ where he insists – contrary to all prior accounts – that the conflict between the nobles and the plebs was not the cause of its downfall but precisely what made Rome great.\textsuperscript{38} Then there is the claim in *The Prince*:

These two different dispositions are found in every city; and the people are anxious not to be dominated or oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles are out to dominate and oppress the people (Machiavelli 1961: IX, 31).

Two things stand out in this quotation. In the first place, the people do not want to turn the tables on the nobles and dominate and oppress them. They merely want to end their own domination and oppression and, in doing so, attempt to inaugurate a form of organisation in which these phenomena are minimised. In the second place, Machiavelli’s use of the term disposition indicates that he is not referring to fixed social types within a structure, but merely that two different worldviews exist within that structure. It is the interplay between these two different worldviews – and the quality of their articulation – that will determine the proportion of the two dispositions, and the extent to which they are involved in politics. The fluidity of social space that this implies helps to explain the sheer range of terms Machiavelli deploys when discussing political subjects. If ever there was any doubt as to where Machiavelli stands within this conflict, the following passage appears conclusive:
The term ‘gentry’ [gentiluomini] is used of those who live in idleness on the abundant revenue derived from their estates, without having anything to do either with their cultivation or with other forms of labour essential to life. Such men are a pest in any republic and in any province; but still more pernicious are those who, in addition to the aforesaid revenues, have castles under their command and subjects who are under their obedience… for men born in such conditions are entirely imical to any form of civic government (Machiavelli 1970: I.55, 245-246).

In order for the people to resist the disposition that seeks to dominate and oppress them, Machiavelli urges that they become politically active, and channel that activity appropriately. Without channelled activity, they are condemned to repeat and perpetuate their misery and misfortune.39 As Del Lucchese writes:

Fortune and order, fortune and virtue, are not completely independent variables: to change the course of one, you have to act through the other. Actions must be changed in order to combat the changing times… Machiavelli’s words are an out-and-out exhortation to action: you cannot sit still and simply observe the changing times; you need to act to avoid being crushed by them. This theme runs throughout his works … However [it] is most fully embodied in the figure of The Prince (Del Lucchese 2009: 142).

Activity, however, was conspicuous by its absence in the cinquecento Apennine peninsula. It was rather passivity that was widespread, and Machiavelli identified Christianity’s focus on another, distant world – the after-life – as the chief cause of this condition:

Our religion [Christianity] has glorified humble and contemplative men, rather than men of action. It has assigned as man’s highest good humility, abnegation, and contempt for mundane things, whereas the other [paganism] identified it with magnanimity, bodily strength, and everything else that conduces to make men very bold. And, if our religion demands that in you there be strength, what it asks for is strength to suffer rather than strength to do bold things. This pattern of life, therefore, appears to have made the world weak, and to have handed it over as a prey to the wicked, who run it successfully and securely since they are well aware that the
generality of men, with paradise for their goal, consider how best to
bear, rather than how best to avenge, their injuries (Machiavelli
1970: II.2, 278).

Machiavelli sought to channel the activity through two prominent
aspects of his thought – consent and political institutions. A
consideration of these concludes this chapter.

In terms of consent, Machiavelli develops this concept – that
was presented in isolation by Marsilius of Padua (see I.1) – and this,
in turn, serves as the starting-point for Gramsci’s theorisation of
hegemony (see II.2). Alongside force, consent features as one of
the two arms available to political leaders. This is developed in the
widely recounted chapter XVIII of The Prince, through the metaphor
of the lion and the fox. Most commentators who portray
Machiavelli as a *Machiavellian* stress the priority of the former over
the latter. This portrayal is problematic for two reasons. In the first
place, the lion and fox metaphor follows on from a discussion of
Chiron the centaur – half-man, half-horse – which, in turn, is
preceded by the following comment, “there are two ways of
fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the
second to beasts” (Machiavelli 1961: XVIII, 56). In other words, the
lion and the fox combined constitute only half of the requirements
for leadership – that is, individually, they each constitute a quarter.
The law constitutes the remaining half. And we have just seen that,
with the movement towards a republic – or, the becoming-prince of
the people – there is a concomitant shift to the becoming-law of the
people. Machiavelli stresses that it is the people – and not the
prince, and most certainly not the nobility – who respect the law,
and this respect represents their consenting to the law. It is also
worth noting that when leaders adopt the persona of the lion, this is
precisely the result of a decision undertaken through the persona of
the fox. As Lahtinen argues:
the lion frightens off wolves and the fox recognises the traps. As Machiavelli states, “Those who simply act like lions don’t understand the point...” According to Althusser, this... means... that the instinct of the fox must guide the prince whether he acts as a beast or a human. From this follows that ‘fox-likeness’ is defined as the most important characteristic of the prince. If the prince does not have the instincts of a fox, he will not know when to act as a good person and when to act like a violent beast (Lahtinen 2009: 188).41

The blind and repeated exercise of force fails to endear a prince to the populace at large and, ultimately, leads to his downfall. This is why Machiavelli urges that a prince should use force decisively – “once for all” – at the outset of a regime:

We can say that cruelty is used well (if it is permissible to talk in this way of what is evil) when it is employed once for all, and one’s safety depends on it, and then it is not persisted in but as far as possible turned to the good of one’s subjects. Cruelty badly used is that which, although infrequent to start with, as time goes on, rather than disappearing, grows in intensity. Those who use the first method can... somewhat enhance their position... the others cannot possibly stay in power (Machiavelli 1961: VIII, 30).

Machiavelli also distinguishes between glory and power in order to defend the former against the latter: “Yet it cannot be called prowess to kill fellow-citizens, to betray friends, to be treacherous, pitiless, irreligious. These ways can win a prince power but not glory” (ibid.: VIII, 28). This once again points to Machiavelli privileging consent, as established by Fontana. He argues that, in his writings on consent, Machiavelli provides an ‘anticipation’ or ‘prefiguration’ of hegemony that Gramsci bases his theorisation of the concept upon. Fontana writes that the purpose of his study is:

... to redirect the analysis of Gramsci and Machiavelli into an inquiry into the relation between Machiavelli’s political thought and Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as the unity of knowledge and action, ethics and politics (Fontana 1993: 5).

The second reason to question accounts that privilege the lion over the fox is that Machiavelli does not regard these two leadership
qualities as discrete, but insists they overlap with one another. With this crossover, more often than not a domestication of the lion occurs, rather than the becoming-feral of the fox. The best illustration of this intersection is provided by the military. The army is the most lion-like of institutions – or, in Althusser’s terms, the most repressive of the Repressive State Apparatuses. But it also serves fox-like functions. When considering Machiavelli, Althusser writes:

the army, its constitution, formation and utilization, must be considered predominantly from the viewpoint of politics... Machiavelli is the first conscious, explicit and consistent theorist of the primacy of the political over the military in military matters themselves (Althusser 1999: 83).

In the first place, its mere presence ensures that citizens or subjects are awestruck by the state. Next, Machiavelli utterly rejects the recent use of mercenaries throughout the Apennine peninsula, as “they have led Italy into slavery and ignominy” (Machiavelli 1961: XII, 43). It is not merely, however, that mercenaries have negative consequences for a state; it is also that native troops have positive effects. They will fight more passionately for their people. The provision of employment for subjects or citizens – as opposed to outsiders – forges a connection between the people and the state. This is most obviously developed by the armed forces themselves, but it is also felt more widely among the people:

by arming your subjects you arm yourself; those who remain suspect become loyal, and those who were loyal not only remain so but are changed from being merely your subjects to being your partisans (ibid.: XX, 68).

This emerging reciprocal loyalty between the people and the state is also a device to prevent members of the nobility from creating
disunity within the people, and plotting to overthrow the state: “a republic which has its own citizen army is far less likely to be subjugated by one of its own citizens than a republic whose forces are not its own” (ibid.: XII, 40). The formation of the military, thus, is the precondition for the formation of the state which, in turn, unifies the nation, thereby taking a crucial step in the development of the people as a loyal and active force. Once the military has been secured, the prince can turn his attention to laws; the existence of the military enables this move and, thereafter, the processes of the becoming-prince of the people and the becoming-law of the people begin to take hold:

The main foundations of every state... are good laws and good arms; and because you cannot have good laws without good arms, and where there are good arms, good laws inevitably follow (ibid.: XII, 39).

The focus on laws assists in the process of the becoming-law of the people: “it is said that hunger and poverty make men industrious, and that laws make them good” (Machiavelli 1970: I.3, 112). Yet a focus on laws in isolation is insufficient. In addition, attention has to turn to the role of forms of political organisation, and their interplay with laws. This must be a constant vigilance, regularly enquiring as to whether the laws and organisations are appropriate for each specific conjuncture, and the emergent challenges – at home and abroad – they throw up. This entails the revision of extant laws and organisations, and the creation of new ones wherever appropriate. It involves keeping a continual eye on the need for renovation:

It is a well-established fact that the life of all mundane things is of finite duration. But things which complete the course appointed them by heaven are in general those whose bodies do not disintegrate, but maintain themselves in orderly fashion so that if there is no change; or, if there is change, it tends rather to their conservation rather
than to their destruction... Hence those are better constituted and have a longer life whose institutions make frequent renovations possible... For it is clearer than daylight that, without renovation, these bodies do not last (ibid.: III.1, 385, emphasis added).

Here we have a mobile account of sovereign power: frequent renovations ensure an enduring state. This mobility is produced by the interaction between the people, the prince and the nobility. The people invoke the prince in order to challenge the disposition of the nobility – to dominate and oppress – and to materialise its own disposition – a state without domination and oppression. This mobility is guaranteed by the becoming-prince of the people (and the becoming-people of the prince), a process which requires the “frequent renovations” of forms of political organisation. These frequent renovations, performed by the people as republicanism solidifies, situate the people at one and the same time above and under the law. Laws and institutions, in other words, are dynamic entities for Machiavelli. This dynamism is necessary not only to prevent the degeneration of a regime (which inevitably results in its disintegration) but also to respond to the various challenges that new conjunctures (or, in Lahtinen’s terms, the occasione) pose: the virtù of the people is required to ward off and redirect fortuna (which often emerges in the guise of the nobility or the multitude).

This mobile account of sovereign power that Machiavelli develops – and was a prominent feature of early modern republican thought, as the earlier consideration of Marsilius demonstrates – provides a serious challenge to Negri’s account of Machiavelli. Negri discusses Machiavelli in a chapter of Insurgencies, the text in which he develops the notions of constituted power and constituent power.45 This was written in the late 1980s, and first published in Italy in 1991. At this stage, Negri had not fully elaborated an account of the multitude – as is evidenced by his ambiguous presentation of the various political subjects in Machiavelli46 – but
the concept of constituent power can be viewed as a surrogate for the multitude. Constituent power is a revolutionary force that blasts open the status quo and ushers in a new political form, whereas constituted power closes down that revolutionary movement and institutes a stable, ordered political form. Negri views Machiavelli as the instigator of constituent power: “Constituent power had... found in Machiavelli its first absolute and inevitable definition” (Negri 1999: 97). Negri’s analysis is at odds with the analysis developed in this chapter, and it is at odds with the theorists used – Gramsci, Althusser, Fontana, Del Lucchese and Lahtinen – to develop this analysis. The concept of constituent power implies a dynamic account of politics (which is entirely consistent with Machiavelli’s project), but it also requires a constant upheaval of politics – or, the regular overthrow of the state (which is entirely inconsistent with Machiavelli’s project). For Machiavelli, the nobility was the regular cause of this upheaval in cinquecento Italy, which was guaranteed by the passivity of the people. Machiavelli abhors these upheavals, and trains his entire political armoury against them. Nothing could be further from his project than to view these upheavals in a positive light, celebrating such turmoil as a dynamic enacted by the multitude, as Hardt and Negri claim. The multitude, for Machiavelli, was an irregular feature of politics, as opposed to a permanent actor as implied by Negri’s association of the multitude with constituent power. The aim of politics, moreover, was a state that endures – mantenere le stato – in stark contrast with Negri’s version of constituent power. Or, to put this in Althusser’s terms, Machiavelli’s position (or fourth thesis) breaks the cycle of the third thesis, so that the state endures.

In order to achieve this position, Machiavelli treats political forms of organisation with an intense seriousness. He recognises that his preferred political subject – the people – is not up to the primary task of forming a national state. Only a prince is able to
bring it into being. Thereafter, constituent power is contained within sovereign power. This containment ensures that the people are at one and the same time *above and under the law*, to repeat Balibar’s antinomy; it provides for a *mobile account of sovereign power*. Machiavelli, thus, theorises a dynamic (as opposed to a static) account of the people, alongside two other core factors – consent on the one hand, and laws and institutions on the other hand – to ensure the endurance of the state. Althusser describes Machiavelli as “a *theoretician of the political preconditions of the constitution of a national state*” (Althusser 1999: 121). Machiavelli offers a *mobile account of sovereign power* which produces and is produced by a similarly mobile account of the people. This is in stark contrast to Negri’s account of Machiavelli as a theorist of constituent power, and his claim that early modernity should be viewed through the prism of the battle between a mobile multitude and a static people.

While there are clear differences between the preferred political subject in the three early modern republican theorists under consideration (with Machiavelli as an advocate of the people, and Marsilius and Spinoza as proponents of the multitude), the role that they assign to their preferred political subjects bear clear resemblances: while the name differs, the role does not. And this role points to the increasing importance of consent which, in turn, points to the dynamism of sovereign power in the people. Spinoza’s philosophical system proposes the common notions – and communication in general – to fulfil the role that consent play in the theories of Marsilius and Machiavelli. This seventeenth century philosopher is now considered.
I.3 SPINOZA

Warren Montag argues that the multitude is involved in:

the most important debate to take place around Spinoza (and of course the stakes are far greater than simply the correct interpretation of Spinoza) in perhaps the last century (Montag 2005: 663).

As this suggests, in recent decades, the multitude has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Yet interpretations vary as to how Spinoza regards the multitude. Yirmayihu Yovel and Antonio Negri are perhaps the best representatives of the opposite poles of this debate. For Yovel, Spinoza’s multitude is irrational, that is, both devoid of reason and incapable of developing it. As a consequence, they have to be controlled and manipulated by the ‘rational sage’. Yovel regards the multitude as a negative political subject for Spinoza. Negri, by contrast, views Spinoza as an advocate of the multitude, celebrating it as the political subject capable of realising his preferred form of political organisation, namely democracy. The presentation of the multitude in Spinoza in this chapter falls between these accounts, although it veers closer to Negri. It confirms the positions elaborated by Étienne Balibar, Warren Montag, and Martin Terpstra.

These theorists view Spinoza as identifying the multitude as key to politics in modernity, while elaborating qualified support for the multitude. The qualifications involved in this support indicate that Spinoza is not a simple theorist of potentia, as Negri claims. In The Savage Anomaly, Negri identifies a radical distinction between potentia and potestas at the heart of Spinoza’s project, and aligns the seventeenth-century philosopher and the multitude with potentia. This distinction is recognised in continental European languages – potere and potenza in Italian, pouvoir and puissance in
French, *macht* and *vermögen* in German – but does not feature in English, where both terms are rendered as power. The distinction between *potentia* (or ‘power-to’) and *potestas* (or ‘power-over’) in Spinoza serves as the foundation on which Negri theorises the concepts of constituent power and constituted power in *Insurgencies*. In turn, Negri’s reading of *potentia* and the multitude in Spinoza underpins his work with Michael Hardt in *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*.

This chapter contends that Spinoza is a theorist of both *potentia* and *potestas*, and that Negri exaggerates the import of this distinction in Spinoza. For Negri, *potentia* entails that the multitude is outside of the law, while the claim made here that Spinoza is a theorist of both *potentia* and *potestas* indicates that the multitude is inside the law. It is inside sovereignty, whilst being at one and the same time above and under the law, to draw on Balibar’s antinomy. There is a close parallel between the *potestas-potentia* distinction that Negri delineates and several others that operate in the Hardt and Negri system, including Hobbes-Spinoza, people-multitude, immanence-transcendence and sovereignty-democracy. All of these dichotomies are dubious, and Spinoza develops a more complex and nuanced account than Negri allows. To take the last of these distinctions, for instance, Spinoza considers democracy as an option within sovereignty rather than one that opposes it. Spinoza’s account of sovereignty is not an inversion of Hobbes, as Hardt and Negri claim. It is a *subversion* of Hobbes, conducted through a mobile account of sovereign power in which the mobility is provided by democratisation, that is, the expansion of democracy within sovereignty. This mobile account of sovereign power is in keeping with the early modern republican theorists already considered. Here, there is a specific and direct link to Machiavelli: Spinoza conceives that he is pursuing and developing a project initiated by Machiavelli. As opposed to an inversion of Hobbes and remaining
within the problematic of the multitude-people and state of nature-civil society distinctions, Spinoza ignores these distinctions and pursues a politics that is a continuation of Machiavelli and the mobile account of sovereign power of early modern republican thought.

In addition, an important continuity can be drawn between these three early modern theorists of republicanism, and the more recent contributions provided by Antonio Gramsci and Ernesto Laclau. This points to the importance of two features of these theorists’ thought: hegemony and forms of political organisation. The argument that Spinoza is a theorist of both potentia and potestas indicates the importance he attaches towards forms of political organisation and, in this, there is continuity between Spinoza, Marsilius and Machiavelli – and a departure from the hostility to forms of political organisation that Hardt and Negri express. In terms of hegemony, this term does not feature in the language of these three early modern theorists of republicanism. Yet, there are terms that can be identified as anticipating the theorisation of hegemony and articulation by Gramsci and Laclau. In Marsilius, this involves situating consent at the heart of politics. Machiavelli, meanwhile, develops a more complex account involving the interplay between consent and force in his consideration of political leadership and activity. For Spinoza, the concept of the common notions, coupled with his philosophy of communication, can be viewed as further developments of this tradition.

In identifying the multitude as the key political subject of modernity, Spinoza departs from Machiavelli’s defence of the people, and aligns himself with Marsilius’ earlier account of the multitude. Yet despite the divergence in their naming of political subjects, their accounts of how this subject operates in politics converge: Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza are consistent in how they situate their nominated subject politically. They all operate
within sovereignty, and their activity initiates a mobile account of sovereign power. This is in stark contrast to the dichotomous presentation that (Hardt and) Negri offer between potestas and potentia (or constituted power and constituent power) in Machiavelli and Spinoza, which opposes democracy to sovereignty and the multitude to the people.

This chapter considers three themes within Spinoza’s thought. It begins by considering the political subjects that feature in Spinoza’s descriptions of history and society. This is done in order to establish an account of the multitude. It then turns attention to Spinoza’s taxonomy of forms of political organisation, and focuses on his proposal that democracy is the best and most absolute form of government. Finally, it explores the common notions, and situates these within a context of increasing urbanisation and contact that was developing in the Dutch seventeenth century, a process which Spinoza recognises and seeks to encourage and develop through a philosophy and politics of communication. These three themes – the multitude, democracy and the common notions – mutually overlap and reinforce one another.

i. The multitude

This section argues that, as with Marsilius and Machiavelli, Spinoza identifies ‘the mass’ at the centre of politics. ‘The mass’, rather than the monarch, constitutes the very stuff of politics. Spinoza terms this ‘mass’, the multitude. It is difficult to appreciate the philosophical inspiration for Spinoza’s account of the multitude. Throughout his oeuvre, he only mentions three modern philosophers: Machiavelli, Descartes and Hobbes.6 His account of the multitude differs from Machiavelli in being a permanent – rather than occasional – subject of politics, while Spinoza distances himself from Hobbes through: a rejection of contractarianism; an association of right with power; and a refusal to depict the
multitude in a negative light. While drawing on the *mobile account of sovereign power* developed by Machiavelli, Spinoza’s account of the multitude entails the identification of a *new* political subject orientated to a *new* political form, namely democracy, and a *new* set of conditions that were incipient in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic – a set of conditions that favoured the expansion of communication within the multitude and, by extension, the development of the common notions.

That is to say, Spinoza is an advocate of the multitude, but a qualified one. One way of putting this is that, for Spinoza, the multitude is not purely associated with democracy. Ultimately, only the multitude can create democracy – and the realisation of democracy is the realisation of the power of the multitude. But there is no necessity here. The multitude can equally prop up monarchy or aristocracy, by openly advocating their continuation. Negri views Spinoza’s multitude as being solely aligned with democracy and, in turn, insists that Spinoza casts the multitude in an entirely benevolent light. For Negri, Spinoza is the polar opposite of Hobbes, and this dichotomous relationship is expressed in (Spinoza’s account of) the multitude as the polar opposite of (Hobbes’ account of) the people. That is to say, Negri reads Hobbes’ promotion of the people as the negation of the multitude, while Spinoza directly counters this, by advocating the multitude as the negation of the people. This chapter argues, instead, that Spinoza’s philosophy ignores contractarian thought and rejects its problematic, while continuing the republican aim, already established in Marsilius and Machiavelli, to forward a *mobile account of sovereign power*. Negri, by contrast, remains within the problematic of Hobbes’ social contract theory: either sovereignty or the state of nature; either the multitude or the people; either power or right. Negri, in short, views Spinoza as *inverting* Hobbes, while the presentation here views Spinoza as *subverting* Hobbes in
providing an account that is different from – rather than opposed to – the author of *Leviathan*. This account views the multitude and democracy as *internal to* sovereignty for Spinoza, rather than *external to* it as Hardt and Negri claim.

As internal to sovereignty, politics takes a number of different forms – some positive, some negative, some in between. As a consequence, Spinoza’s subject of politics, namely the multitude, also takes a number of different forms – some positive, some negative, some in between. It is in this sense that Spinoza qualifies his support for the multitude: he was an advocate, and not a celebrant. Negri, by contrast, is a celebrant of the multitude. For him, the multitude is entirely positive; for Spinoza, the multitude’s activity is multifarious, and is ultimately dependent on its capacity to develop its politics in common (through the common notions). Spinoza’s philosophy and politics should be read as an attempt to direct it towards the positive (democracy) and away from the negative (monarchy). He recognises, however, its success is dependent on the activity and movement of the multitude. Yet, given the continuation of the conditions that the Dutch Republic had experienced during the seventeenth century – including freedom of expression, urbanisation, and the expansion of communication – the likelihood of the multitude linking up with democracy increases.

To elaborate this account of Spinoza as a qualified advocate of the multitude, this section explores five themes. It begins by considering Spinoza’s two political texts – the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*7 – and compares Spinoza’s use of the multitude in them. It argues that Spinoza orients the multitude towards the future. Related to this, it provides a brief account of the other political subjects that Spinoza deploys in these two texts. It then assesses Spinoza’s equation of right and power, and contends that this aligns Spinoza with a *mobile account of sovereign power*, in which the multitude is at one and the same time *above and*
under the law. Next, it focuses on the method Spinoza deploys when considering society, arguing that he rejected two methodologies frequently assigned to him – methodological holism or crude determinism, and methodological individualism – and, instead, develops an interactive and expansionary relational anthropological account. Finally, it reflects on the relationship between the multitude and reason, and aligns the increasing development of ratio – the second kind of knowledge – in the multitude as reinforcing the movement towards democracy. This final sub-section then opens up the analysis to the topics of the next two sections of this chapter, which address democracy and the common notions.

The multitude in Spinoza’s political texts
There is an extraordinary contrast between Spinoza’s deployment of the multitude in the TPT and the PT. The latter was incomplete and unfinished when Spinoza died in 1677, and was published shortly afterwards. In the former, the multitude is largely absent, appearing on just three occasions. In the latter, by contrast, the multitude is at the very centre of analysis. An exploration of this contrast provides a good initial approximation of the role the multitude plays in Spinoza’s thought.

Accordingly, it is worth comparing the concerns of these two texts. As its name indicates, the TPT is an investigation into the intersection between theology – and its wider manifestation, religion – and politics. Spinoza began working on it in 1665 and it was published anonymously five years later. This involved interrupting work on his systematic philosophy, which began around 1660, and culminated in the completion of the Ethics around 1675 or 1676. The central concern of the TPT is to promote freedom and, in particular, the freedom of expression and the communication of that expression. Since the inauguration of the regime of the
Regents’ party in the middle of the seventeenth century, under the leadership of Johan de Witt, freedoms had been extended. By the 1660s, however, these extended freedoms were increasingly challenged by a series of movements that coalesced around the House of Orange. The Contra-Remonstrants were prominent among these movements: they were orthodox Dutch Calvinists whose message confronting the decadence and license of the Regents’ party – and, by association, its policies of freedom – attracted growing social adherence among the rural population and emergent urban proletariat. In writing the TPT, Spinoza sought to protect, justify and develop the recent freedoms that had been granted under the De Witt regime. There is, then, a political immediacy to the TPT.8

While the concerns of the TPT are immediate, however, its content has a markedly different temporality. In contrast to the urgency of its concerns, the content is almost exclusively projected backwards to the past, and the distant past of the Hebrew people in particular. As a consequence, the terminology of the TPT is linked to this history: the political subjects and social categorisation that Spinoza deploys in this text are a reproduction of the terminology that other authors use to describe these societies. The terminology, in other words, is of the past and is articulated by figures from the past. Its main sources are the Bible – particularly the Old Testament – and Roman historians such as Quintus Curtius, Sallust, Tacitus and Seneca.

There are only three references to the multitude in the TPT, and all occur when Spinoza’s discussion concerns politics (and not religion). Spinoza’s use of the multitude here is not only marginal but also entirely negative. He associates it with superstition, the passions, idleness, greed and, finally, describes its riotous activity. This negative account is probably influenced by those authors who are dismissive of the multitude. In the preface, Spinoza argues that
Quintus Curtius “rightly notes” in the *History of Alexander* that “nothing governs the multitude as effectively as superstition” (*TPT*: preface.5, 5). Spinoza’s second use of the multitude in the *TPT* confirms its association with superstition and the passions.

Anyone with any experience of the capricious mind of the multitude almost despairs of it, as it is governed not by reason but by passion alone, it is precipitate in everything, and very easily corrupted by greed or good living (ibid.: XVII.4, 210).⁹

For Spinoza, these two aspects – the sway of the passions in the complete absence of reason and the power of superstition – combine to produce instability in the multitude. While at one moment persuaded by one superstitious form, a change in circumstances may propel adherence to an alternative superstition. This inconstancy eventually causes instability in politics and society. This instability, in turn, leads to riots, rebellions and even threatens a regime’s existence:

all the worst hypocrites everywhere have been driven by the same frenzy (which they call zeal for God’s law), to persecute men of outstanding probity and known virtue, resented by the plebs for precisely these qualities, by publicly reviling their opinions, and inflaming the anger of the multitude against them (ibid.: XVIII.6, 234).

In summary, Spinoza in the *TPT* regards the multitude negatively, as devoid of reason, yet it has a marginal status in his account of politics.

Within the space of six years, this account is utterly transformed with Spinoza’s analysis of politics and the multitude in the *PT*. First and foremost, the multitude is no longer marginal but at the very centre of politics. There is a clear lineage with Marsilius and Machiavelli here. The central concern of politics is with the mass – irrespective of the naming of this mass as either the people or the multitude. This concern is opposed to two of the dominant
traditions in political philosophy. First, it is directed against the ascendant conservative tradition whose attention is purely focused on the state and, within that, the elites that control the state, irrespective of the name of these elites – a monarch, a philosopher-ruler, and so on. Next, this concern clashes with social contract justifications for political power. The primary concern of this tradition is the relationship between the state and the individual. The early modern republican theorists considered here, by contrast, are interested in the mass and the relationship between this mass and the state – or, in Spinoza’s terminology, the multitude-state relation.

The multitude is the very first political subject to be named in the *PT*:

> experience has revealed every conceivable form of commonwealth where men may live in harmony, and also the means whereby a multitude may be governed or restrained within fixed bounds (*PT*: I.3, 34).

With this, Spinoza announces the multitude-commonwealth relationship to be the object of investigation of any study of politics, and the focus on this object continues throughout the text. To state that the central concern of politics is the relationship between the multitude and the state or the commonwealth is to state that Spinoza’s concern is the relationship between sovereignty and the multitude. The multitude is not outside of or against sovereignty; it is within it. In this move, Spinoza escapes Hobbes’ dichotomous relationship between sovereignty and the multitude: *either* sovereignty *or* the multitude. Rather, for Spinoza, the overriding aim of modernity – that is, the new politics and the new philosophy which produce a new history – is the relationship between sovereignty and the multitude: *both* sovereignty *and* the multitude. In this move, Spinoza escapes from Hobbes’ problematic. In
contrast (Hardt and) Negri – and Spinoza, according to their reading – remain within Hobbes’ problematic when they state that Spinoza poses the multitude and democracy against sovereignty and the people. With this, Spinoza places the multitude at one and the same time above and under the law which, in turn, provides a mobile account of sovereign power.

In the PT, Spinoza – in accordance with so many accounts of politics – states that there are three forms of sovereignty, or forms of political organisation: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. This classification immediately indicates that, for Spinoza, democracy is a form of sovereignty contra (Hardt and) Negri. Throughout the text, moreover, he discusses the multitude alongside each of these three different forms of sovereignty. The multitude, for Spinoza, is just as likely to feature within monarchical or aristocratic forms as it is to appear in democratic forms. Again contra (Hardt and) Negri, Spinoza’s multitude is not purely a feature of democracy; it is intrinsic to sovereign power. In fact, Spinoza uses the multitude’s power to undermine arguments advocating monarchy. The multitude’s power, for Spinoza, is a necessary constraint on a king’s power. As a consequence, those that claim ‘the divine rights of kings’ or promote monarchical absolutism, according to Spinoza, forward fallacious arguments:

We conclude, therefore, that a multitude can preserve quite a considerable degree of freedom under a king, provided that it ensures that the king’s power is determined only by the multitude’s power and depends on the multitude for its maintenance. This has been the one and only guideline I have followed in laying down the foundations of monarchy (ibid.: VII.31, 94).\(^{10}\)

In summary, the multitude is pivotal to politics in the PT, in distinct contrast to its marginality in the TPT. Two other characteristics of the multitude in the TPT were identified earlier: Spinoza’s negative view of the multitude; and, its domination by the
passions and inability to reason. The question of how Spinoza views the multitude, having established its centrality to politics by the time of the *PT*, is ultimately informed by the mutually reinforcing and expansive relationship between the multitude, democracy and the common notions. This question, in other words, touches on all the different aspects of Spinoza’s thought that constitute the three sections of this chapter. The question of the multitude’s capacity to reason will be addressed at the end of this section. For now, however, let us briefly consider the other political subjects that feature in Spinoza’s account of politics. This provides a contrast between the multitude and the other political subjects in Spinoza.

*Other political subjects in Spinoza*

Spinoza provides some clear assistance regarding his political terminology in the *PT*:

> The order maintained by any state is called civil; the body of the state in its entirety is called a commonwealth, and the public business of the state under the control of one who holds sovereignty, is called affairs of state. We call men citizens in so far as they enjoy all the advantages of the commonwealth by civil right; we call them subjects in so far as they are bound to obey the ordinances or laws of the commonwealth (ibid.: III.1, 48).\textsuperscript{11}

Here Spinoza refers to citizens (*cives*) and subjects (*subditi*), but a number of other political subjects feature in his terminology. These are the vulgar (*vulgus*), the plebs (*plebis*), all (*omnia*), the multitude (*multitudo*) and the people (*populi*).\textsuperscript{12} It is in the *TPT* that Spinoza’s terminology is at its most diverse with regard to political subjects. The terms that are most particular to this text are the vulgar and the plebs; these, by contrast, are largely absent from the *PT*. As has already been established, the multitude is marginal to the *TPT*, but central to the *PT*. The terms citizens, subjects and people feature across both texts.\textsuperscript{13}
As Balibar has shown, the vulgar has an “epistemological connotation” for Spinoza, whereas the plebs is a “sociopolitical” category (Balibar 1994: 9-15). The vulgar designates what, in contemporary terms, would be described as ‘the mob’ or ‘the crowd’, akin to Machiavelli’s *moltitudine*. Spinoza views the vulgar epistemologically because it is trapped in the first kind of knowledge. This is the realm of superstition, the passions, imagination and the imaginary. Politically, the vulgar’s activity is manifested in two ways. Either violent but ultimately directionless behaviour – they are rebels without a cause, or their circumstances have forced them into rebellion, yet they are unable to propose an alternative to these circumstances – or blind adherence to manipulative oratory, usually conducted by a theologian. In both these respects, the vulgar are destructive of social life.

As with Machiavelli, Spinoza invokes the plebs when discussing the Roman empire. The plebs, then, is that group within (Roman) society that is excluded from the Senate. Or, put another way, the plebs should be delineated from the ruling group that run the Senate. That is, plebs is one of the two groups within society; it is, subsequently, a “sociopolitical” category. Spinoza uses plebs in a descriptive manner, based upon a classification of society, as opposed to the pejorative sense he accords to the vulgar.

In the *TPT*, Spinoza generally views the people in a benevolent light. He deploys it to indicate a cultural collectivity that proceeds to form a political entity; it is used alongside ‘nation’. Spinoza introduces the term in his discussion of Moses and the ‘Hebrew people’, which designates the endurance of this people in the face of copious examples of adversity (which, of course, assist in maintaining the unity of the Hebrews). In the *PT*, however, Spinoza refers to the people ambiguously. His references to the people and the multitude must be considered especially in light of the core debates surrounding these terms in the seventeenth
century. The obvious reference here is to Hobbes, but also Grotius, Pufendorf and Bodin. These were the key initiators of contractarianism, a system of thought that Spinoza engaged with and rejected through his association of right with power, which is now explored.

*Jus sive Potentia*

*Sive* is the most subversive word in Spinoza’s diction. It is deployed between two groups of couplets, with radical consequences for each of these four words. These are *Deus sive Natura* and *Jus sive Potentia*: God that is Nature and Right that is Power. Since the publication of the *Ethics*, voluble debates have ensued over the status of God in Spinoza’s philosophy. Irrespective of the position adopted within this debate, all agree on the radicality of Spinoza’s association of God with Nature. *Sive* has a similarly radical effect in the second couplet, *jus sive potentia*. Power that is right is the same as saying: power = right; or, power is equivalent to right, the equivalent of right. It is a subversion of contractarianism and, in particular, Hobbes’ account of the state of nature, civil society and the transfer from the former to the latter.

Spinoza’s philosophy grapples with the key philosophical figures of the seventeenth century. Just as the epistemological and ontological theories of the *Ethics* should be read alongside Descartes, Spinoza’s account of human anthropology and politics should be read alongside Hobbes. There is only one other early modern political theorist who features prominently – both directly and indirectly – in Spinoza’s account, and that is Machiavelli. It is striking that Spinoza explicitly praises Machiavelli and his intervention in and contribution to politics, whereas he clearly distances himself from Hobbes’ politics and philosophy on the two occasions that he directly references Hobbes. Both were written in close proximity to one another, in the mid-1670s. The first, a letter,
responds to Jarig Jelles’ enquiry about Spinoza’s political differences with Hobbes:

[w]ith regard to Politics, the difference between Hobbes and me, about which you inquire, consists in this that I ever preserve the natural right intact so that the Supreme Power in a State has no more right over a subject than is proportionate to the power by which it is superior to the subject. This is what always takes place in the state of Nature (Spinoza 1985: Letter L, 269-270).

The second is an annotation which relates to a passage where Spinoza is forging a connection between the “freest state” and “those whose laws are founded on sound reason” (TPT: XVI.10, 201). His annotation appears after Spinoza maintains that in such a state, “there each man can be free whenever he wishes”:

[a] person can be free in any civil state whatsoever. For a person is certainly free to the extent that he is guided by reason. However, (contrary to what Hobbes says) reason recommends peace without reservation, and peace cannot be had unless the general laws of the state are maintained inviolate. Hence, the more a person is led by reason, i.e. the freer he is, the more resolutely he will uphold the laws and obey the commands of the sovereign authority whose subject he is (TPT: Annotation 33, 271-2).

This annotation refers to chapter XVI of the TPT where, alongside chapter II of the PT, Spinoza’s discusses right and power. It is early on in the second section of chapter XVI that Spinoza invokes fish to demonstrate equivalence between right and power:

fish are determined by nature to swim and big fish to eat little ones, and therefore it is by sovereign natural right that fish have possession of the water and that big fish eat small fish. For it is certain that nature considered wholly in itself, has a sovereign right to do everything that it can do, i.e., the right of nature extends as far as its power extends (TPT: XVI.2, 195).¹⁹

Translated into politics, this means that the right of the sovereign is dependent upon the support (or power) of the multitude – as “the right of nature extends as far as its power extends” and, if the
multitude withdraws support, it drains the sovereign of its right (power) to rule. In other words, the sovereign form is ultimately dependent on the power of the multitude:

sovereigns... retain the right to command whatever they wish only so long as they truly hold supreme power. If they lose it, they at the same time also lose the right of decreeing all things (ibid.: XVI.9, 200).

With this move, as Montag indicates, it “is suddenly no longer clear who are the big and who are little fish in the sea of the civitas” (Montag 1999: 67): the monarch may exude and project the power of a big fish, but the multitude can coalesce and assert this combined power, constituting themselves as the big fish that devours the little fish that the monarch has become. Spinoza, in other words, is posing the question: if right equals power, where does power lie? And this question is posed in order that we ask the very same question. Against Hobbes, power has not been transferred to and invested in the sovereign for it to exercise this power. There is now a brake on the Leviathan, and this brake will be exerted if this power conflicts with the understanding of the multitude.

But the exercise of this power is not to construct an opposition between sovereignty and the state of nature. If the state and society disintegrate, then there is a corresponding diminution of power of each and every member of the multitude. As Balibar remarks, “Spinoza is not so much proclaiming a “right to resistance” (against “tyrannical” regimes) as recognising, within the theory itself, that precarious regimes do collapse” (Balibar 1998: 35). To reiterate an earlier point, Spinoza’s intention is to eliminate the distinction between the state of nature and sovereignty and, thereby, to escape the problematic posed by Hobbes. Spinoza rejects the stark choice offered by Hobbes – a choice that (Hardt
and) Negri remain trapped within: either the fixity and closure of sovereignty and the One of the people, or the flexibility, openness and adaptability of the state of nature, and the infinity of the multitude. For Spinoza, rather, sovereignty and the open, adaptable, infinite nature of the multitude become combined with one another: the movement of a sovereign regime is entirely governed by the movement – that is, the levels of activity or passivity, alongside the political direction – of the multitude. This is how Spinoza theorises a mobile account of sovereign power.

Spinoza’s description of right as power leads, as Balibar maintains, “to the paradox of a natural right without a corresponding state of nature” (Balibar 1998: 105). The existence of this right – or power – outside of the state of nature means that Spinoza displaces Hobbes’ corresponding dichotomy between the people and the multitude. As Balibar proceeds to argue:

The “multitude” is not (as it is for Hobbes and for many others [including (Hardt and) Negri]) the antithesis of the “people”, to whom it is opposed as the savage state is to an ordered society. Spinoza lived at a time of considerable unrest, and he saw clearly that the problem posed by the violence of the masses (whether overt or latent) cannot be dealt with by trying to evacuate that violence, by expelling it from the common space. Rather, to come to terms with violence is the true object of politics (ibid.).

**Individualism or relationalism?**

Initial commentaries in the first few centuries since the publication of the *Ethics* predominantly consider Spinoza to be a methodological holist, or determinist. These interpretations rest on the primary force of Spinoza’s ontology, which he variously describes as substance, God, or *Deus sive Natura*. For them, substance determines the behaviour of its modes, which have a weaker status in Spinoza’s ontology. From the twentieth century onwards, the debates concerning Spinoza’s explanatory methodology focus
elsewhere. These can be broadly divided into two camps: one placing Spinoza within the tradition of methodological individualism; the other emphasising the interaction, interactivity, interdependence and/or interconnectivity of the ‘modes’ that compose Spinoza’s multitude. The former camp is most prevalent in the Anglophone academy, with Douglas Den Uyl, Lee C Rice, Steven Barbone and Steven B Smith its leading representatives. The latter camp is more widespread within the continental tradition, which developed in France during the 1960s, and is most prominently associated with Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Negri. This debate has profound repercussions for how Spinoza’s account of the multitude is conceived.

I argue that the continental tradition is correct in adopting a relational approach, which variously stresses the interaction, interactivity, interdependence, interconnectivity or transindividuality of Spinoza’s methodology. This is crucial in our understanding of Spinoza, in that the multitude (and not the individual) is key to his approach to politics, and his overriding concern is with the multitude-state relation (and not the individual-state relation, as proposed by social contract theory).

Just as the argument for Spinoza as a determinist or a methodological holist rests on a single concept – substance – the argument for Spinoza as a methodological individualist rests on conatus. Conatus is usually translated as ‘striving’, and is also rendered as ‘attempting’ or ‘endeavouring’; it refers to the striving of a mode to persevere in its own existence. It, thus, does not refer to substance, which exists necessarily and, as a consequence, does not have to strive to maintain its existence. It refers instead to all modal entities, including humans, animals, plants, minerals and all other material forms. The argument that presents Spinoza as a methodological individualist fails to take this point into account.
Humans differ from these other modes, according to Spinoza, because they can develop the capacity (which is not the same thing as the innate faculty) to exercise reason. Reason can only be developed socially as the consideration of the multitude and reason in the following sub-section, and the ensuing section on the common notions and communication demonstrate. The free, atomic individuals of the contractarian and liberal traditions, as a consequence, do not exist. For Spinoza, in contrast, individuals are always-already social beings; beings are formed in and through the encounters experienced with other bodies and minds, and the most successful are those encounters between beings that agree with one another; these bodies are not artificially united through a contract, but are of necessity. Each human mode, as a consequence, is in a constant process of composition, decomposition and recomposition; they are complex bodies formed through encounters from without, and are not individuals whose identities are internally generated. In other words, beings are at one and the same time limited by, and expanded through, interaction with other beings. For Spinoza:

There is in Nature no individual thing that is not surpassed in strength and power by some other individual thing. Whatsoever thing there is, there is another more powerful by which the said thing can be destroyed” (Ethics: 4a23).

As Del Lucchese writes:

The finite modes are not considered statically, but rather, dynamically... Their existence is one of mutual constraint, of interaction that can be violent and destructive at times, in a multiple, dynamic network of causes and effects. Relationship immediately takes precedence over essence and the relationship involved is primarily conflictual... The strength, the power of every finite mode... never presents itself abstractly and in itself, but rather, concretely and in alio, meaning as part of the infinite web and network of relations with other modes (Del Lucchese 2009: 52).
This is a recognition of the primacy of relationships and communal life: both their power and productivity, and the limitations they entail.

The definition that its adherents adopt for methodological individualism indicates further difficulties for their position. Den Uyl, for instance, restricts the responses to Spinoza’s methodology to a mere two: either methodological individualism or methodological holism. This is to deny alternative approaches, such as the relational one that characterises much of the continental response to Spinoza. In presenting this dichotomous choice, Den Uyl incorporates many features of the relational argument into his account of methodological individualism, thereby unintentionally undermining his own case. He writes:

Spinoza can be characterized as a methodological individualist, that is, one who seeks to explain social phenomena in terms of the activities and relationships among individual agents. More precisely, methodological individualism would hold that, in principle, explanations of social events are reducible to explanations of the relationships between individual agents, and that any “social laws” are reducible to laws of human psychology (Den Uyl 1983: 67, emphasis added).

It is unclear how the final clause of this statement follows from what precedes it, and a similar lack of clarity and conflation can be found in Steven C. Smith. After stating that the “term egoism describes little of Spinoza’s Ethics, but the term individualism does” (Smith 2005: 15) without explaining the distinction between them, he argues that:

Spinoza was scarcely alone in trying to derive ethics from egoism and finding a foundation for virtue in self-interest. He belongs to the great tradition of individualism in political theory... his aim was... to cut through the layers of inherited custom and convention to uncover the deeper wellsprings of human behavior (ibid.: 16).
Not only does the first sentence contradict his earlier statement about egoism, but the second sentence asserts that individualism is alone in challenging “the layers of inherited custom and convention”. This assertion fails to consider the real differences between Spinoza and Hobbes over the social contract, power and the multitude – differences that Spinoza directly alludes to when discussing Hobbes. 

As Montag argues,\(^{24}\) *contra* the egoism of individualistic theories, Spinoza responds that, “it is when every man is most devoted to seeking his own advantage that men are of most advantage to one another” (*Ethics*: 4p35c2). A few propositions further on, Spinoza indicates that he understands advantage – or the useful (*utile*) – as that which: “renders the human body capable of being affected in the greatest number of ways or what allows it to affect external bodies in the greatest number of ways” (ibid.: 4p38). Nothing could be more removed from the abstract, isolated, disconnected individual of contractarianism and liberalism.

There is one final problem for the methodological individualist presentation of Spinoza, and that is the role of free will. The whole ethos of methodological individualism rests upon the notion of free will. Spinoza’s account of free will is well known. His dispute with Descartes was specifically directed against his account of free will, along with associated issues such as the mind-body problem. When discussing Descartes’ philosophy, Spinoza writes that he:

appear[s] to go so far as to conceive man in Nature as a kingdom within a kingdom [*imperium in imperium*]. They believe that he disturbs rather than follows Nature’s order, and has absolute power over his actions, and is determined by no other source than himself (ibid. 3pref).

For Spinoza, freedom was not a faculty of the individual and its will (whose existence he denied) but was intimately related to the collective – that is, the multitude.
So against the abstraction of isolation which characterises methodological individualism, there is a three-dimensionality and materiality that embodies Spinoza’s anthropological and sociological methodology. It is a physics of bodies, planes and surfaces. This three-dimensionality and materiality stresses that human relations are embedded, situated and conjunctural. And it is within these relations, ultimately, that the multitude enhances its ability to develop reason. The multitude is characterised by its sociability, and it is through sociability that the multitude can develop reason. We now turn to the question of this relationship.

The multitude and reason
The relationship between the multitude and reason is tackled through a brief exposition of Yirmayihu Yovel’s account of this relationship, and a critique of it. A fuller consideration of this relationship is provided in the final section of this chapter, through an examination of the concept of the common notions in Spinoza, and the influence of the role of communication in and on his philosophy.

Yovel’s account of the relationship between the multitude and reason is located in the chapter ‘Spinoza, the Multitude and Dual Language’ of Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Marrano of Reason. His fundamental thesis is that, for Spinoza, the sage possesses reason while it is entirely absent from the multitude. In other words, Yovel argues that Spinoza forwards an elitist epistemology in line with ancient (and particularly Platonic) accounts. This views the social as characterised by two epistemological camps: the multitude and the sage.

Like the old Judaizing Marranos, [Spinoza], too, possessed a secret metaphysical truth, the genuine key to salvation and the worthwhile life, which the multitude would never grasp and always despise... Spinoza remained an elitist... That ratio [the second kind of
knowledge], let alone scientia intuitiva [the third kind of knowledge], will become the lot of the multitude is an illusion. Although Spinoza’s theory of reason was potentially modern and democratic, his view of the sage and the multitude was still medieval, very much marked by Maimonides’ views and by Spinoza’s own experience and appreciation of the volcanic nature and fluctuations of that beast, the vulgus (Yovel 1989: 31).

So, for Yovel, Spinoza recognises the centrality of the multitude to politics, but despairs of it. It is not only devoid of reason but, more importantly, incapable of developing this quality. The question then becomes, how to control the multitude? Yovel’s response is that Spinoza set up a distinction: although it is impossible to expect the multitude to act from reason, they can be organised and their behaviour channelled such that they act according to reason. This is achieved by using political and religious tools such as obedience, respect for authority, fear and punishment. Through time, these techniques become habituated within the multitude and, accordingly, the need for repressive state apparatuses diminishes as these rules become behavioural norms. Yovel writes, “the multitude, although by definition unable to live the life of reason, will under proper political conditions behave externally as if it did” (ibid.: 36).

There are, however, two substantive problems with Yovel’s analysis. First, his account is based on the Ethics and, predominantly, the TPT. Yet the multitude barely features in either of these two texts. It was shown earlier that Spinoza was concerned with political subjects other to the multitude in the TPT, whereas the Ethics considers the effects that metaphysics, epistemology, ontology and human psychology have on ethics. Although the Ethics ultimately relates to politics, it never does so explicitly, and in this text references to political subjects are few and far between, with mentions of the multitude rarer still. In his consideration, moreover, Yovel tends to collapse all of the political subjects that Spinoza
introduces into the multitude, thereby rendering redundant the real differences between them. More problematic still is Yovel’s failure to consider the role of the multitude in the *PT*. Here Spinoza develops a more complex account of the multitude than simply expecting that they can be corralled into acting *according to* reason.

This leads on to the second problem in Yovel. This relates to Spinoza’s epistemology, which constructs three different kinds of knowledge. The first kind relates to imagination (*imaginatio*), the second to reason (*ratio*), and the third to intuitive science (*scientia intuitiva*). Yovel insists that, for Spinoza, the multitude exists at, and is condemned to remain at, *imaginatio*. The sage, by contrast, has attained the saintly heights of *scientia intuitiva*.

There are two problems with this account. In the first place, it assumes an ancient or medieval account of humanity. That is, humans are fixed within certain categories that are biologically defined. Spinoza’s account, in contrast, is thoroughly modern, in his emphasis on change and dynamism as opposed to stasis, in his account of human modes. This is most obvious through the concept of *potentia* that is so central to his thought. *Potentia* is ‘power-to’, and stresses the power, potential, capacity and capability of humans to transform themselves. And this *potentia* itself affects and is affected by the social, economic, political and intellectual conjuncture within which a particular community exists. Unlike desire, *ratio* for Spinoza is not a natural human attribute; the capacity to reason, by contrast, is. And this capacity can only develop in adulthood and if the right conditions assist in its development:

Each person’s natural right therefore is determined not by sound reason but by desire and power. For it is not the case that all men are naturally determined to behave according to the rules and laws of reason. On the contrary, all men are born completely ignorant of everything and before they can learn the true rationale of living and acquire the habit of virtue, a good part of life has elapsed even if
they have been well brought up, while, in the meantime, they must live and conserve themselves so far as they can, by the sole impulse of appetite. For nature has given them nothing else, and has denied them the power of living on the basis of sound reason (TPT: XVI.3, 196).

It is only through human interaction and sociability that ratio is generated: “it is scarcely possible for men to support life and cultivate their minds without mutual assistance” (PT: II.15, 43).

In the second place, Yovel’s account downplays the role of ratio – that is reason, or the second kind of knowledge – within Spinoza’s epistemology. Ratio is the most important epistemological level in Spinoza’s philosophy for politics. It is the level at which political solutions to contentious issues are discovered and also where the common notions develop. Yovel’s stress on the sage and scientia intuitiva, moreover, does not tally with Spinoza’s politics. A strictly hierarchical and elitist account of social knowledge is compatible with the advocacy of monarchy or, in its most classically elaborated version, the office of the philosopher-ruler. Spinoza, in contrast, is not only a professed democrat, but the first modern thinker to declare himself as such. It is only the movement towards democracy – democratisation – that enables the multitude to develop ratio, and thereby destabilise the elitism associated with the sage and monarchical forms of rule. Democracy, the multitude and the common notions reinforce one another, in Spinoza’s presentation of a dynamic society which seeks to overcome established hierarchies, and create new forms of association.

ii. Democracy, democratisation
The previous section argues that, while addressing urgent concerns, the TPT is oriented towards the past. This is especially the case with regard to the terminology that Spinoza deploys with respect to political subjects. The PT, by contrast, is oriented towards the
future. It is significant that Spinoza is the first thinker in the modern period to openly declare his allegiance to democracy. It is equally significant that he names the multitude as the political subject in the PT. These two factors immediately indicate that Spinoza regards democracy and the multitude as theoretically related.

They are *theoretically* but not *scientifically* related in Spinoza. This is because the PT is a work of theory and not a work of science. The view that the PT is a work of science has been widely propagated; its argument usually rests on the opening sections of the work in which Spinoza invokes Machiavelli’s distinction in chapter 15 of *The Prince* that philosophers:

> conceive men not as they are, but as they would like them to be. As a result, for the most part it is not ethics they have written, but satire; and they have never worked out a political theory that can have practical application, only one that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia (PT: I.1, 33).

Spinoza proceeds to differentiate between philosophers and statesmen, indicating that the latter’s writings on politics are superior:

> Yet there can be no doubt that statesmen have written about political matters much more effectively than philosophers. For since experience has been their guide, there is nothing they have taught that is remote from practice (ibid.: I.2, 34).²⁷

The superiority of such experience has led commentators to describe the PT as a text of science and of realism.²⁸ For adherents of this approach, Spinoza sharply differentiates between those prior texts’ infatuation with ethics and utopia and the new science of experience and reality, positioning himself squarely within the latter camp.
Yet there is a clear problem with this approach. If it is correct to claim – as is done here – that the PT is oriented towards the future, that Spinoza is the first modern advocate of democracy, that Spinoza names the multitude as the new political subject – in fact, the *only* political subject – capable of moving politics towards democracy, then what use is experience, what use is ‘what is’, or more predominantly, ‘what has been’? In announcing himself as an advocate of democracy Spinoza was breaking with prior political experience. This is not to suggest that Spinoza was the kind of ‘philosopher’ or utopian that he and Machiavelli criticise. Nor is it to suggest that Spinoza ignores ‘what is’ and ‘what has been’. It is merely to suggest that he works in the present and on the past in order to act in the future or – better still, as Negri writes – in the “time-to-come”.29 As with Machiavelli (see I.2), and as will be the case with Gramsci (see II.2), Spinoza subverts the is-ought distinction and instead theorises the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’.

What lies ahead, for Spinoza, is indeterminate. But precisely because it is indeterminate, political activity in the present seeks to ward off the predictability of the future (more of the same) and open this out to the “time-to-come”. The future is indeterminate: Spinoza makes no bold claims about ends, just as he makes no bold claims about beginnings. There is no “In the beginning...” for Spinoza. He simply asserts that substance exists and exists necessarily: in the opening words of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines substance as “that whose nature can be conceived only as existing.” There is no initial creation. This is directed not only against the ex nihilo account of creativity in the book of Genesis, but also against the act of creation that exists within contractarian thought. Instead, creativity is internal to the process of human sociability and politics. Spinoza is interested in – utterly focused on – the *in between*, not the beginning nor the end but the middle, not the head nor the tail
but the core body. Such a focus indicates that Spinoza’s primary concern is not with sovereignty’s inertia (as is Hobbes), nor with its elimination (as are Hardt and Negri), but with its mobility: he provides a mobile account of sovereign power. He is focused on encounters between bodies: the materialism of the encounter.  

As Balibar so cogently writes with reference to the four sections, covering just two-and-a-half pages, that Spinoza wrote specifically on democracy:

If one is willing to consider the Political Treatise not as the execution of a pre-established, perfectly coherent plan, already certain of its conclusions, but as an experiment in thought, or better yet, a theoretical experiment fraught with its own internal difficulties, then the absence of a theory of democracy… will appear to us in a new light… We should ask ourselves what, in the very definition of concepts, finally leads to theoretical blockage, and makes the constitution of a coherent theory of “democracy” impossible, inasmuch as its concept would be fundamentally equivocal (Balibar 1994: 18).

Turning to the question of the evidential basis for democracy in the TP, there are few resources available for Spinoza to draw upon. Effectively, there were three examples: ancient Greek democracy, the De Witt regime in Holland, and the earliest communities.  

In terms of ancient Greece, there is a distinct possibility that Spinoza would have ignored this to build his account of democracy for two reasons. First, it is striking the extent to which Spinoza avoids references to classical Greek figures in his philosophy. The famous letter to Boxel points to why this is the case:

The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates has not much weight with me. I should have been surprised had you mentioned Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius or any one of the Atomists, or defenders of the atoms. It is not surprising that those who invented occult Qualities, intentional Species, substantial Forms, and a thousand other trifles, should have devised spectres and ghosts, and put their faith in old wives’ tales, in order to weaken the authority of Democritus, of
whose good repute they were so envious that they burnt all his books (Spinoza 1958: Letter LVI, 290, translation modified).

One can surmise that Spinoza’s strategy was to mete out a similar treatment to the classical Greek ‘authorities’ that they had administered to Democritus, namely to silence them. Second, there was – and remains – no accounts of ancient Greek and Athenian democracy written by one of its adherents. In other words, there was not only a paucity of information on Greek democracy available to Spinoza but, moreover, a paucity of positive information. Negri has argued that Spinoza was silent on ancient Greek democracy for a specific purpose: Athenian and other forms of Hellenic democracy were particular to the polis and citizenship, whereas Spinoza wanted to sharply delineate a modern theory and practice of democracy based on human universality.

Spinoza speaks enthusiastically of the De Witt regime in the TPT. Here Spinoza argues that a democratic state is “the best way of ruling” since it is “most in harmony with human nature”. He then proceeds to search for examples that most closely approximate this condition, and insists “I do not have to go far to find instances of this” (TPT: XX.15, 257). Balibar argues, however, that by the time Spinoza sat down to draft the PT he had realised that he had overestimated the regime’s democratic and egalitarian credentials. The cataclysmic events of 1672 – in which the government of the United Provinces was overthrown, the De Witt brothers were murdered at the hands of a mob, and William of Orange was restored as stadholder – were key in revising Spinoza’s opinion. Balibar is probably correct to insist that Spinoza subsequently recognised that 1672 occurred because of the regime’s exclusive and inegalitarian policies. As a consequence, the example of the De Witt regime only serves as a form tending towards democracy, and a weak tendency at that.
Finally, in terms of the earliest communities, it is difficult to imagine that Spinoza had any evidence to support his claim that these were democratic. Yet, of the three alternative forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy) identified in the PT, this seems the most likely explanation for democracy’s inclusion in this classification. He writes:

Indeed, I am fully convinced that experience has revealed every conceivable form of commonwealth where men may live in harmony, and also the means whereby a multitude may be governed or restrained within fixed bounds. So I do not believe that our researches in this field can lead us to anything not at variance with experience and practice that has not already been discovered and tried (PT: I.3, 34).

Later on in this text, he adds: “This, I believe, is why democracies turn into aristocracies, and these eventually into monarchies. I am quite convinced that most aristocracies were once democracies (ibid.: VIII.12, 101). Note the order of this development, in which democracy is presented as the initial form of state. This chimes with chapter XVI of the TPT in which Spinoza describes the democratic republic to be “the most natural”.35

Democracy and monarchy
There is a discrepancy in Spinoza’s taxonomy of the different forms of state between the TPT and the PT. Both deploy a threefold classification, yet they differ in the forms offered within this. For the TPT, the available forms are monarchy, theology and democracy, while in the PT these are the more conventional alternative of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. It is, as a consequence, legitimate to question why Spinoza remained wedded to a threefold classification in both texts, yet changed the contents. More importantly, in the TPT, why is aristocracy excluded to enable the inclusion of theocracy precisely when Spinoza has an armoury of
historical examples to support its retention? When considered together, it seems likely that Spinoza is constructing a hierarchy between these four forms of state. Because they appear in only one of the texts, aristocracy and theocracy are assigned only secondary importance in Spinoza’s account of politics. Monarchy and democracy, by contrast, are included in both and, consequently, are the primary forms of state. Why, then, do monarchy and democracy assume such primacy in Spinoza?

When this question is posed alongside other claims Spinoza made about democracy – including his contentions that democracy is the best, “the most absolute” and the “most natural” form of commonwealth – his intentions become clearer. It is easy to underestimate the radicality of these claims. In openly advocating democracy, Spinoza departs from his predecessors. He also delineates a sharp distinction between the historical past, which was dominated by the monarchical form, and the “time-to-come” of democracy. In other words, Spinoza wasn’t simply asserting that the primary forms of political organisation within a community are monarchy and democracy. He is presenting them dichotomously: not monarchy and democracy, but monarchy or democracy or, better still, democracy against monarchy.

Let us now return to the claim that theocracy and aristocracy are of secondary importance for Spinoza. In terms of theocracy, it will be remembered that the content of the TPT was oriented towards the past. So what of the opportunities for theocracy in the present and the future? The opening section of chapter XVIII of this text provides the answer: not only is theocracy an undesirable form of government, its revival is impossible in the modern age:

The Hebrew state… might have lasted for ever, but no one can now imitate it, and it would not be wise to try to do so. For if anyone wished to transfer their right to God, they would have to make an explicit covenant with God, just as the Hebrews did, and this would
require not only the will of those who were transferring their right, but also the will of God to whom it was to be transferred. But God has revealed through the Apostles that His covenant is no longer written in ink or on stone tablets but rather on the heart by the spirit of God. Moreover, such a form of state would probably only be useful to those desirous of living without interacting with others, shutting themselves up within their borders and separating themselves from the rest of the world, but not to those who need to have commerce with others. *There are very few who would find such a form of state advantageous to them* (TPT: XVIII.1, 230, emphasis added).

What is striking in this passage, and particularly in those highlighted excerpts, is that the modern world, for Spinoza, is characterised by interactivity and communication. He sought to extend and intensify these characteristics, and recognises that theocracy rests upon their suppression, which effectively nullifies it as an option in the emergent modern world of interaction and communication.\(^{36}\)

Spinoza’s explanation for aristocracy’s inferiority takes a different approach. The range of examples of aristocratic states contemporaneous with Spinoza precludes the option of disregarding aristocracy as impossible in the modern world. It is, rather, that aristocracy lacks the distinctiveness of the two primary forms of collective organisation. That is to say, aristocracy is a half-way house between monarchy and democracy, as Spinoza defines these three forms in the standard manner, as the rule of a few, the rule of one, and the rule of many (or all) respectively. In other words, modernity confronts society with a stark choice in the realm of politics: either Spinoza’s preferred option of democracy or the familiar and restrictive monarchical form. Spinoza’s presentation of aristocracy as a half-way house occurs at a strategic point: it serves as the sub-title to the opening chapter on aristocracy; that is, it is the very first words Spinoza uses to define aristocracy.\(^{37}\) In this sub-title, Spinoza writes:

\[
\text{[t]hat an aristocracy should consist of a large number of patricians. Of its superiority, and that it comes closer than monarchy to an}
\]
absolute form of government [ie democracy], and is therefore more suitable for the preservation of freedom (PT: VIII, 95).

So, for Spinoza, we are confronted with two political options: democracy or monarchy. In other words, he constructs a continuum with the rule of one at one end of the pole and the rule of all at the other. This continuum is now explored.

‘Situation zero’ and the ‘global situation’
The notion that Spinoza developed a monarchy-democracy continuum is proposed by Giuseppa Battisti, under a slightly different register. Battisti contrasts a ‘situation Zero’ with a ‘global situation’. The former bears many similarities with the state of nature in contractarian thought, and is described as “before the situation in which a single man dominates... in which there is no supreme authority”, whereas the latter is oriented ahead, “in which supreme authority is shared by all living human beings” (Battisti 1977: 192). These situations share two factors: they are characterised by a “utopian” equality which, in turn, places them in polar opposition to monarchy. Battisti draws on the passage in section 12 of chapter VIII of the PT where Spinoza declares democracy to be the first form of government before progressively yielding to the increasingly hierarchical variants of aristocracy and monarchy. Spinoza’s political goal – the new political truth that he wants to construct – is to reverse this process, and to reverse it as far as possible. This, however, is not a simple dialectical inversion, for the very reason that monarchy and democracy are so substantially different from one another. They differ in the activity required of the multitude, the depth and richness of relationships they develop, and the conception of these relations, their power and activity. As Negri writes, the “terms ‘power’ and ‘freedom’ are superimposed onto one another, and the extension of the first is equivalent to the intensity of the second” (Negri 2004: 34-5).
Spinoza deploys various techniques to advance democracy by undermining the claims and status of monarchy. In the first place, he demonstrates that monarchy is a fraud, and it is a fraud because it is a practical impossibility:

those who believe that one man by himself can hold the supreme right of the commonwealth are greatly mistaken. For right is determined by power alone, but the power of one man is far from sustaining so heavy a load. As a result, the man whom the people has chosen as king looks about him for generals or counsellors or friends to whom he entrusts his own security and the security of all citizens (PT: VI.5, 65).

The above quotation also contains the next challenge to monarchy that Spinoza deploys, namely *jus sive potentia*, the association of power with right. It is not only that a monarch rests on advisors, it is also that, from the other side, the power of the multitude limits the range of possibilities available to the monarch.

Furthermore, *it is a fact that everyone would rather rule than be ruled*, “for no one willingly yields sovereignty to another,” as Sallust says in his first speech to Caeser. It is therefore evident that an entire people [*multitudo*] will never transfer its right to a few men or to one man... So a people [*multitudo*] freely transfers to a king only that which is absolutely beyond its capacity to possess, that is, a facility for settling disputes and for making rapid decisions (ibid.: VII.5, 78-9, emphasis added).

This quotation, furthermore, aligns Spinoza with a *mobile account of sovereign power*.

Spinoza then turns themonarchical claim that monarchy is the best form of government during wartime on its head: if this is the case, then democracy aligns with peace. Due to this discrepancy, the logic of monarchy is warfare, and it is in the interest of the monarch to promote war which, in turn, increases the actuality of war. The flipside of this argument is that democratic forms of state advocate and create the conditions for peace. It is at this point that Spinoza associates monarchy and war with slavery,
and elsewhere he links democracy and peace with freedom. So, monarchy-war-slavery against democracy-peace-freedom.\textsuperscript{39} In this move, Spinoza also tweaks his description of peace. Peace is impossible in monarchy, even when war is absent, because the logic of monarchy is to seek war, and the threat of its occurrence constantly looms over this form of organisation. Finally, because monarchy is a fraud, it is necessarily bound to govern through the exercise of fear. Beyond war, fear is the only mechanism available for the monarch to exercise in order to maintain power. And the diffusion of fear will ultimately cause the spread of passivity throughout the multitude which, in turn, compromises the quality of the regime:

human nature does not allow itself to be absolutely compelled, and as the ancient tragedian Seneca says, no one has maintained a violent regime for long; it is moderate regimes that endure. For while men are acting from fear alone, they are doing what they do not at all want to do; they have no reason of interest or necessity for doing what they do; they seek merely to avoid punishment or even execution. Indeed, they cannot help but rejoice when their ruler suffers pain or loss, even if this involves them in great suffering themselves; they cannot help but wish him every calamity and inflict it themselves when they can. Moreover there is nothing that people find less tolerable than to be ruled by their equals and serve them; and nothing is more difficult than to deprive people of liberty once it has been granted (\textit{TPT}: V.8, 73).

In pitting monarchy against democracy as a continuum, Spinoza avoids a utopian celebration and launches a theory not so much of democracy, but of \textit{democratisation}, as Balibar shows.\textsuperscript{40} In other words, there is no event that will inaugurate the democratic form: democratisation is a process that unfolds, it is a form of politics posed against the event (which is associated with contractarianism). It will materialise, rather, in a staggered fashion, through a series of measured steps, and as a result of a long, hard slog. Spinoza frequently deploys the adjective ‘excellent’ to describe democracy and, as the last words of the \textit{Ethics} announce, “all things
excellent are as difficult as they are rare” (*Ethics*: Vp42s, 223).

What we have with democratisation is the expansion and intensification of human relations, increasing activity and the exercise of *potentia*. As Negri writes:

[d]emocracy is the highest form in which society is expressed, because it is the most expansive form in which natural society is expressed as political society: ‘For if there is such a thing as absolute sovereignty, it is really that which is held integrally by the multitude’ (TP VIII/3). And in this expansiveness of dimensions, by traversing the *multitudo* of subjects, democracy becomes absoluteness, for it sets all social powers in motion from below, and from the equality of a natural condition. Democracy as an *omnino absoluta* form of government means, then, that there is no alienation of power (Negri 2004: 36-7).

Democracy then is expansionary in Spinoza (unlike monarchy, which is associated with stasis), just as *ratio* – reason – is, as it develops through the common notions. The three sections that constitute this chapter – multitude, democracy, the common notions – are expansive, interconnected, and mutually reinforcing.

*Democracy and sovereignty*

An understanding of 1672 is pivotal to an understanding of Spinoza’s politics. This year witnessed the invasion by Louis XIV, the termination of the liberalising regime of the past two decades in the United Provinces, and the restoration of William of Orange as *stadholder*. These internal developments were provoked by tumults in Amsterdam which culminated in the De Witt brothers being torn apart by the hands of a mob, whipped up by Counter-Remonstrant theologians. Spinoza had to be restrained from confronting this mob with the slogan, *ultimi barbaria*. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that 1672 looms large over analyses of Spinoza’s politics.

Commentaries broadly fall into three main camps, represented by Lewis Feuer, Negri and Balibar. Of these, Balibar’s is the most persuasive. Feuer maintains that the events of 1672 were
repugnant for Spinoza and they infused him with a deep sense of pessimism, a pessimism which pervades the PT. This unfinished text was the final destination of a long political journey, for Feuer’s Spinoza, which began with a youthful, idealistic communism fostered by contact with the proliferating dissident religious communities in the late 1650s and into the 1660s. This communistic phase was supplanted by the liberalism that suffuses the TPT, a benevolent and budding liberalism that went by the wayside as Spinoza recognised the entrenched irrationality of the multitude. The ‘ultimate barbarity’ of 1672, for Feuer, forced Spinoza to recognise the validity of conservatism in politics. It is difficult to square Feuer’s account, however, with Spinoza’s pioneering advocacy of democracy and identification of the multitude, both of which are rearticulated with additional force in the PT.

Negri, by contrast, effectively ignores 1672, insisting that the events had little or no impact on Spinoza’s political views. He argues, instead, that the core divide in Spinoza’s project is metaphysically inspired, with a revolutionary materialism supplanting an earlier neoplatonism. The contrast Negri identifies in Spinoza between potestas and potentia assumes added significance, and Negri translates this contrast into that between the constituted power of the people and the constituent power of the multitude. Put differently, Negri reads Spinoza as posing sovereignty against democracy. It is difficult to square Negri’s account, however, with Spinoza’s association of democracy as one of the three forms of sovereignty, and his insistence in the PT that the aim of politics is peace and security.

Balibar’s approach tempers Negri’s excessively optimistic depiction of Spinoza. He effectively distinguishes between Spinoza’s identification of the centrality of the multitude, and the ambivalence the seventeenth century philosopher felt towards this pivotal political subject. In other words, Spinoza is dispassionate towards
the multitude, in and of itself. For Balibar, 1672 and indeed the wider historical context “informs the search for a means by which to “keep the multitude within bounds”, a search that rapidly takes on the character of a veritable obsession” (Balibar 1998: 52). The significance of 1672 for Spinoza, as a consequence, needs to be considered in a wider historical context. As Spinoza acknowledges – overestimates, even – in the *TPT*, the De Witt regime had produced a series of political advances, most notably the freedom of expression and advances in interaction and communication. 1672 revealed to Spinoza not only that these advances could be reversed, but also that the advances themselves were not thoroughgoing enough, that they sat side-by-side with residual regressive socioeconomic and intellectual factors associated with the monarchical regime, enabling its return. The activity and rationality of the multitude was only developed partially in the mid-seventeenth century Dutch Republic, and 1672 indicates to Spinoza that their lack of development was just as likely to lead to a reversal of these gains as their continued advancement.

One thing that 1672 did confirm to Spinoza was to exercise caution and avoid idealisation when considering violent and insurrectionary activity. Such rebellion could not only inaugurate a regime more regressive than its predecessor, but also – even if the revolutionaries had benign intentions – there is every likelihood that a new regime would fail to implement its policies, with the form of its predecessor proving stubbornly resilient. This was Spinoza’s interpretation of the English Civil War in the *TPT* (that is, even before 1672):

> a people have often been able to change tyrants but are never able to get rid of them or change the monarchical form into another form of state. The English people have provided a fatal example of this truth. They looked for reasons that would seem to justify their deposing their monarch. But once they had deposed him, they could do no less...
than change their form of state. However, after spilling a great deal of blood, they succeeded merely in installing a new monarch with a different title (as if the whole thing had been about nothing but a title) (*TPT*: XVIII.7-8, 235-6).44

This attitude points towards profound difficulties in Negri’s account of Spinoza, yet there is a shift that takes place between the *TPT* and the *PT* that undermines this account completely.

This shift between texts concerns the goal of the state. In the *TPT*, the state’s aim is freedom; in the *PT*, it is security – that is, the condition of peace and the stability of the regime. This shift occurs in chapter V of the *PT*, which Spinoza describes – in letter LXXXIV which outlines the plan of this text – as concerned with the question of “what is the ultimate and highest end which a Society can consider” (Spinoza 1958: 366). The relevant passage reads:

> The best way to organise a state is easily discovered by considering the purpose of civil order, which is nothing other than peace and security of life. Therefore the best state is one where men live together in harmony and where the laws are preserved unbroken. For it is certain that rebellions, wars, and contempt for or violation of the laws are to be attributed not so much to the wickedness of subjects as to the faulty organisation of the state. Men are not born to be citizens, but are made so... For a civil order that has not removed the causes of rebellion and where the threat of war is never absent and the laws are frequently broken is little different from a state of Nature, where every man lives as he pleases with his life at risk (*PT*: V.2, 61-2).

In this shift, Spinoza is not abandoning, or even downgrading, freedom. Nor is this a call for order, and total obedience to the sovereign, à la Hobbes. Spinoza, rather, is exploring the conditions in which freedom can flourish, as the sections that follow the above quotation testify. Right remains equivalent to power. Power, however, is not simply blind power; it expands as the multitude’s interactivity and reason develop. Freedom, for Spinoza, emerges in conditions of peace, and he articulates an expanded notion of peace: peace is not the mere absence of war, but a condition in
which freedom, reason and human relations can interact, expand and thrive:

peace is not just the absence of war, but a virtue which comes from strength of mind... a commonwealth whose peace depends on the sluggish spirit of its subjects who are led like sheep to learn simply to be slaves can more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.

So when we say that the best state is one where men pass their lives in harmony, I am speaking of human life, which is characterised ... especially by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind (ibid.: V.4-5, 62).

Immediately after this passage, Spinoza turns his attention to the core passions and again carves his distance from Hobbes and contractarianism in placing hope over fear:

a free people is led more by hope than by fear, while a subjugated people is led more by fear than by hope; the former seeks to engage in living, the latter simply to avoid death... the latter is a slave, the former is free (ibid.: V.6, 62-3).

These factors all coalesce around two related issues: respect for the laws, and the threat posed to a state’s security by internal conflict. These two related issues interact in Spinoza’s vision of an expanding, dynamic state, characterised by a mobile account of sovereign power. For a state to be secure, internal conflict has to be contained. This theorisation of ‘contained conflict’ aligns Spinoza with Marsilius and Machiavelli, both of whom sought to contain conflict in order to inject sovereign power with dynamism. It is also another way of saying that, ultimately, the multitude has to respect the law, and that – in Chantal Mouffe’s distinction – Spinoza proposes an agonistic rather than an antagonistic form of politics.\(^45\) Agonism, or contained conflict, ensures a mobile account of sovereign power which, in turn, assists in the preservation of the sovereign form. Antagonism, in contrast, threatens its survival. Spinoza’s mobile account of sovereign power is a subversion of
Hobbes, rather than an inversion as Hardt and Negri claim. In Spinoza, constituent power and constituted power are not opposed to one another. Rather, the former is contained within the latter. Spinoza has not inverted Hobbes, but utilised his theory so that he can escape from it. As Balibar writes:

only a State which is organised to guarantee the security of its own citizens, and thus pre-empt and defuse conflicts that might be caused by differences of ideology or of class, can aspire to stability (Balibar 1998: 116).

And:

The institution of the “body politic” can then be understood as a process of internal transformation of the power of the mass (potentia multitudinis), through which that power which was passive tends to become active (ibid.: 120).

This is achieved through an elaborate theory of the state that Balibar identifies in Spinoza. It involves not only laws but also state apparatuses that comprise policing, representation, decision and control. In addition, it also entails increasing interactivity and the ‘emendation of the intellect’, that is, the development of rationality – in a word, education. At certain points in his analysis, Negri acknowledges that constituent power is incorporated into sovereignty for Spinoza:

The relationship between power and the absolute in the TP is expressed according to two movements... one movement presses with great force toward absoluteness in the strict sense, toward the unity and indivisibility of government, toward its representation as one soul and one mind... But the other movement is plural; it is the reflection on (and the recovery of) the powers of the multitudo. The life of absolute government is endowed with a systole and a diastole, with a movement toward unity and a movement of expansion (Negri 2004: 38).46
Here, the movement towards “unity and indivisibility” are equivalent to respect for the rule of law; the multitude, in other words, is under the law. The movement towards “plurality”, “the powers of the multitude” and “expansion” constitutes the internal dynamism of the polity, the intensification and extension of democracy – or, put another way, the process of democratisation; the multitude, in other words, is above the law. This antinomy, where the multitude is at one and the same time above and under the law is intimately related to the mobile account of sovereign power that Spinoza develops. Yet this is a far cry from (Hardt and) Negri’s account of Spinoza as the proponent of the constituent power of the multitude, who contrasts sovereignty with democracy. As Spinoza himself writes, when considering a ‘free state’ in the TPT:

In order, then, for loyalty to be valued... and for sovereigns to retain their full authority and not be forced to surrender to sedition... people must be governed in such a way that they can live in harmony, even though they openly hold different and contradictory opinions. We cannot doubt that this is the best way of ruling... In a democratic state... all men agree... to act – but not to judge or think – according to a common decision... reserving always the right to recall their decision whenever they should find a better course (TPT: XX.14, 257).

To contrast democracy with sovereignty – as Hardt and Negri do47 – is inspired more by a reading of Hobbes than Spinoza. For Spinoza, democracy is internal to sovereignty and operates through its very logics, including the rule of law. The theory of democratisation that Spinoza proposes ties in with a mobile account of sovereign power, one in which the law is dynamic. This dynamism of the law, however, is connected to its communication. Put in the language of Laclau, with this move, articulation becomes central to politics. Spinoza elaborates this broadly through his
philosophy of communication and, more specifically, through the common notions. Attention now turns to these.

### iii. Communication and the common notions

Balibar stresses the centrality of communication for Spinoza’s account of politics and philosophy,\(^{48}\) while Deleuze unearths the common notions as a key concept within Spinoza’s complex epistemological system.\(^{49}\) These two factors complement the themes considered earlier in this chapter – the multitude and democracy – and their connection ensures an expansive, joyous ontology of the multitude.

**Communication**

It is worth beginning this analysis with a consideration of the historical context in which Spinoza operates. A consideration of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century illustrates that Spinoza’s politics and philosophy can be viewed as a celebration of many of its developments and a plea for their continuation and intensification.

Although Spinoza never explicitly confronts the expansion of communication within the historical context that he was living through, these developments inform his philosophy and politics. As Arrighi demonstrates, the Dutch Republic was arguably the most advanced economy in the world during the seventeenth century, superseding the earlier ascendancy of Italian city-states such as Venice and Genoa, only to be itself superseded by Britain by the eighteenth century.\(^{50}\) This advance has two related demographic effects: population growth and urbanisation. In Spinoza’s lifetime (1632-1677), the Dutch Republic’s population more-or-less doubled,\(^{51}\) while urbanisation developed even more intensely.\(^{52}\)

These demographic developments contrasted sharply with the isolation and insularity of rural life – or, to coin a later thinker’s
phrase that was deployed with the express intention of illustrating the non-circularity of communication – “the idiocy of rural life”. The De Witt regime was founded on the support of these emergent and developing urban areas; the Contra-Remonstrants, greatly influential in the events of 1672, by contrast, had their basis in the countryside, garnering the support of both landowners and the rural workforce. Balibar refers to this as the battle between the ‘Spinoza Party’ or the ‘Freedom Party’ on the one hand, and the ““absolutist” monarchists and theologians” on the other hand. The former ‘party’ is associated with the policies promoting infrastructural – and, hence, communicational – development, whereas the latter was suspicious of it. The seventeenth century also witnessed extraordinary developments in intellectual advances and – more importantly, for this thesis – connections. This was most pronounced under the ‘Spinoza Party’, characterised by freedom of expression, radical publishers (such as Spinoza’s, Jan Rieuwerstz), political pamphlets, the circulation of key books throughout the European continent, the emergence of learned journals, correspondence with the recently formed Royal Society, and the spread of libraries within which many of these texts could be viewed.

The context of Spinoza’s life, then, is one of expanded human encounters. In the essay ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’, Althusser traces a materialist lineage that begins with Lucretius, Democritus and Epicurus – Spinoza’s three ancient Greek “authorities” – and passes through Spinoza. Althusser illustrates this materialism of the encounter through Epicurus’ atoms falling (‘raining’) through the void. These atoms fall equidistantly until the clinamen, the swerve, interrupts their isolated passage and causes an encounter that disrupts this neat geometric ordering. Althusser’s presentation is a deviation from methodological individualism’s approach to atomism. This approach
views atoms as pristine and impenetrable, and equally regards individuals to be pristine, impenetrable ontological entities. For Althusser, by contrast, the encounter disturbs and disrupts each atom – one atom affects and is affected by the encounter with another atom, and vice-versa. Spinoza’s context was one in which both the number and regularity of these encounters sharply accelerated. That is, greater numbers – or, we could call this, along with Spinoza, a multitude – were affecting and being affected by even greater numbers. These encounters operate through the mechanism of communication.

This enhanced communication, for Spinoza, is the key to the enhancement of knowledge; the increase of encounters constitutes the intensification of human potential. Knowledge, then, is a collective enterprise; it occurs through accelerating human relations and sociability; it results from interactivity, interdependence, and increased inter-relationality. This is a mass activity, in stark contrast to the isolationism of the ‘rational sage’ as proposed by Yovel, which is more in keeping with Plato than Spinoza. Yet this is no utopian blueprint. There is every possibility that interaction can go wrong, as it did in 1672.

This is the point at which Spinoza’s epistemology enters. Spinoza divides knowledge into three different kinds: the first kind is that of the passions and imagination (imaginatio); the second, reason (ratio); and the third, intuitive science (scientia intuitiva). Whilst the first kind predominates, the likelihood is one of two options: either hypostasis, or merely the reform of a regime on the basis of a transfer from one form of superstition to another. There is, however, a way out. As Balibar argues, the second and third kinds do not:

lead us away from this common element of language and into an incommunicable “vision”... Rather, a form of intellectual work enables primary usage to be corrected, so that the sequence of words
accurately reflects relationships of natural necessity (IIP18S; VP1). By this process, words come to refer to common notions. This allows us to define more precisely the place of knowledge in the life of the multitude. If no man ever thinks alone, then we might say that to know really is to think ever less by oneself... In this way, we can see why the essential element of Spinoza’s conception of democracy is freedom of communication. We can also see why the theory of the “body politic” is... the search for a strategy of collective liberation, whose guiding motto would be as many as possible, thinking as much as possible (Balibar 1998: 97-8).

As many as possible, thinking as much as possible. This is an apt summary of Spinoza’s politics and philosophy – his embrace of democracy, and his recognition of the multitude (warts and all). This is why Spinoza places the freedom of expression and communication at the centre of his politics:

for the freedom to think (to reason, to judge) is nothing without the freedom to communicate one’s opinions: no one, in practice, can think all alone, without expressing his opinions, without communicating... The "place” of thought is not the "private” individual or the “secrecy of conscience” which is its physical hypostasis; it is communication itself... (We can understand why the Ethics does not postulate “I think” but that “man thinks”, and goes on to show that he thinks all the more as his notions become more “common notions.”) (Montag 1999: 31-2).

The question, for Spinoza, then becomes: how can the consolidation and expansion of communication be achieved? Here, there are two obstacles. Firstly and most obviously, there is conservatism, the conservatism of religion, isolation, fear and blind obedience to theologians and the monarchy. This is a traditional obstacle, but there is also an emergent obstacle increasingly entering view: that of individualism and social contract theory. This new philosophy merely replicates the isolationism of conservatism, as both its starting-point and its central feature is the isolated, atomised individual (of, for instance, Hobbes’ state of nature). This is why Spinoza’s politics concentrates on the mass-state relation – or, to adopt his own language, the multitude-state relation – in
contradistinction to the individual-state relation of social contract theory. As Balibar indicates, in the following two passages:

How can one produce a consensus, not just in the sense of the communication of pre-existing opinions, but above all as the condition of the creation of communicable opinions...? And how can this consensus be produced since... the "matter" of politics is constituted not of isolated individuals, but of a mass, whose most frequent passion is fear, and to which everyone belongs, rulers and ruled alike? (Balibar 1998: 119).

The individual is a construction. This construction is the result of a striving (conatus) by the individual himself, within the determinate conditions of his "way of life". And that "way of life" is nothing other than a given regime of communication (affective, economic or intellectual) with other individuals. The different regimes of communication form a sequence through which a collective effort is being worked out... The political state itself is essentially one such regime. But Spinoza's definition of the State, although still rigorously realistic, is clearly also much broader than the juridical and administrative form... Thus, this definition can help us envisage, at least in theory, historical forms of the State other than the present form. And it also identifies for us the decisive mechanism by which those new forms can be created: the democratisation of knowledge (ibid.: 124).

Spinoza, thus, forwards a philosophy of communication. He identifies the onset of the expansion of communication in his milieu, and he seeks to consolidate this by rising to the challenge posed by its twin threats (conservatism and individualism), and developing an alternative account of politics and philosophy within which communication can thrive and expand. The common notions is the specific epistemological mechanism that enables this expansion. Spinoza’s account of this is now elaborated.

Common notions
The common notions are absolutely pivotal to this process of the democratisation of knowledge referred to by Balibar in the above quotation. Spinoza introduces the common notions in 2p38-42 of the Ethics. These passages are referred to later in the fifth and final
part of the text, entitled ‘Of the Power of the Intellect, of Human Freedom’, in 5p12d and 5p28d. These demonstrations from the fifth part, in turn, refer back to additional passages in the second part, which is entitled ‘Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind’. To many, Spinoza’s *Ethics* is a labyrinth. But, if he makes reference to another point in the text, and if these references are carefully followed, then a clearer picture emerges. This is the case with the common notions: if the route Spinoza lays down is followed, understanding is enhanced. What follows over the next four pages, then, is highly technical and involves a close reading of the common notions in the *Ethics*.

Spinoza begins this discussion with the following proposition: “Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole, can be conceived only adequately” (2p38). Now this proposition should be regarded as ‘introductory’, because it doesn’t arrive at the heart of the issue that unifies all subsequent considerations of the common notions. We have to wait until the corollary of the ensuing proposition before we reach this point. This stipulates that, “the mind is more capable of perceiving more things adequately in proportion as its body has more things in common with other bodies” (2p39c).

There are two things worth highlighting about this statement. In the first place, adequate knowledge (which is how Spinoza describes true knowledge) results from activity *between bodies*. The activity of the mind follows from the activity of the body, and not vice-versa as is the case with Spinoza’s key protagonist in the fields of epistemology and metaphysics, Descartes. In the second place, this is a physics of bodies in which an increase in the encounters (or collisions) between these bodies produces an increase in understanding or knowledge. In Althusser’s terms, this is the materialism of the encounter, in which an encounter is good and more encounters are better. But this is not just important in and of
itself. It also provides the foundation for the further expansion of adequate ideas – or true knowledge – as the ensuing proposition indicates: “Whatever ideas follow in the mind from ideas that are adequate in it are also adequate” (2p40). This, in other words, is an epistemology of inclusion and expansion which, in turn, rests upon “a philosophy of communication” (to quote Balibar). In this proposition’s scholium, Spinoza indicates that, “I have decided not to embark on these questions at this point because I have set them aside for another treatise” (2p40s1). Spinoza is referring here to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, which contains the following passage:

> an idea is situated in the context of thought exactly as is its object in the context of reality. Therefore, if there were something in Nature having no interrelation with other things, and if there were also granted its objective essence (which must agree entirely with its formal essence), then this idea likewise would have no interrelation [Spinoza adds a footnote at this point, which reads: “To be interrelated with other things is to produce, or to be produced by, other things”] with other ideas; that is, we could make no inference regarding it. **On the other hand, those things that do have interrelation with other things – as is the case with everything that exists in Nature – will be intelligible, and their objective essences will also have that same interrelation; that is, other ideas will be deduced from them, and these in turn will be interrelated with other ideas, and so the tools for further progress will increase. This is what we were endeavouring to demonstrate** (Spinoza 1992: TEI.41, 242), emphasis added).

Later in 2p40s1, Spinoza indicates that, “not all men form these notions in the same way; in the case of each person the notions vary according as that thing varies whereby the body has more frequently been affected.” He then gives an example: those that admire the stature of men will conceive of the word man as an “animal of upright stature” while others conceive of “a laughing animal”, “a featherless biped” or “a rational animal”. This, he explains, is the cause of dispute between philosophers concerned with natural phenomena.
Then, in the second scholium, Spinoza outlines the three different kinds of knowledge: imagination and opinion (which is “knowledge from causal experience”); reason, or “the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things”; and, ‘intuitive’ knowledge. The next two propositions indicate, first, what constitutes truth and falsity and, second, that the most important distinction is that between the first kind and the next two kinds of knowledge. Spinoza writes: “Knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity; knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true” (2p41), and “Knowledge of the second and third kind, and not knowledge of the first kind, teaches us to distinguish true from false” (2p42). The distinction between the first kind of knowledge and the second kind, then, is far more important than that between the second kind of knowledge and the third kind. This is confirmed in 5p28d, where Spinoza indicates that the important leap is from the first to the second, rather than from the second to the third. This is another way of saying that ascending to the second kind of knowledge – that is, forming the common notions – is absolutely pivotal to the multitude and democracy for Spinoza.

5p28d then refers the reader on to the definition of the emotions, which commences part three. This definition and its postulates highlight the interactive nature of human knowledge, just as the (recently considered and) important corollary to the second part does (2p39c). Both components of the word ‘interactivity’ are crucial to Spinoza’s philosophy, politics and epistemology: ‘inter’ because knowledge and politics occur between and among different bodies; ‘activity’ because only in activity can rationality develop. Spinoza contrasts these two components with their opposites. Just as isolation is a threat (this is the threat posed by contractarianism and methodological individualism), so is passivity (this is the traditional threat that monarchy and theology
have rested upon). Isolation and passivity condemn the multitude to remain within the realms of opinion and imagination, that is the first kind of knowledge.

Returning to part three, Spinoza defines the emotions as follows:

By emotion (affectus) I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.

Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity (3def3).

The first postulate to this definition reads:

The human body can be affected in many ways by which its power of activity is increased or decreased; and also in many other ways which neither increase nor diminish its power of activity... (3def3post1).

The second postulate states that, “the human body can undergo many changes”. What Spinoza provides in his account of the emotions is a dynamic and active process in which bodies encounter other bodies, and construct their ‘selves’ according to the impact of both these encounters and subsequent encounters (the latter can add to a previous assemblage or entail its decomposition – which inevitably will result in a subsequent recomposition). Put simply, bodies (and, therefore, minds) affect and are affected by other bodies: A affects and is affected by B; B affects and is affected by A; A affects and is affected by C; and so on, ad infinitum.

We were led to the definition of the emotions from a passage in part five that considers the common notions. In another passage in part five that considers the common notions, he leads us back to part two. These run from 2p13 to 2p18. In 2p18, Spinoza returns to the theme of the encounter between bodies that causes the development of the common notions. He raises this theme to
indicate what memory is: “It is simply a linking of ideas involving
the nature of things outside the human body” (2p18s). In the
ensuing elaboration on memory, he introduces a further way in
which confusion arises. Remember that earlier we considered how
Spinoza indicates that differences arise over the definition of terms,
using the example of man as an animal of upright stature, a rational
animal, a featherless biped, and so on. In his discussion of memory,
he points out that even when definitions agree, different
associations are formed regarding terms. He uses the example of a
track left in the sand to illustrate this. A soldier on seeing the track,
according to Spinoza, will draw the following links: the horse, the
rider, war, and so on. A peasant, by contrast, will pass from the
horse to the plough to the field, and so on.

Although this example of memory can be considered to be an
argument for experiential knowledge, this is not the case. Spinoza
does not consider it to be the case that humans have experiences,
and then store up those experiences in their memory, and can then
effortlessly extract those experiences (and their associations) from
memory. Instead, he states that the more the human body
experiences, the more confused it becomes.57 Certain things are
more vivid than others. This is because an ‘individual’ is not an
essence, but undergoes a constant process of composition,
decomposition and recomposition. Rather than ‘individuals’ or
‘essences’, these are bodies in constant interaction with other
bodies. This is most brilliantly illustrated in a series of postulates
that Spinoza uses to complete 2p13.58 It is worth quoting these in
full, as they are extremely striking, and have not been highlighted
in the recent commentaries on Spinoza that stress the importance
of the common notions and/or the multitude. They read as follows:

1. The human body is composed of very many individual parts of
different natures, each of which is extremely complex.
2. Of the individual components of the human body, some are liquid, some are soft, and some are hard.
3. The individual components of the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected by external bodies in a great many ways.
4. The human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were (quasi), it is continually regenerated.
5. When a liquid part of the human body is determined by an external body to impinge frequently on another part which is soft, it changes the surface of that part and impresses on it certain traces of the external body acting upon it.
6. The human body can move external bodies and dispose them in a great many ways (2p13po1-6).

These postulates exhibit the non-essential, interactive nature of the human modes in Spinoza’s ontology, in which encounters between these modes enhance human power and potential. They outline how the multitude – for this is the political subject of Spinoza, and not the individual, which would constitute an essential mode – can develop epistemologically so that it can, in turn, expand politically toward democracy through democratisation.

To sum up, the common notions for Spinoza are the foundation of the reasoning process. The common notions and reason constitute the second kind of knowledge, which is contrasted with the realm of opinion or imagination – knowledge of the first kind. Reason and the common notions are true knowledge, whereas knowledge of the first kind causes falsity. In addition, knowledge of the second kind enables us to distinguish the true from the false.

The common notions depend upon increased and accelerated human interactivity.

Spinoza expresses the value of human interdependence and interconnectedness through the concept of the common notions. Together, they provide the foundation of reason and the launchpad to further reason. This value is expressed by Spinoza at key points in the unravelling of his theory, when he is not discussing the common notions directly. The common notions, in other words,
loom large over his entire philosophy. This is the case, for instance, when Spinoza stipulates:

That which so disposes the human body that it can be affected in more ways, or which renders it capable of affecting bodies in more ways, is advantageous to man, and proportionately more advantageous as the body is thereby rendered more capable of being affected in more ways and of affecting other bodies in more ways. On the other hand, that which renders the body less capable in these respects is harmful (4p38).

Nothing, for Spinoza, is more useful to man than man: his philosophy of communication is also one of sociability. This is the case in both epistemology and politics, as the following passage from the *PT* testifies:

If two men come together and join forces, they have more power over Nature, and consequently more right, than either one alone; and the greater the number who form a union in this way, the more right they will together possess (*PT*: II.13, 43).59

Here, Spinoza is effectively blurring the distinction between epistemology and politics. But this combination is by no mean inevitable – it is an extremely arduous task: “[a]ll things excellent are as difficult as they are rare” (*Ethics*: 5p42s). After II.13 of the *PT*, Spinoza indicates that in so far as man is assailed by the passive affects – we might call this the condition of isolation – they are drawn apart, by which he means: unable to come together and possess more power. Drawing apart leads to the spread of fear, and “the more cause for fear a man has, the less power... he possesses” (*PT*: II.15, 43). Spinoza then states that, “it is scarcely possible for men to support life and cultivate their minds without mutual assistance” (ibid.). Later on in this section, he repeats that the more that are united in one body, the more power they possess, before concluding that, “if it is on these grounds... that the schoolmen want to call man a social animal, I have nothing to say
against them” (ibid.: II.15, 44). The expansion of the common notions and the embedding of Spinoza’s philosophy of communication enables the expansion of the multitude’s power and forwards the process of democratisation.

Commentaries on the common notions

Having summarised Spinoza on the common notions, I now turn to commentaries, before considering the common notions and communication alongside the concept of consent in Marsilius and Machiavelli.

Gilles Deleuze was the first to highlight the importance of the common notions in Spinoza. Deleuze indicates that, in the first place, the common notions are common (or universal) to bodies. This bodily commonality (or universality) refers to extension, motion and rest. In the second place, these are not universal to all bodies, but only to some: they are general and not abstract ideas. For Deleuze:

[i]n short, a common notion is the representation of a composition between two or more bodies, and a unity of this composition. Its meaning is more biological than mathematical… It is only secondarily that common notions are common to minds – more or less so, since they are common only to minds whose bodies are affected by the composition and the unity of composition in question (Deleuze, 1988: 54-5).

He then proceeds to consider how common notions are formed. This occurs through joy, a crucial affect for Spinoza. Joy, in this context, is the endeavour (conatus) to organise and select good encounters. Joy and the common notions (or reason) are bound up with one another. As this connection develops, the process becomes more general. It is worth quoting Deleuze at length to illustrate this process:
1. “As long as we are not dominated by...” affects of sadness, we have the power of forming common notions... The first common notions are therefore the least general ones... 2. From these first common notions, affects of joy follow in turn; they are not passions but rather active joys that join the first passions and then take their place; 3. These first common notions and the active affects that depend on them give us the force to form common notions that are more general... 4. And from these new common notions, new affects of active joy follow, overtaking the sadnesses and replacing the passions born of sadness (ibid.: 56).

While Deleuze highlights and develops the concept of the common notions in Spinoza, and Balibar’s interpretation is more fully associated with communication, Balibar does indicate how the two combine:

Spinoza’s philosophy is, in a strong sense of the term, a philosophy of communication – or, even better, of modes of communication – in which the theory of knowledge and the theory of sociability are closely intertwined. Spinoza himself addressed this idea in his theory of “common notions”. By this concept, he was referring simultaneously to the universality of reason and to the institution of a collectivity. Common notions are true ideas that underlie any demonstrative science and that are “equally in the part and in the whole” (Ethics, IIP37)... They are also common to all men insofar as they come together to live and to think, whatever their degree of wisdom or their social condition (Balibar 1998: 101).

Balibar, in addition, indicates that the social context of the common notions – or reason which, in turn, is bound up with activity – relates to the development of democracy (and the multitude). Such an interpretation is in line with one of the central arguments of this chapter: the development of communication, the common notions, the multitude and democracy are all interrelated with one another; they are mutually reinforcing and expansive. It is only by instituting a collective – or, more accurately, a series of collectivities – that the multitude is able to form common notions. The joy and further common notions that follow from this foundation enable the multitude to combine and launch a critique of prevailing forms of power (monarchy and theology), and to discover new compositions
to replace these extant powers. This is the realm of democratisation or, more accurately, *democratic experimentation*. For Balibar:

Spinoza says that *man is always thinking* (but he does not always think adequately)... There are two main types of knowledge, which Spinoza refers to as imagination and reason, and which stand in opposition to each other as passive to active. Once more, we are confronted with an anthropological distinction whose political significance is immediately evident. Some men live in the world of imagination. Spinoza is continually hinting that this is the fate of the masses, at least in most historical situations... A minority of men have access to the world of reason... It would seem that, if a truly democratic regime were to be brought about, this minority would have to become a majority. However, if we look more closely at the argument of the *Ethics* and the *TTP*, we will see that this simple presentation is too mechanical. In reality, all men live in both the world of the imagination and that of reason (Balibar 1998: 109).

Filippo Del Lucchese also emphasises the link between knowledge and politics in Spinoza (with a passage that is as good a refutation of the claim that Spinoza is a methodological individualist that exists):

Seen from this perspective [the famous “if two men come together” quotation from II.13 of the *PT*], the totality of Spinozist politics appears tightly linked to the theory of knowledge... Just as a great many relations enrich the life of the individual on the political and ethical level, so from an opposing perspective, solitude frightens men. Alone, it is neither possible to defend oneself from one’s enemies, nor to procure the minimum means of existence. We can then argue that, for Spinoza, fear is principally the fear of solitude or isolation, the fear of the absence of relations. In the last instance, it is a fear of the absence of a common, and thereby political, condition (Del Lucchese 2009: 155).

**iv. Conclusion**

This chapter concludes by considering the role of the common notions within politics, pointing to complementary themes with the concept of consent in Marsilius and Machiavelli. At base, the
common notions occur when bodies agree with one another. It is crucial, then, when considering the formation, development and expansion of the common notions that Deleuze’s dictum that the common notions move from the less general and increase in generality. The common notions are an alternative development from the stultifying realm of order, tradition and passivity. They effectively develop through the consent of bodies that are increasingly affected by activity, joy and reason. Thus far, how Spinoza regards a body has not been sufficiently considered. A suitable understanding of a body is obviously crucial when considering the common notions and their intersection with politics. A body is not – or, at least, not necessarily – ‘an individual’, for Spinoza: ‘an individual’ is a mode. Rather, he regards each mode to be a collection of bodies – and this ‘collection’ is itself determined by the extant composition. While modes are composed of bodies, bodies are also composed of modes. Most relevant here is a political body, such as the state. This, of course, is not a static and exclusive body such as Hobbes’ _Leviathan_ (as impeccably illustrated by the text’s frontispiece); it is, rather, a far more fluid, mobile and inclusive body. It is here that Spinoza’s philosophy zooms into full view. The common notions, democracy and the multitude are the site on which an alternative ‘consent’ can be developed. This alternative is posed between order-monarchy-theology-religion-imagination-passivity on the one hand, and the multitude-democracy-philosophy-reason-the common notions-activity, on the other.

The common notions, in short, point towards a *mobile account of sovereign power*. Such an account has been identified in all three early modern republican theorists considered in this project. While the common notions secure a *mobile account of sovereign power* in Spinoza, Marsilius places *consent* at the centre of his proposals for the development of politics and Machiavelli
focuses on the dynamic interplay between force and consent in order to explicate a modern understanding of politics and leadership.

This mobile account of sovereign power that has been developed in this project calls into question the Hardt and Negri conceptualisation of the multitude in modernity. They claim that the decisive battle of modernity occurred at the outset between the multitude (as elaborated by Spinoza) and the people (as championed by Hobbes). This multitude-people distinction rests upon a fixed, static notion of sovereignty, represented by the One of the people, ordered by the Leviathan. On the Hardt and Negri reading, Spinoza’s multitude operates outside of sovereignty, and this operation ensures mobility within politics. The mobile account of sovereign power identified in the three early modern republican theorists challenges the multitude-people and sovereignty-democracy distinctions that Hardt and Negri present. Rather, mobility is internalised within sovereignty, transforming a fixed understanding of sovereignty into sovereign power understood as mobility.

Their claim that the decisive battle at the outset of modernity is between the multitude and the people is also called into question by the different responses of these early modern republican theorists. While isolating Spinoza as the key advocate of the multitude and a politics of immanence, Hardt and Negri include Machiavelli within this politico-philosophical nexus. The chapter on Machiavelli demonstrates, in contrast, that the Florentine is an advocate of the people and assigns a marginal role for the multitude within his account of politics. Considerations of the multitude and the people, in other words, are far more complex than the Hardt and Negri dichotomous presentation allows. In identifying the people as the key political subject, Machiavelli differs from both Marsilius and Spinoza, for whom the multitude is central. Yet,
despite this disparity in how they name political subjects, all three early modern republican theorists develop similar accounts of the role that subjects should play in politics. These accounts have been elaborated in Part I, and they again challenge the Hardt and Negri presentation. The role that consent plays in Marsilius, the consent-force couplet in Machiavelli, and the common notions within a philosophy of communication in Spinoza all point to a politics in which hegemony and articulation become paramount.

These concepts are laid out in Part II – in Gramsci and Laclau, respectively – and I argue that through these concepts, these theorists take up and develop a politics initiated by these early modern republican theorists. This challenges not only the Hardt and Negri claim that early modernity should be understood through the multitude-people distinction, but also that their proposal of a politics of the multitude in the twenty-first century represents a departure from this early modern republican tradition. It is also to assert that, from the vantage point of the early modern republican tradition, a politics of the multitude is found wanting, and should be rejected in favour of a politics that situates articulation and hegemony at its core. These are considered in II.2, and are compared to the theory of the common that Hardt and Negri develop in their most recent collaboration, Commonwealth. In II.1, the concept of the multitude is traced through a consideration of Negri’s political and philosophical development since the 1960s.
PART II
II.1 MULTITUDE, POLITICAL SUBJECTS, SUBJECTIVATION

In Part I, it was shown that Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza provide varied and complex accounts of the multitude, that differ from the Hardt and Negri presentation of the multitude in the early modern period. It was also shown that these early modern republican thinkers all develop a mobile account of sovereign power which placed consent, the common notions and communication to the fore as they propose a modern account of politics. Consent, the common notions and communication can be viewed as anticipations of and precursors to Gramsci’s subsequent theorisation of hegemony, considered in the second chapter of this part (II.2) in contrast to the conceptualisation of the common by Hardt and Negri. This chapter (II.1) explores Negri’s theorisation of political subjects and subjectivation, which culminates in Hardt and Negri identifying the multitude in their trilogy of collaborative texts, Empire, Multitude and Commonwealth as central to politics in the twenty-first century.

Hardt and Negri argue that the decisive battle in the early modern period takes place between Hobbes and Spinoza, in their respective accounts of the people and the multitude. They regard this battle to have profound and continual repercussions for politics and philosophy throughout modernity. For them, Hobbes proposes the Leviathan as the sovereign and transcendent ‘God on earth’. These are ordered through his concept of the people – a domesticated, fearful, obedient people represented by a sovereign power. Against the sovereignty, transcendence and ordering contained within Hobbes’ concept of the people, Hardt and Negri regard Spinoza to have provided a dichotomous account of political and philosophical activity in his concept of the multitude. Hardt and Negri claim that Spinoza’s multitude should be understood as an infinite expression and, as such, a democratic power (that is, an
anti-sovereign power) that proposes the proliferation and invention of infinity in contrast to the power of the One represented by Hobbes’ people.

The previous chapter (I.3) identified problems with this reading of Spinoza. It argued that rather than an inversion of Hobbes’ account of sovereignty, Spinoza’s conceptualization of the multitude should be regarded as a subversion of Hobbes. It maintained that Spinoza remains within classical accounts of political philosophy in the *Political Treatise* that regards democracy – alongside monarchy and aristocracy – as one of the three forms of sovereignty. The Hardt and Negri claim that democracy and the multitude are outside of and opposed to sovereignty in Spinoza is false. Instead Spinoza presents an alternative account of sovereignty to that of Hobbes, one characterised by mobility as democracy increasingly takes hold and extends and intensifies itself. This mobile account of sovereign power, or democratisation, differs from Hobbes’ fixed and static presentation. For Spinoza, the multitude is the subject capable of bringing democracy into being, working for its extension and intensification. This activity, however, occurs as an expansion of sovereignty; it is a process internal to sovereignty, not external to or outside of it, as Hardt and Negri claim. The key contrast, then, is between Hobbes’ preference for monarchy, and Spinoza’s espousal of the process of democratisation. Part I identified similar mobile accounts of sovereign power in Marsilius and Machiavelli, while also pointing to how these three early modern theorists conceptualised anticipations of and precursors to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony – through consent in Marsilius, the force-consent couplet in Machiavelli, and Spinoza’s theorisation of the common notions and communication.

The core (but, in my view, erroneous) features that Hardt and Negri identify in Spinoza’s account of the multitude – anti-sovereignty, infinity, immanence, non-mediation – are carried
through into their contemporary political conceptualisation of the multitude. They use their reading of Spinoza’s multitude as a basis for an understanding of the contemporary political scene and, in turn, the manner in which political activity is developing. This part (II) argues that, in contrast, politics in the twenty-first century is best conceptualised with the concepts of hegemony, democratisation, and articulation. Here, there is a closer association between the three early modern republican theorists addressed in Part I, and the repositioning of the Marxist project undertaken by Gramsci largely through the concept of hegemony, and its subsequent theoretical development by post-Marxists such as Laclau.

It is through a consideration of labour that Negri has conducted much of his focus every since his earliest involvement in political practice in the 1960s. Negri’s description of transformations in the economic sphere is particularly strong. This description has been a continual process of self-analysis and self-critique, a constant engagement with his own thought, a gradual elaboration that attempts to go beyond the limitations of Marx’s representational account of the proletariat. This process has led to the identification and nomination of various political subjects located at the level of the economy during the 1960s and 1970s: the mass worker, the multinational worker, the social(ised) worker. These subjects and their formation will be explicated in this chapter (II.1), to inform an understanding of the recent proposal of immaterial labour by Hardt and Negri. I contend that their descriptive account of immaterial labour has considerable purchase for understanding contemporary labour, but that they draw over-optimistic conclusions from this descriptive account. The repercussions of the transformations in labour that the concept of immaterial labour, by contrast, identifies lend themselves more appropriately to the approach to politics theorised by Laclau.
This chapter explores Negri’s theoretical development on economics and politics in the sixties and seventies, alongside a consideration of the political activity of the movements of operaismo and autonomia. Such an exploration of the open process of subjectivation that Negri detects in this period provides deeper substance to the Hardt and Negri account of the multitude. Similar illumination is garnered by a consideration of the contrast between constituent power and constituted power proposed by Negri in Insurgencies, his most important text, which provides insight into Negri’s philosophical position. Having secured these economic and philosophical foundations, this chapter proceeds to analyse various elements of the multitude in Hardt and Negri. These elements involve: eras and epochs; being-against; political organisation; definitions and contrasts; immaterial labour; assemblage; the ‘incommunicability’ thesis; and, finally, democracy and democratisation.

The Hardt and Negri account of the multitude is difficult to define, and is probably best understood as resisting definition. To assist with orientation, their multitude is an open, excessive and infinite process of political subjectivation.¹ In contrast to earlier accounts of political subjects – such as the people in Hobbes, the individual of liberalism, and the proletariat of Marx and Marxism – the multitude has no fixed referent, and undergoes a continual process of renewal and innovation.

i. Eras and epochs
Negri deploys various temporal frameworks throughout his engagement with politics and philosophy. In Empire and Multitude, Hardt and Negri distinguish three key epochs: the premodern, modernity and postmodernity. They claim that the conditions of postmodernity offer a number of opportunities for the multitude to
emerge at the political level. These conditions are elaborated as this chapter develops but it begins with a consideration of the different eras that Negri formulates in the 1960s and 1970s. The theorisation of these different eras leads Negri to substantially shift his account of political practice, most obviously exemplified as operaismo was superseded by autonomia in the early 1970s. This section then engages with the epochal periodisation that Hardt and Negri propose.

Operaismo was a distinctive movement of the Italian left during the 1960s. This loose movement comprised a group of intellectuals – including Raniero Panzieri, Mario Tronti, Serge Bologna and Negri – organised around a series of journals. Operaismo sought to make contact with, educate and investigate factory workers in order to forge links and gain a greater conceptual understanding of the mobility of this social force. In their terms, they aim to examine the class composition of the Italian proletariat in situ. Negri later defines class composition as follows:

By class composition, I mean that combination of political and material characteristics – both historical and physical – which makes up: (a) on the one hand, the historically given structure of labour-power, in all its manifestations, as produced by a given level of productive forces and relations; and (b) on the other hand, the working class as a determinate level of solidification of needs and desires, as a dynamic subject, an antagonistic force, tending towards its own independent identity in historical-political terms. All concepts that define the working class must be framed in terms of this historical transformability of the composition of the class (Negri 1982: 209).

This form of investigation enables operaismo to bypass two elements they felt only served to obscure a purer and more productive account of the working class: capital itself; and the traditional mediating and representative institutions of the Italian left (the trade unions and the political parties), which exerted a considerable influence on the proletariat, as indicated by the PCI’s
position as the most prominent western Communist Party in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Operaismo insists that their approach provides a privileged space from which to conceive of the working-class point of view (punta di vista operaio). Such an appreciation of this working-class point of view better orients the development of an alternative political strategy to that of the PCI, parliamentary political parties and unions.

Negri outlines his account of the class composition of the working class in an essay entitled ‘Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929’ (Negri 1968a). Here, he identifies two key eras of industrial forms of capitalism. The first begins in the mid-nineteenth century and ends in the 1920s, as a direct response to the combined threats posed by the Russian Revolutions and the Wall Street Crash. During this period a labour aristocracy predominates or, in Negri’s terminology, the professional worker exerts an enormous influence over the wider working class. Engineers are exemplars of this category, with self-management their motto and motivating aim. By the 1920s, capitalists become increasingly cognisant of the threat the professional worker poses to their control and, Negri maintains, they respond by reorganising production to marginalise the professional worker’s influence. In this era, vanguardism is the most effective form of proletarian politics as, structurally, it replicates the ascendancy of the professional worker at the economic level. This reorganisation of production marks the next era of industrial capitalism, characterised by the ‘massification’ processes of Taylorism, Fordism and Keynesianism. This, in turn, produces a realignment of the class composition of the working class with the mass worker increasingly holding sway: an era in which semi-skilled, as opposed to specialised, labour is in the ascendancy. Although Negri fails to elaborate on the characteristics of the mass worker, we can intimate that, in contrast to the professional worker, there is a
relatively low level of differentiation in the technical, organizational
and behavioural attributes of the mass worker. The redistributive
policies of Fordism and Keynesianism are a concession forced upon
capitalists by the recognition of the recomposition of the working
class as the mass worker. Negri writes:

What was new, and what marks this moment as decisive, was the
recognition of the emergence of the working class and of the
ineliminable antagonism it represented within the system as a
necessary feature of the system which state power would have to
accommodate (Negri 1968a: 13).

Negri reexamines the continuing yield of the concept of the
mass worker in the light of the situated practice of operaismo in the
factories, alongside the outbreak of student activity in the late
1960s. This upsurge in activity convinces Negri that Italy is
undergoing a transition to a new era (Hardt and Negri would later
theorise that this transition in fact inaugurates an epochal shift from
modernity to postmodernity). In a series of articles written in the
early 1970s, Negri argues that this period is experiencing “the
reversal of the sequence state—plan—enterprise” (Negri 1971: 24)
that characterise the era of Keynesianism, Fordism and Taylorism,
that is, the era of the mass worker. In this new era, the enterprise
becomes pre-eminent, and its topos shifts from the national to the
multi-national scale:

during the twenties... it was massification that was introduced to
undermine the professional basis of the workers’ organization; today,
it is selective participation in command that is employed against the
massified basis of the workers’ organization... What emerges... is the
enterprise, in the sense that it extends the norms of command over
factory labor to all social labor. This is the path upon which capital is
now embarking (Negri 1971: 25).

Negri argues that this transformation – which is now more widely
regarded as the shift to neoliberalism – involves the move from “the
Planner-State” to “the Crisis-State” or “the State-as-Enterprise” and ushers in the era of the *multinational worker*. The *multinational worker* features in the discourses of *autonomia*, and appears in two of Negri’s articles, ‘Reformism & Restructuration: Terrorism of the State-as-Factory Command’ (Negri 1974a: 35), and ‘Theses on the Crisis: The Working Class Multinational’ (Negri 1974b: 43 and 52). He adopts the term to name the new *topos* in which the working class now operates, but he swiftly realises that it fails to capture the core features of the newly emergent proletarian composition.

In a subsequent article, ‘Archaeology and Project: the Mass Worker and the Social Worker’ (Negri 1982: 210-216), he indicates that the *multinational worker* merely appears during the transition from “the Planner-State” to “the Crisis-State” or “the State-as-Enterprise”. Instead, it is the *social worker* that best encapsulates the series of transformations that occur alongside the era of “the Crisis-State” or “the State-as-Enterprise”.

In addition to these historical changes in Italy, the inspiration for the *social worker* hails from specific extracts of Marx’s economic writings, namely the appendix to the first volume of *Capital* (Marx 1976: 943-1084) and the formulations on machines that feature at the beginning of the seventh notebook of the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1993: 699-743). Here, Negri applies the concept of *real subsumption* of labour under capital to his contemporary situation. This concept signifies the moment when the *formal subsumption* of capital is surpassed, and the entirety of society is subsumed under the rule and logic of capital. Under *real subsumption*, in other words, capital reaches its limits, and the whole of society is subsumed within it. For Negri, Marx’s concept of *real subsumption* perfectly expresses the shift from the *mass worker* to the *social worker*: the locus of antagonism relocates and widens from the *topos* of the factory to society itself. With this broadening of locus, attention shifts from an exclusive focus on the worker in the factory
– the industrial labour-force – to a wider gaze throughout society, involving other marginalised groups including women, students, migrants (especially those emigrating from the south to the north of Italy) and the unemployed. In other words, while the mass worker features exclusively in the realm of production, the social worker cuts across the divide between production and reproduction.

This transformation that Negri identifies in its infancy proves fundamental to his analytical development. It informs his theorisation of political subjects and subjectivation, including his conceptualisation of the multitude with Hardt. In the language adopted by the title of this section, the transformation from the mass worker to the social worker is so fundamental that it represents a shift in epoch as opposed to a shift in era. For Negri, two core features encapsulate this new epoch. In the first place, real subsumption means that there is no more outside: capital has reached its spatial limits, and everything is now contained within its logic – this is one of the primary mechanisms through which Hardt and Negri describe the concept of empire in Empire (Hardt & Negri 2000: xi-xii, xiv). In the second place, the breaking down of the factory walls and the situating of the social worker within society at large necessarily entails a transformation in strategic political thought and action. Production ceases to be the privileged space of action; this should now be directed across both production and reproduction. Alongside this spatial shift from the factory to society, a temporal shift occurs. Antagonism and conflict are no longer restricted to the working day (in the factory), but occur throughout the entire day (in society). This shift is perhaps best characterised by Hardt, when he indicates that the zone of production, exploitation and conflict shifts from the spatial confines of the factory to the entire realm of the social.
The shift also removes the fetters which previously confined labour to the four walls of the factory: one of the core characteristics of the social worker is that of mobility:

the socialisation of the proletariat... has above all represented a new quality of labour... a mobile sort of labour force, both horizontally and vertically, a labour-power which is abstract, and which projects new needs (Negri 1980a: 183).

This concern with mobility is carried through to the subsequent theorisation of the multitude by Hardt and Negri: migrants constitute part of the social assemblage of the multitude.³

During his research for operaismo in the 1960s, Negri detects incipient tendencies towards mobility through a series of factory struggles (Milan in 1959, Genoa in 1960, Turin in 1962 and Porto Marghera in 1963), which display a number of novel features. These include spontaneity, mass participation, and independence from the internal, formalised structures of the unions. They also reveal for Negri two momentous and related developments: the emerging autonomy of the working class, and the increasing ascendancy of its subjectivity as it peels itself away from the ‘objective relations’ imposed by both capital and the representational institutions of labour. This emergent mobility intensifies with the advent of the social worker, as their activity becomes increasingly diffuse, itself a signal of their developing independence from trade union organisation:

the intensification... of heightened forms of mobility, of absenteeism, of socialisation of the struggle, ran immediately counter to any factory-centred conception of working-class interests, of the kind that has come down to us from the workers’ councilist tradition. All this gradually uncovered, in increasingly socialized forms, an attitude of struggle against work, a desire for liberation from work – whether... in the big factory... or work in general (Negri 1982: 204-205).
Negri insists that the new form of autonomous development and movement that defines the social worker leads to the unification of their struggles and, ultimately, to the unification of the social worker: “[m]obility of abstract labour equals tendency for subjects and for struggles to unify” (Negri 1982: 218). As to how and why this unification takes place, however, readers are left in the dark. This is a persistent theme of Negri’s work, one that is carried forward into his collaborative work with Hardt on the multitude. Rather than carefully elaborating the processes through which this unification occurs, it is merely asserted as a fait accompli. This assertion is all the more questionable when the characteristics of the mass worker are compared to those of the social worker. Negri insists that the former contains relatively low levels of differentiation; its principal quality is that of ‘massification’. The social worker, by contrast, is confronted by policies of fragmentation:

capital exercises its capacity to repress, to fragment and to introduce hierarchical division... Experiments in job-design, segmentation of the labour market, policies of regrading, reforms of methodologies of command within production, cooperation, etc – all this became fundamental (Negri 1982: 213).

There is a profound disconnect between this fragmentation of labour on the one hand, and the spontaneous unification of the social worker on the other hand. Yet Negri does not even register this disconnect. It is not just that there is an apparent paradox between a process of fragmentation in one realm (the economic) leading to spontaneous unification in another (the political), the fundamental problem is that this apparent paradox is asserted without an explanation. The tensions between these two processes are a recurrent theme in Negri’s subsequent theorisation, including his conceptualisation of the multitude with Hardt. Let us compare this combination of assertion and paradox with two theories of the
social that undergo a painstaking explanation of unification: Marx and Laclau. Marx posits a detailed account through which structural productive relations under capitalism create a numerically dominant proletariat, that increasingly recognises the structures of society and its position within them. This leads to a series of struggles, which accumulate and, in turn, increase the organisational power of the proletariat, causing unification and the overthrow of capital. Laclau’s vision of unification within the social can be applied more broadly. As with Negri’s account of the social worker, he begins with an acknowledgment of the fragmentation of society. Put in his own terms, the logical impossibility of the universal – “the universal is the symbol of a missing fullness” (Laclau 1996: 28) – leaves society with a proliferation of particularities. A group of these particularities, however, coalesce in a chain of equivalence through acts of articulation; they stand in as the content of this impossible universal. The set of particularities that pose as the dominant articulatory chain are the hegemonic force within society. But each and every hegemony or equivalential chain is always precarious. It is constantly exposed to two twin threats: the decomposition of its own chain, and the emergence of a more effective rival chain. Even if we disagree with Marx and Laclau, it is immediately apparent that they provide sophisticated, coherent, detailed and fully elaborated accounts of the operation of political unification within the social, in stark contrast to Negri’s assertion regarding the spontaneous unification of the social worker. This opacity continues in the account of the multitude provided by Hardt and Negri: they do not provide an adequately theorised account of how empire can be defeated (especially as they oppose the multitude’s unification in Empire – in contrast to the importance of unification in the accounts of Marx and Laclau).

Despite this limitation, the various political subjects Negri evokes during the 1960s and 1970s – the mass worker, the
The multinational worker, the social worker – indicates a constant engagement between theory and practice. The conceptual development of these figures indicate a continual process of self-critique and theoretical reevaluation, alongside an immersion in the movements of capitalism, its interaction with labour, and the social consequences of this interaction. It represents a gradual conceptual elaboration that breaks with the increasing limits of the application of Marx’s conception of the proletariat to society in the final decades of the twentieth century. In retrospect, Negri’s analysis of labour during this period appears acute and farsighted in its recognition of what is now considered to be the breakdown of the postwar Keynesian consensus, and the emergence and ascendancy of neoliberalism.

By the time of Empire, Hardt and Negri recognise that this period constitutes an epochal shift (as opposed to a shift of era). Here Hardt and Negri characterise this as the epochal shift between modernity and postmodernity, with a broad periodisation that identifies three epochs, the other being the premodern. This necessitates a transformation in terminology: the postmodern epoch is not defined by the social worker but, rather, by empire and the multitude. They describe empire as “deterritorialised and decentred” (Hardt & Negri 2000: xii), which can be simplified as the globalised form of neoliberal capitalism alongside the various regimes that enforce and legitimise its operation. Empire’s emergence is a sign of four key shifts: the real subsumption of capital which now operates on a truly global scale, having exhausted all geographical barriers; this globality indicates the absence of an outside which terminates the project of imperialism – hence empire is imperial but not imperialist; a series of philosophical, political and cultural developments broadly associated with 1968 that constitute a shift from modernism to postmodernism;

and, finally, changes in the topography, structure
and work practices of the organisation symbolize a concomitant transition from material labour to immaterial labour (see II.1vi). For Hardt and Negri, this combination of factors and the passage to empire heralds the epoch of the multitude, and points to the declining influence of the political subjects of modernity: the individual, the people and the proletariat.

What the name *the multitude* – and indeed Negri’s earlier continual reexamination of political subjects (the *mass worker*, the *multinational worker*, the *social worker*) – announces is the obsolescence of the category ‘political subjects’ *tout court*. Instead of the *essence* of political subjects, what is now in view is their *existence*. Being is no longer originary, closed in on itself, but is a process of subjectivation – a process that is open and continual. As Balibar writes, “this figure exceeds its own institution” (Balibar 1991: 46). As a result, this puts an end to their *subjection* and, instead they undergo a continual process of *subjectivation*. These figures are not fixed, static entities but undergo transformations or, in the language of Deleuze and Guattari, are marked by flows of composition, decomposition and recomposition. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes, in the introduction to the collection, *Who comes after the Subject?:*

> [t]he question therefore bears upon the critique or deconstruction of interiority, of self-presence, of consciousness, of mastery, of the individual or collective property of an essence. Critique or deconstruction of the firmness of a *seat* (*hypokeimenon*, *substantia*, *subjectum*) and the certitude of an *authority* and a *value* (the individual, a people, the state, history, work). My question [who comes after the subject?] aimed in the first place to treat this motif as an event that had indeed emerged from our history – hence the “after” – and not as some capricious variation of fashionable thinking. But at the same time I wanted to suggest a whole range – no doubt vast – in which such a critique or deconstruction has not simply obliterated its object... That which obliterates is nihilism (Nancy 1991: 4).

And Balibar notes:
this equation means that the humanity of man is identified not with a given or an essence, be it natural or super-natural, but with a practice and a task (Balibar 1994b: 12).

Returning to the epochal classification adopted by Hardt and Negri, their analysis raises a core question: what is the status of the multitude during the epoch of modernity? They insist that the key battle at the outset of this epoch is conducted by Hobbes and Spinoza, through their respective concepts of the people and the multitude. They argue that conceptually Spinoza inverts Hobbes’ theory of the multitude and the people (and, by association, the state of nature-civil society distinction with its ordering qualities of sovereignty and transcendence), yet historically Hobbes and the people triumph during the modern period, although this is not an absolute victory: the people “gained the upper hand, but... not in a definitive way” (Hardt & Negri 2000: 77). The flipside of the people’s ascendancy during modernity is the domestication of the multitude. “Through the workings of the sovereignty machine the multitude is in every moment transformed into an ordered totality” (ibid.: 87). For them, this is the modern European metaphysical project of sovereignty, transcendence, representation and order spilled over into and subordinated to the realm of politics:

The political solution offered by Hegel... demonstrates the profound and intimate relationship between European politics and metaphysics. Politics resides at the center of metaphysics because modern European metaphysics arose in response to the challenge of the liberated singularities and the revolutionary constitution of the multitude... it provided a transcendent apparatus that could impose order on the multitude and prevent it from organizing spontaneously and expressing its creativity autonomously... Hobbes’s proposition of... a “God on earth” plays a foundational role in the modern construction of a transcendent political apparatus (ibid.: 83).
The implication of this account is that the multitude plays only a limited role, although it bursts into life and throws off its fetters during upsurges of revolutionary activity.\textsuperscript{6}

In \textit{Multitude}, Hardt and Negri develop their analytical account of the multitude. Here they describe the multitude’s dual character: it is both ‘always-already’ and ‘not-yet’. “The multitude, then... has a strange double temporality: always-already and not-yet” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 222). The ‘always-already’ component is inspired by Spinoza’s \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}, and indicates “the multitude from the standpoint of eternity”, although they quickly qualify this:

Perhaps rather than eternity we should say more precisely that this multitude acts always in the present, a perpetual present. The first multitude is \textit{ontological} and we could not conceive our social being without it (ibid.: 221).

The ‘not-yet’ relates to history and politics:

the historical multitude or, really, the not yet multitude. This multitude has never yet existed... This second multitude is \textit{political}, and it will require a political project to bring it into being (ibid.).

Yet the overcoming of the ‘not-yet’ – that is, the historical realisation of a political multitude, its coming-into-being – raises distinct theoretical problems with their broader philosophical account. This account rests upon a basic dichotomy between infinity and order – which relates to further dichotomies, immanence-transcendence, democracy-sovereignty, excess-closure, multitude-empire. They pose these dichotomies in order to unleash the first of these terms from the grip of the second. It is not clear from their account, however, whether the realisation of the multitude at the politco-historical level constitutes the elimination of its antagonist (presumably, empire) or some form of accommodation with it. Some theoretical problems are raised regarding whether the
multitude’s relation is one of contradiction, opposition or antagonism in II.1v, where it is established that – in order for an antagonism to operate – the identity of each antagonist requires each other. As a consequence, the one cannot eliminate the other and, hence, the multitude is incapable of fully constituting itself politically, that is, moving beyond the ‘not-yet’ stage.

ii. Operaismo, Autonomia, Constituent Power

Hardt and Negri develop ‘being-against’ as the political ontology of the multitude in *Empire*. This section explores the philosophical roots of this strategy in Negri’s theory and practice. It focuses on two issues: Mario Tronti’s arguments in the 1960s, that exert a decisive influence on *operaismo* and *autonomia*; and, the central concept of *constituent power* that Negri theorises in *Insurgencies*. It concludes with an analysis of being-against.

*Tronti, operaismo, autonomia*

*Operaismo* originated through the journal *Quaderni Rossi*, established by Raniero Panizieri in 1961, around which a cluster of emergent radical intellectuals formed. Within this group, Tronti’s views – elaborated in the 1966 book *Operai e capitale (Workers and capital)* – were pivotal. Tronti claims that Marxism and the labour movement had misunderstood the message laid down by Marx: they had not appreciated the implications that flow from the basic fact that capital is ultimately dependent on labour. The flipside of this is that labour is only temporarily – and not ultimately – dependent on capital. Labour, furthermore, has the ability and the potential to free itself from this dependency: “that simplest of revolutionary truths: capital *can not* destroy the working class; the working class *can* destroy capital” (Tronti 1979b: 18). So for Tronti, contrary to standard portrayals, workers are not subordinate to
capital and capitalists, but rather the latter are subordinate to the former. The traditional viewpoint that workers provide labour and capitalists provide capital requires revision. Instead, it is workers that provide (the capitalists with) capital (through the surplus value of their labour), while it is the capitalists that provide (the workers with) labour (to extract surplus value form workers). As a result, capitalists need to escape their subordination to workers, and this is achieved through exploitation:

Exploitation is born, historically, from the necessity of capital to escape from its de facto subordination to the class of worker-producers. It is in this very specific sense that capitalist exploitation, in turn, provokes workers’ insubordination. The increasing organisation of exploitation, its continual reorganisation at the very highest levels of industry and society are, then, again responses to workers’ refusal to submit to this process (ibid.: 10).

Capital, thus, is constantly forced to react and respond to the struggle and strength of the working-class movement (rather than vice-versa). This is best demonstrated by the opening salvo of the 1964 essay ‘Lenin in England’:\(^8\) “A new era in the class struggle is beginning. The workers have imposed it on the capitalists” (Tronti 1979a: 1).

Tronti’s work inspired the extra-parliamentary Italian left, and many of the themes elaborated in Operaia e capitale recur thereafter. His thesis informed a strategy in which the only viable method for the working class to achieve power was through extricating itself from its enforced relationship with capital. As a consequence, operaismo and autonomia launched a new enquiry into labour, with two key requirements. In the first place, to investigate workers as a whole, rather than to examine certain sections of it, such as a labour aristocracy. In the second place, to conduct an inquiry into the workforce autonomous of both its antagonistic class and those claiming to represent it (the trade
unions and political parties of the left). This was to be an unmediated project that explored the *class composition* of the working class, which was developed as a deliberate alternative to the dominant strategy of the PCI and the trade unions. These institutions were numerically strong and exerted clear effects on post-war Italy. Influenced by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, the PCI’s strategy was to seek alliances with groups beyond the working class. Their success and incorporation within the parliamentary system – in contrast to most other post-war European communist parties, whose activity was largely conducted in non-parliamentary realms – left a space for radical leftist activity, which *operaismo* (and, later, *autonomia*) inhabited. As Red Notes indicates:

The ‘specific material interests’ of the working class as the basis for strategic analysis was defined as ‘workerism’ (*operaismo*), stressing all the time the ‘working class point of view’ (*punta di vista operaio*). This was (and is) deliberately and diametrically opposed (from *Quaderni Rossi* onwards) to the basic Communist Party framework of class alliances... of which the term ‘hegemony’ was, and remains, the reference point.

Against the term ‘hegemony’, *Quaderni Rossi* developed the term ‘class composition’ to attack the prevailing idea of a static ‘working class’ which is passive in its material relation to capital... *Class recomposition* (and its further stage, *political recomposition*) refers – as against frontist ‘alliances’ determined from above – to the process of socialisation of the working class, and the extension, unification and generalization of its antagonistic tendency against capital, in struggle, *from below* (Red Notes 1979: viii).

*Operaismo*, then, differentiates itself theoretically and politically from the PCI. By extension, Negri’s theory and practice is from the outset set against Gramsci, whose theoretical approach informed the PCI’s post-war strategy.

Negri adopts Tronti’s view that capital constantly reacts to the initiatives of labour. He emphasises the importance of labour’s *separation* from capitalism and the State.
The separation that I outlined as a methodological break... This is no longer tendency but actuality... Marxism now becomes a logic of separation (Negri 1977b: 265).

is this not the most desirable of situations – the victorious increase in our separateness; the intensification of our independence; this (Promethean?) self-reliance (ibid.: 269).

This new approach that Negri adopts had implications for and permeates all aspects of political and intellectual practice; it involves re-imagining how politics and research are conducted:

The continuity of the history of the revolutionary workers’ movement is the history of the discontinuity of that movement, the history of the radical breaks that have characterized it. The revolutionary workers’ movement is continually reborn from a virgin mother. The whores of continuity are still alive and well in the Official Labor Movement’s institutes of history. But, luckily, militant historiography is undergoing a renaissance too... and on the plane of historiography we are not afraid to present ourselves as the “other workers’ movement”... When Karl-Heinz Roth or Gisela Bock tells the formidable story of how the working class in struggle has continually destroyed its own traditional organizations, they are certainly not animated by a spirit of iconoclasm; rather, they are highlighting the radical, irreducible difference of the revolutionary movement... So, I must assume this radical difference as a methodological condition of the subversive case we are arguing (ibid.: 237).

For Negri, then, the failure of the institutions of the left (trade unions, political parties, even academics and intellectuals) is their failure to separate from the capital relation and those institutions that buttressed this relation, most notably the state. The failure to base a strategy around separation, for Negri, merely incorporates labour within capital, enforcing the former to operate on the latter’s terms. He argues that the pitiful state of the Italian left is its failure to separate. Separation remains a persistent feature of Negri’s theory and political practice: it is recast in Empire as ‘being-against’.

Separation informs the strategy of autonomia which emerged in the early 1970s, combining operaismo and strands of the post-68
student movements. Negri was its leading theoretical influence, and it emerges alongside his identification of the social worker. The activity of autonomia encompassed two key factors: separation from capital, the state, and the traditional representative institutions of the left; and, a recognition that the sites of production, exploitation and conflict were shifting from the factory to wider society. This latter factor prompted autonomia to direct its actions away from the factory, by proliferating radical activities throughout society. These include transport blockades, ‘auto-reduction’ (a phenomenon whereby users paid prices deliberately below the retail price on a range of goods and services, in supermarkets and cinemas, on buses, and so on), the occupation of housing, and setting up free (pirate) radio stations. The variety and range of these activities indicate the focus that autonomia gave to mobility and innovation in these struggles, their situation in wider society and an emphasis on the importance of local and collective initiative. The stress on mobility assists and reinforces the proliferation of activity, but another intention is to confuse the authorities; it prevents the capture and domestication of political activity, preserving the wild excess that characterises this new form of political action.

To reinforce the separation of labour from capital, autonomia’s economic strategy departs from the traditional approach of labour institutions. This strategy advocates the refusal of work. Negri and autonomia consider that socialist ideology valorises the performance of work, and this ultimately extends the working class’ subordination to capital. He argues that socialists merely strive to maintain workers in their traditional forms of employment, rather than attempting to overturn this relation. Negri maintains that only refusal can break this relationship:
The refusal of work is first and foremost sabotage, strikes, direct action... The exploitation of labour is the foundation of the whole of capitalist society. Thus the refusal of work does not negate one nexus of capitalist society... Rather, in all its radicality, it negates the whole of capitalist society (ibid.: 270).

The strategy of refusal enables a reimagination and reconstruction of work; this, in turn, displaces drudgery and other negative elements so that labour is undertaken positively.

We are talking about the fact that once workers have reached this level of productivity [in the era of the social worker] and "refinement of their talents"... they "want to enjoy it". That is, they no longer imagine work as a discipline but rather as satisfaction. Workers imagine their life not as work but as the absence of it, their activity as free and creative exercise (Negri 1973: 75).11

The social worker and its strategies of separation and refusal are carried forward into Negri’s collaboration with Hardt. In Empire these terms are reformulated as the multitude and ‘being-against’ (alongside related terms such as withdrawal, flight and exodus) respectively. They consider that these will facilitate their preferred form of anti-sovereign democracy which, in turn, is linked to Negri’s crucial concept of constituent power, which is now considered.

Constituent Power

Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State12 is arguably Negri’s most important text in terms of social and political philosophy. Here he develops the concept of constituent power, which hugely informs the later theorisation of the multitude, especially through its open form of politics, characterised by excess and infinity.

The concepts of constituted power and constituent power follow on from a prior distinction Negri identifies in his text on Spinoza, The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics. Here, Negri highlights the importance of the distinction
between *potestas* and *potentia* in Spinoza’s philosophy. This couplet is inspired by Negri’s reading of Hobbes and Spinoza which, in turn, informs the Hardt and Negri account of empire and the multitude. For Negri, *potestas* (and, thus, constituted power) describes the formal, consolidated power of order, organisation and constitution, while *potentia* (and, thus, constituent power) refers to the occasional, underground power that swells up and explodes during a revolutionary situation. So, constituent power cannot be grasped in isolation, but only when contrasted with its opposing force, namely, constituted power. Negri regards constituent power as the force that opens up history and inaugurates a new epoch and reorients being; constituted power, by contrast, is the closure of such activity, its domestication. Constituent power describes the intensification of activity that exemplifies key revolutionary periods in the western world during the modern era. Generally these major revolutionary episodes are considered in isolation, as disparate events that express responses to specific historical conjunctures through the proposal of key ideological, social and political alternatives to the status quo – whether they be bourgeois, liberal, socialist, proletarian, communist, and so on. The concept of constituent power eschews the historical specificity of these events, by bringing them together to describe the liberatory desires and impulses that animate these pivotal moments in history. Negri regards constituent power as the fundamental concept of politics: “The concept of constituent power is the core of political ontology” (35).

For Negri, constituent power has a specific relation to time. It is fundamentally oriented forwards, towards the future, whereas the fate of constituted power is to be frozen in time, constantly referring back to the past, attempting to preserve it in aspic:
In the concept of constituent power is thus implicit the idea that the past no longer explains the present, and that only the future will be able to do so... Constitutionalism is a juridical doctrine that knows only the past... In contrast, constituent power always refers to the future. Constituent power has always a singular relationship to time. Indeed, constituent power is on the one hand an absolute will determining its own temporality... But this is not enough: constituent power, on the other hand, also represents an extraordinary acceleration of time. History becomes concentrated in a present that develops impetuously... From this perspective constituent power is closely connected to the concept of revolution. And since it is already linked to the concept of democracy, now it positions itself as the motor or cardinal expression of democratic revolution (11).

This analysis forges an association between constituent power and a number of qualities. These include openness – both in the sense of forcing something closed open, and in itself resisting closure – innovation, creation, democracy, revolution and the future. They contrast with the qualities of closure, tradition, stasis, order and reaction that exemplify constituted power, constitutionalism and sovereignty:

Sovereignty... a foundation... is an accomplished finality, whereas constituent power is unfinalized; it [sovereignty] implies a limited time and space, whereas constituent power implies a multidirectional plurality of times and spaces; it is a rigidified formal constitution, whereas constituent power is absolute process. Everything, in sum, sets constituent power and sovereignty in opposition (13).

Negri exaggerates in suggesting that “everything” sets them in opposition as constituted power relies on constituent power, as he later acknowledges. The latter invents, founds and creates the former: revolution produces laws; these laws then succeed the revolution:

The law and the constitution follow constituent power: constituent power gives rationality and substance to the law. Constituent power stands as a revolutionary extension of the human capacity to construct history, as a fundamental act of innovation (24).
Here, we have the *raison d’être* of constituent power: “[c]onstituent power fulfils here its central function, which is that of building new being and a new nature of history. A new world of life” (332).

There is much appeal to Negri’s theorisation, but the question remains as to whether constituent power can eliminate constituted power. Under a different register, Laclau insists that this is impossible.\(^1\) He writes that in any situation of radical disorder (or, in Negri’s terms, constituent power), there is the ever-present threat that numerous elements of society will rally around any ‘call to order’ (or, in Negri’s terms, constituted power), irrespective of its contents, and this becomes ever more the case the greater the disorder. Laclau writes:

> when people are confronted with radical *anomie*, the need for *some kind* of order becomes more important than the actual ontic order that brings it about. The Hobbesian universe is the extreme version of this gap: because society is faced with a situation of *total* disorder (the state of nature), whatever the Leviathan does is legitimate – irrespective of its content – as long as order is the result (Laclau 2005a: 89).

This example points to the enduring relevance of a discursive analysis of politics – something that is entirely lacking from Negri. It points to two factors: the inexorable significance of articulation to politics; and, the impossibility of investing the entire social with constituent power (which is another way of saying, the elimination of constituted power).

Three further points can be made on constituent power. In the first place, constituent power flattens history, ignoring the acute specificities associated with each of these key revolutionary periods. Negri considers five: the Italian Renaissance (through Machiavelli); the English Civil War (and Glorious Revolution); the American War, and Declaration, of Independence; the French revolutionary period of the late eighteenth century; and the Russian revolutionary period
of the early twentieth century. Each of these upheavals, however, can be (and have been) explained by their own specific set of historical circumstances which largely effect the direction of events. In highlighting the revolutionary and liberatory desire that constitutes constituent power and connects all of these episodes, the historical differences between them are necessarily downplayed. An approximation of constituent power undoubtedly plays an important part in this revolutionary transformations, but so do a number of other factors, factors that are grounded in the historical conditions – such as the economic composition of that society and its level of fluidity, political actors and organisation, the relative degrees of technological and communicational development, and so on. To focus on articulation, we only need to consider the key slogans of the last three of these revolutions – “No taxation without representation”, “Liberté, égalité, fraternité” and “Bread, peace and land” – to highlight their historical specificity. All of these slogans mobilised the respective revolutionary forces, assisted in previously fragmented groups coalescing against a specific enemy or the status quo, and channeled their oppositional activity in overturning embedded regimes. In short, these regimes were not overthrown as a result of a spontaneous oppositional unification but, rather, as a result of the intervention of articulatory form of politics.

In the second place, Negri’s close association between constituent power and revolution raises questions about how to conceive of change and transformation. Negri’s discussion aligning these five revolutionary periods with constituent power raises the question of those historical moments of significant political, social, economic and cultural change that occurred in non-revolutionary situations: the attainment of universal suffrage, the creation of welfare systems in the post-war period, or civil rights legislation in the US during the 1960s, for instance. Negri’s account cannot explain these transformations. Profound revolutionary situations,
furthermore, are extremely rare: Negri himself highlights five that have occurred in five distinct nations over a timespan in excess of four centuries (albeit with significant repercussions that spread beyond their spatio-temporal location). How is constituent power to be organised or activated during these long swathes of time in which revolution is absent? How are we to understand the history of these periods? Any effective politics requires an intense focus on these *longue durées* as opposed to treating them as irrelevant.\(^\text{18}\)

In the third place, Negri’s contrast between institutions and being raises difficulties.\(^\text{19}\) For him, the opposition between constituent power and constituted power is also an opposition between being and institutions, as if these were mutually exclusive entities:

In these elements [resistance and desire] strength takes shape as constituent power: not to seek institutionality but to construct more being – ethical being, social being, community (22-3).

Institutions, for Negri, have one feature: they seek to endure, prompting their own institutionalisation whereby they become self-seeking and self-serving. For Negri, it is not just constituted power’s institutions that should be rejected. He displays an indifference to emergent institutions (such as the trade union movement of the second half of the twentieth century, and socialist and communist political parties that arose in the early twentieth century), precisely because they are destined to become institutionalised. Yet the revolutionary episodes he describes are intimately linked to the abrupt arrival of new and emergent institutional forms on to the historical stage. These were organised to endure: the English civil war is also the history of the New Model Army; revolutionary France is also the history of the Girondins and the Jacobins; the Russian Revolution is also the history of the new Soviets and the Bolsheviks.
This opposition between the ‘being’ of constituent power and the ‘institutionalisation’ of constituted power is even more problematic in relation to democracy. In keeping with his opposition between sovereignty and democracy, Negri defines democracy as an expansive force that resists institutionalisation:

democracy, too, resists being constitutionalized: democracy is in fact a theory of absolute government while constitutionalism is a theory of limited government and therefore a practice that limits democracy (1-2).

Historically, however, the various forms of democracy have been entwined with their own specific institutions. The history of Athenian democracy is also the history of organisation and internalisation: of the bounded polis, restricted citizenship, and the specific practices and procedures formalised in institutions such as the Assembly, the Council and the courts. The history of modern representative democracy is also the history of organisations: of parliaments, political parties and elections. In an historical sense, then, it is mistaken to contrast democracy with sovereignty as Negri does: “the opposite of democracy is not totalitarianism but the concept of sovereignty itself” (29). Models of democracy have been, remain, and will continue to be inseparable from the various institutional frameworks (elections, parliaments, parties, and so on) through which their activities are formalised and legitimised. This is not to deny that any advocate of democracy must at one and the same time be an advocate of democratisation. It is merely to stress that: democracy has historically been linked with institutions; this link is likely to persist; and, as a consequence, these institutions need to be engaged with in order for their democratic credentials to be deepened and extended. These processes are unlikely to occur by disengaging from the institutions, and situating politics on the margins of society, as Negri advocates. As Laclau and Mouffe write:
the project for a radical democracy as an alternative for the Left... cannot consist of the affirmation, from positions of marginality, of a set of anti-system demands; on the contrary, it must base itself upon the search for a point of equilibrium between a maximum advance for the democratic revolution in a broad range of spheres (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 189).

The broad conceptual apparatus of constituent power makes it very difficult to criticise, but it ultimately rests upon those ontological features that Negri deems to be positive: desire, freedom, sociality. The flipside of this is that it ignores the role of those factors – tradition, order, insularity – he regards as negative. Hardt and Negri are fond of quoting Spinoza’s comment that humans will “fight for their own servitude as if they were fighting for their own [salvation]”.21 Yet unlike Spinoza, Hardt and Negri never address why this is the case; they fail to consider for what reasons humans accept and defend their servitude. More importantly, they fail to tackle how to move from the condition of servitude to that of salvation – arguably the key question that an alternative politics needs to address.

The concept of constituent power ultimately requires the concept of constituted power in order to operate: in the latter’s absence, the former would be unable to function. In posing constituent power, in other words, Negri remains wedded to Hobbes’ problematic – albeit from the other side of it. There is, however, no outside of sovereignty. Democracy (or constituent power) is not exterior to sovereignty (or constituted power), as Negri claims. Democracy – as Spinoza indicates – is one form of sovereignty, that is, interior to it. Yet sovereignty is not closed in on itself, static and the mere repetition of the same. The wild excess, similarly, is not external to democratic forms of sovereignty, but internal to it, and this provides it with its dynamism, producing a mobile account of sovereign power.
iii. ‘Being-against’: refusal, exodus, desertion, flight

‘Being-against’ is developed in *Empire* through a series of related terms, including refusal, desertion, exodus, withdrawal, subtraction, defection and flight. It is associated with the democracy-sovereignty dichotomy, in which ‘being-for’ represents the continuation of sovereignty and ‘being-against’ constitutes the puncturing of sovereignty as part of the project to absolutise democracy. Hardt and Negri extend Negri’s earlier theoretical development, and proclaim ‘being-against’ as the generalised strategy of the multitude: ‘being-against’ enables the multitude to “push through” empire. For Hardt and Negri, these actions will eventually exhaust empire, and drain it of its power:

Whereas in the *disciplinary era* sabotage was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may well be *desertion*. Whereas being-against in modernity often meant a direct and/or dialectical opposition of forces, in postmodernity being-against might well be most effective in an oblique or diagonal stance. Battles against the Empire might be won through subtraction and desertion (Hardt & Negri 2000: 212).

It is difficult to ascertain what might be on the other side once empire has been “pushed through”. For Hardt and Negri, this would be a politics conducted on the plane of immanence, but this ignores the role of articulation in politics. “Pushing through” empire would inaugurate a situation of radical disorder, the very lifeblood of the articulation of the ‘call for order’, that Laclau considers.

A defining characteristic of empire for Hardt and Negri is the lack of an outside: empire subsumes the globe in the era of *real subsumption*. Empire, as a consequence, is *imperial* rather than *imperialist*: while all prior empires (the Roman, the British, and so on) were imperialist – they expanded spatially – empire has reached its limits. This external lack also affects the multitude’s strategy of refusal: as there is no external space to desert to, the
flight of ‘being-against’ is a metaphorical and mental withdrawal as opposed to a literal and geographic one. They write, “[i]f there is no longer a place that can be recognized as outside, we must be against in every place. This being-against becomes the essential key to every active political position” (ibid.: 211).

This is precisely the level on which analysis should be conducted and, when it is, a strategy of ‘being-against’ is found wanting. ‘Being-against’ in and of itself is ultimately an endless and exhausting exercise that saps time, energy and resources; it is negative and unproductive. At a certain point, a ‘being-for’ has to be conceived. Once conceived, this ‘being-for’ requires: articulation; negotiation with a range of groups; and, to be inserted in a struggle in order for its implementation. Hardt and Negri tacitly acknowledge this at the end of Empire in their espousal of three demands. These – a social wage, global citizenship and the right to reappropriation – constitute a ‘being-for’, but there is very little in the Hardt and Negri theoretical account capable of describing how this ‘for’ can be brought into ‘being’, and how they relate to their broader philosophical system. As Laclau writes:

both demands and rights have to be recognized, and the instance from whom that recognition is requested cannot be in a relation of total exteriority vis-à-vis the social claims. Each of the three demands, in order to be implemented, requires strategic considerations concerning changes in the structure of the State, autonomization of certain spheres, political alliances and incorporation to the historical arena of previously excluded social sectors. That is, we are in the terrain of what Gramsci called “war of position”. But this political game is strictly incompatible with the notion of a plurality of unconnected vertical struggles, all targeting – through some unspecified mechanism – an assumed virtual center of the Empire (Laclau 2004: 30).

The strategy that Laclau advocates recognises the mess and the tedium of political struggles. These are, more often than not, protracted, mundane and tiresome, riddled with negotiation,
compromise, pitfalls and setbacks. There is undoubtedly joy in these episodes, too, not just in securing victories, but in assembly, association and combination. But political action does not automatically deliver communism in the laps of the multitude as they spontaneously converge through their strategy of ‘being-against’. Political action is characterised by victories, but also by dedication and disappointment. Hardt and Negri set the bar too high, and this has repercussions. On suffering setbacks, new political actors will quickly become disillusioned, prompting a downward spiral into passivity and cynicism.

It also provides an incomplete picture of political practice. ‘Being-against’ presupposes that advance is the only form of politics, whereas the defence of prior gains is equally important. Without such defensive activity, the hegemon is left unopposed to advance further in the direction of its choice. This inevitably entails engaging with political organisations, which are now considered.

iv. Political organisation

The substantive break in Negri’s approach to political organisation occurs with the movement from operaismo to autonomia, in the early 1970s. Operaismo accepted Lenin’s vanguard as the optimal form of organisation. By the time of autonomia, vanguardism is discarded as a middle course is steered between the “long march through the institutions” of the PCI, and the terrorism practiced by emergent clandestine groups such as the Brigate Rosse. This organisational shift was informed by Negri’s view that post-war Italian society had become simplified into two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As a result of this simplification, Negri’s political aim was to abolish any remaining hierarchies within the working class. He believes that this enables it to bypass the transitional socialist stage and move directly from (the impending
collapse of) capitalism to communism. “Today... [t]he party must reveal the given class unity, the recomposition that has taken place within the proletariat, from within and below, not from outside and above (Negri 1973: 89).

*Autonomia*, then, was effectively a political party characterised by a ‘non-party’ form, an ‘organisation’ without hierarchies aiming to dissolve hierarchies in the working class. For Negri, the working class should not only abandon their traditional institutions (the parliamentary or vanguard party and trade unions), but those new political movements that take their place (such as *Autonomia*) should be liberatory in goal, and also liberating in and through their very practice. Rather than having representatives, mediating forces or even delegating responsibility, the working class should seize control of its own internal organisation: “there can be no working class conception of the party unless it is a working class desire for reappropriation of organisation” (Negri 1974d: 61). This also involves a spatial shift, with local initiative superseding any national form of direction:

> power is to be dissolved into a network of powers, and the independence of the class is to be constructed via the autonomy of individual revolutionary movements. Only a diffuse network of powers can organize revolutionary democracy (Negri 1977b: 279).

In terms of organisation, then, two themes exemplify *autonomia*: anti-institutionalism and the network form. These two themes serve as an ideal entry-point for a consideration of organisational strategies that Hardt and Negri propose for the multitude.

The first of these themes, anti-institutionalism, has been the predominant stance adopted by Negri since the 1970s – best exemplified through the concept of constituent power. Anti-institutionalism also informs the strategy in *Empire*, which stresses the vitality of autonomous and autonomist developments. Here,
there is a close association between anti-institutionalism and ‘being-against’, as considered in II.1.iii. Hardt and Negri do not provide a full elaboration of this in *Empire*, as their focus is primarily on an explication of this new imperial form (as opposed to a full consideration of how to move beyond it).

In *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, however, there are signs of a shift and a *rapprochement* with forms of political organisation. Here, Hardt and Negri concede the value of certain forms of organisation, and acknowledge that organisations have a role to play in the project to form the second arm – the political, ‘not yet’ – of the multitude. They single out the International Criminal Court (ICC) for particular praise, which “indicates the possibility of a global system of justice that serves to protect the rights of all equally” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 276).

While this is a welcome development, three problems stand out. First, as its name indicates, the ICC is an *international* and only potentially a *global* institution, with voluntary membership – famously, George W Bush refused US entry to avoid the prosecution of its politicians and military. Second, in the ICC there is somewhat of a replication of the dispensation of justice at the level of the nation state – precisely a form of *constituted power* that Hardt and Negri seek to move beyond. Third, the ICC is only a legal body, and this inevitably raises questions regarding the enforcement of its strictures and codes.

In *Multitude*, furthermore, there are frequent pronouncements that recognise the need for organisation: “[w]e have to construct a method or a set of general criteria for generating institutional reforms” (ibid.: 289); “[w]e need a new institutional mechanism not only to prevent corruption but to restitute the common that has been stolen” (ibid.: 298); and, “we need something like Foucault’s notion of genealogy, in which the subject creates new institutional and social models based on its own productive capacities” (ibid.:
Here there are two key problems. In the first place, the whole discussion is conducted at an abstract and vague level; once again, beyond their call for novelty, it is difficult to appreciate what these new institutional forms might look like and how they would operate. In the second place, hostility to institutions has been a persistent feature of Negri’s political practice and thought, especially through the concept of constituent power, the rigid opposition between sovereignty and democracy, and the ‘being-against’ of Empire. Does this rapprochement indicate a rejection – however partial – of the theory developed in Insurgencies, and even in Empire? If so, what else is to be jettisoned? Or, do they consider the analyses in Insurgencies and Empire on the one hand, and Multitude on the other to be consistent with one another and, if so, how is this rapprochement to be developed?

Hardt and Negri continue their opposition to the traditional institutions of the left in Multitude. Political parties are ignored, while trade unions are explicitly depicted as outmoded. Three reasons are offered for this growing irrelevance: their limited representation of the labour force; their basis around particular trades and/or industries – miners, electricians, shopworkers, and so on – inevitably causes a divided and restricted focus; and their preoccupation with (narrow) economic factors as opposed to (broader) political ones. Hardt and Negri do, however, throw a lifeline to trade unions: new life can be breathed into them, provided they open up and broaden their base, and combine with emergent social movements. This is a promising line to develop, but one that is fraught with difficulties. First, the increasing prevalence of immaterial labour (see II.1vi), unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment has gone hand-in-hand with falling membership, participation, activity and recognition of trade unions, especially in the west. Second, as Hardt and Negri are well aware, the cultural and organisational characteristics of trade unions are
vastly different to those of the new social movements. Third, although Hardt and Negri point to those examples – such as Seattle at the turn of the millennium – in which trade unions and new social movements have collaborated successfully, there are plenty of other examples in which attempts at cooperation have proved less fruitful.24

More importantly, however, there is no theoretical development of how such a combination might materialise. This is in stark contrast to Laclau’s careful, thoughtful elaboration of how social and political alliances are constructed, decomposed and recomposed.25 Once again, it is difficult to imagine how unions and new social movements can achieve combination on the basis of a politics conducted on the plane of immanence. For Laclau, by contrast, the increasingly diverse social field is overridden by the articulation of a hegemonic power. Activity within society comprises various groups attempting to join forces with others so that they can articulate a politics that becomes hegemonic, through the construction of a chain of equivalence. This comprises various elements (unions, environmentalists, NGOs, and so on) who combine to negotiate their positions and formulate a series of demands to be articulated. These demands combine – weakening the ‘identities’ of the components in the equivalential chain – to challenge and ultimately seek to replace the extant hegemonic force.

Hardt and Negri illustrate the emerging organisational forms of the multitude through three metaphors: flesh, swarm, and the network. The metaphor of the flesh is used in contrast to the metaphor of the body. The latter is most closely associated with Hobbes, the people and, more particularly, the frontispiece of Leviathan. The flesh – in contrast to the body – is malleable (rather than rigid), formless (rather than hierarchical), mobile (rather than fixed) and diversely constructing (rather than centrally
constructed). The metaphor of the swarm is deployed to indicate how resistance adapts against the imperial power of empire:

*it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then disappear back into the environment... It has swarm intelligence... The intelligence of the swarm is based fundamentally on communication... The swarm model suggested by animal societies... assumes that each of the agents... is effectively the same and on its own not very creative. The swarms that we see emerging in the new network political organizations, in contrast are composed of a multitude of different creative agents. This adds several more layers of complexity to the model (ibid.: 91-92).*

While in agreement with Hardt and Negri that communication is pivotal to oppositional political activity, their account of communication falls short in comparison to other theorists, such as Gramsci and Laclau (this is explored in II.2). These “several layers” of “different creative agents” referred to above imply multifaceted activity (as opposed to strategy) across a range of issues (as opposed to the combination of these) which, in turn, signifies the requirement of an articulatory force that attempts at their unification. In order to “swarm”, articulation is required. As Laclau writes, “the unity of the group is... the result of an articulation of demands” (Laclau 2005a: ix). The construction of this unity – or “an ever-receding totality” as expressed in the ensuing quotation – is complex, convoluted and precarious. It is always problematic to keep the different demands – or “partial objects” as expressed in the ensuing quotation – unified:

*We have, however, partial objects that, through their very partiality embody an ever-receding totality. The latter requires a contingent social construction, as it does not result from the positive, ontic nature of the objects themselves. This is what we have called articulation and hegemony (ibid.: 224).*

The third and final metaphor is the network, the predominant one used by Hardt and Negri. It was introduced by Negri to depict
the organisational structure of Autonomia in the 1970s, but was not explicated further. In Multitude, however, Hardt and Negri explicitly endorse the network form. With the Internet as its prime example, they regard the network to have two key features. First, a ‘flat’ form of organisation, characterised by the absence of a central point, thereby leaving a multiplicity of nodes to construct in common and resist unification and centralisation. Second, expansivity: the absence of central coordination enables and encourages proliferation from new nodal points. Seattle, for Hardt and Negri, serves as the highpoint for network forms of political organisation, which witnessed the convergence of numerous seemingly incompatible singular groups – environmentalists, trade unionists, church leaders, anarchists, and so on. They list a number of more durable signs that point to the increasing pertinence of network politics. These include the ‘identity politics’ movements that proliferate in the last decades of the twentieth century (with “their insistence on autonomy and their refusal of any centralized hierarchy, leaders, or spokespeople” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 86)), the resurgence of anarchist movements, and the alter-globalisation movements that sprung up in the first years of the new millennium:

[t]he groups are not unified under any single authority but rather relate to each other in a network structure. Social forums, affinity groups, and other forms of democratic decision-making are the basis of the movements... a “movement of movements” (ibid.: 86-87).

The adoption and celebration of the political potential of the network form of organisation by Hardt and Negri is not without difficulties. In the first place, the network form is a recent arrival, and its future direction is uncertain: it is premature to emphasise the potentiality and potency of this emerging organisational form. In the second place, and more importantly, analyses by Barabási and Castells of the network form indicate that the optimistic account
provided by Hardt and Negri needs to be tempered with caution. Barabási argues that, alongside standard topographical exposition of networks that emphasise nodes and links, the network form is additionally characterised by *connectors* and *hubs*. *Connectors* are “nodes with an anomalously large number of links” (Barabási 2003: 56), while:

> the architecture of the World Wide Web is dominated by a few very highly connected nodes, or *hubs*. These hubs, such as Yahoo! or Amazon.com are extremely visible... The hubs are the strongest argument against the utopian vision of an egalitarian cyberspace... Compared to these hubs, the rest of the Web is invisible (ibid.: 58).

Castells, meanwhile, in his consideration of the *space of flows*, similarly identifies the prevalence of hierarchical ‘hubs’ within networks. These hubs enable “*the dominant, managerial élites*” to exercise “directional functions” so that “the space of flows is made up of personal micro-networks that project their interests in functional macro-networks throughout the global set of interactions in the space of flows” (Castells 2000: 445-446). The analyses of Barabási and Castells, in short, call into question an optimistic reading of the democratic and egalitarian potential of the network form of organisation: while superficially flat and inclusive, it has produced new hierarchies (and, to a lesser extent, reinforced others) with hubs, connectors and dominant managerial élites that possess disproportionate power and influence. There are coherent arguments, then, which suggest that the Internet – that exemplar of the network form – lacks the democratic credentials Hardt and Negri assign to it. This casts dim light on their exuberant embrace of the network form as the portent of a democratic future.

Despite these concerns, it is clear that social networking is playing an increasing role in organising and directing popular protest. Within the last year, it has proved crucial in the UK, Tunisia and Egypt, to take just a few examples. In the UK, social networks
assisted in the student demonstrations and wider activity in late 2010, while the anti-tax avoidance group, UK Uncut, has activated a range of events across hundreds of sites within a matter of months. In Tunisia and Egypt, decades-old dictatorships have been swept aside through popular revolutionary activity. Much of this was initiated and organised through social networks and. In Egypt, the dying regime recognised the threat and closed down Internet access. Social networking has clearly played a significant role in the events in Egypt and Tunisia but more embedded communicational forms – such as Al-Jazeera – have been equally effective. Equally, the Arab Spring has underlined the enduring potency of social and political assembly in public spaces. The symbolic importance of Tahrir Square – as the most prominent of many examples – with its (impeccably Spinozist) body-to-body association, points to the obdurate efficacy of the collective appropriation of material public space, just as much as it does the emergent possibilities provided by ethereal social networking. The network form, in other words, is a supplement to more traditional forms of communication and organisation, rather than the sign of a structural transformation.

Its adoption by Hardt and Negri, however, does point to a departure from, or weakening of, their dichotomous presentation of institutionalisation through constituted power and the revolutionary activity of constituent power or, put differently, sovereignty and democracy.

v. Definitions, comparisons and contrasts
In keeping with the movement beyond the political subjects of modernity, the open process of subjectivation that characterises the multitude resists enclosing the multitude in a single definition. Instead Hardt and Negri deploy various mediating techniques to flesh out the concept. Three can be identified: through comparison
with certain political subjects; through analogy; and, through comparison to empire.

In the first place, Hardt and Negri compare the multitude with three political subjects – the people, the working class, and the masses, mob or crowd. They continue to contrast the people to the multitude through Hobbes and Spinoza. They argue that the people stands for an homogenising entity that overrides (real) differences to form a single identity: the people is One. The multitude, by contrast, is a multiplicity that cannot be reduced to this One – it resists such processes of identification. The multitude, in other words, names a continual, open process of subjectivation, and in this moves beyond those essentialist qualities that characterise political subjects. Hardt and Negri view the working class (and, even more so, the industrial proletariat) to be defined by closure and exclusivity, in contrast to the openness and inclusivity of the multitude. They claim that the working class excludes other social groups to reinforce their ascendancy. Not only is the labour aristocracy accorded a privileged position over other forms of labour (such as service workers or agricultural labour), it also regards itself as superior to those excluded from the realm of wage or salaried labour (the unemployed, housewives, and so on). Finally, the multitude is compared with a further group, the masses, the mob or the crowd. Hardt and Negri regard this group as passive and indistinct: they are incapable of generating their own activity, and rely upon external direction and leadership. The multitude, in contrast, is active and distinct: it acts off its own initiative and is autonomous of hierarchical command. ‘External direction and leadership’, here, is a cryptic critique of the unificatory potential of articulation. There are, however, an abundance of examples in which disparate groups have become unified through articulation, in stark contrast to the vague and unspecified potential of the
multitude’s ascent to its political, not-yet stage through a non-articulatory form of politics.

In the second place, they explicate the multitude through two analogies. The first, the network form, was explored in the previous section. Here, for Hardt and Negri, all nodes are different but remain connected “in common” (see II.2) to one another in an organisational structure that is open, inclusive and, thereby, expansive. This analogy continues earlier correspondences between those political subjects Negri previously identifies (the professional worker, the mass worker) and what he describes as the ‘hegemonic’ (also see II.2) organisational model. In other words, the pyramidal form of political organisation (exemplified by the Leninist vanguard, in which the ‘professional worker’ predominates) is informed by the sway of a labour aristocracy in production; the mass worker is aligned with trade unionism under Fordism; and, now, in the paradigm of immaterial labour (see II.1vi), in which the network form constitutes the organisational model, the multitude prevails. The second analogy aligns the multitude with the goals of feminist and antiracist movements of the last decades of the twentieth century. These movements advocate non-hierarchical difference: feminists and antiracists want their differences to be recognized but without the imposition of a hierarchy that ranks those differences:

Something like a concept of the multitude has long been part of powerful streams of feminist and antiracist politics. When we say that we do not want a world without racial or gender difference but instead a world in which race and gender do not matter... this is a desire for the multitude (Hardt & Negri 2004: 101).

In the third place, the multitude is contrasted with empire: it exists within and alongside the institutional sovereign power of empire. Hardt and Negri claim that this postmodern relationship is an asymmetrical and non-dialectical one as opposed to the “symmetrical and dialectical” relationships of modernity, which are
characterised by essentialist binaries. In contrast, they claim that the multitude’s relation to empire differs from those of modernity as the multitude is not an essentialist political subject, but is characterised by excess. This excess ensures that the relation between the multitude and empire is asymmetrical and, as a consequence, non-dialectical. Hardt and Negri argue that due to this asymmetrical and non-dialectical relationship, empire and the multitude are in a relation of non-reciprocal dependency: empire feeds off the multitude, indeed requires the multitude to nourish its development; whereas the multitude ultimately does not depend on empire for its maintenance and development. This relation acts in precisely the same way as one considered earlier, namely the manner in which Tronti conceives the relation between capital and labour: the multitude for Hardt and Negri, and labour for Tronti, are only temporarily and accidently related to empire and capital and ultimately they can extricate themselves from this relationship. In this sense, at the very least, it is difficult to understand how the relationship between the multitude and empire in postmodernity differs from those core relationships of modernity (such as labour/capital, female/male, colonised/coloniser).

The distinctiveness of the relation between the multitude and empire is further called into question by the insistence of Hardt and Negri that the "[m]ultitude is a class concept" (ibid.: 103). Political theories of class rest on opposition. For instance, Marxian class theory is informed by the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. These classes are defined by their relations to the mode of production; that is, they are essential. The bourgeoisie is defined by their ownership of the means of production, while the proletariat is defined by its requirement to sell labour. Although asymmetric (the bourgeoisie is financially strong but numerically weak, the proletariat is financially weak but numerically strong) and shifting (the proletariat’s strength depends on its consciousness of
its position), this is a relation that is clear and comprehensible, one that occurs between two social groups.

It is not clear, however, what constitutes the multitude’s relationship, and with whom. In order to consider the multitude’s relationship, it is useful to draw on Laclau and Mouffe’s distinction between three different forms of relationships: contradiction, opposition and antagonism. The former two involve essentialisms or “full identities”. These take the form of A/not-A in a contradiction, and A/B in an opposition. They write of these:

it is something that the objects already are which makes the relation intelligible. That is, in both cases we are concerned with full identities... But in the case of antagonism, we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution. The presence of the Other is not a logical impossibility: it exists, so it is not a contradiction... Real opposition is an objective relation – that is, determinable, definable – among things; contradiction is an equally definable relation among concepts; antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 124-5).

This is an apt methodological framework through which to conceive political subjects (or their movement beyond to subjectivation), yet Hardt and Negri are inconsistent in how they conceive of the multitude and its relations. Their open account of the multitude’s ontology implies that its relations are antagonistic. If this is the case, however, they need to recognise that the multitude’s antagonist is constitutive of its identity, and that it will always remain internal to this relationship – that is, it cannot escape it. In this sense, the multitude cannot “push through” empire and come out the other side and eliminate its antagonist; rather, the relationship between these two antagonists is destined to endure. It is also not entirely clear, finally, who is the antagonist of the multitude in the twenty-first century: empire, the people, or some other entity (whether institutional or social)?
vi. Immaterial Labour

Immaterial labour is one of the most debated (and misunderstood) concepts in the Hardt and Negri collaboration. It has provoked a number of commentaries, and related research streams, particularly in Paris and Italy. The conceptual development of immaterial labour follows on from Negri’s theorisation of the *social worker* in the 1970s (see II.1i). I maintain that, conceptually, immaterial labour best captures recent developments in labour, but that Hardt and Negri fail to draw appropriate political implications from their impressive conceptualisation. That is, the fragmenting of labour entailed by the increasing shift to immaterial labour requires a political response that emphasises *articulation*, as opposed to one conducted on a ‘plane of immanence’.

The conceptualisation of immaterial labour is in line with a profusion of material devoted to the transformation to the forms of capital and labour over the past four decades. These have deployed various names: ‘post-industrial society’ (Touraine 1971); ‘the end of the working class’ (Gorz 1982); ‘the end of organized capitalism’ (Lash & Urry 1987); ‘post-fordism’ (Amin 1994); ‘the information age’ and ‘the network society’ (Castells 2000; 2004; 2010); ‘the new economy’ (Henwood 2003); and ‘the new spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007). All of these attempt to signal a break in two areas. First, in the form of capitalism itself, with a particular emphasis on organisational structure and technological development. In the terminology of Castells (following Marx), while the capitalist *mode of production* has solidified, the *mode of development* has been transformed such that a new informational paradigm supersedes industrialism. Second, the *composition* of labour – or, more particularly, the working class – has undergone profound mutations; this tends to stress the decline of the industrial
proletariat and/or the emergence of new forms that go beyond labour in its industrial form.

The examples of *modes of development* that Castells provides are agrarianism, industrialism and informationalism. Hardt and Negri align these three alongside their classification of historical epochs: agrarianism in premodernity, industrialism in modernity, and informationalism in postmodernity. The figure of labour in informationalism and postmodernity is immaterial labour.

The acuity of immaterial labour results from three broad factors. The first relates to the *presence* of the term labour within the formulation, which continues the tradition – most closely associated with Marxism – that celebrates the power and value-creating activity of labour. This is in stark contrast to those ‘technological determinist’ accounts, characterised by the elimination (or drastic reduction) of labour as repetitive functions increasingly become performed by machines.

The second relates to the dual character of the conceptualisation of immaterial labour. This duality refers to the two components that comprise immaterial labour: *intellectual* (mental, cognitive) and *affective* functions. Thus, immaterial labour comprises both ‘labour of the head’ and ‘labour of the heart’, in contrast to the ‘labour of the hand’ that largely characterise both agrarianism and industrialism. As Hardt and Negri write:

As an initial approach, one can conceive immaterial labor in two principle forms. The first form refers to labor that is primarily intellectual or linguistic... This kind of immaterial labor produces ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products. We call the other principle form of immaterial labor “affective labor”... Affective labor, then, is labor that produces or manipulates affects such as feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion... legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers (service with a smile)... Most actual jobs involving immaterial labor combine these two forms (Hardt & Negri 2004: 108).
The third relates to the stress the concept places on communication, collaboration and cooperation. These become the very premise of labour – its foundation – in the twenty-first century with the acceleration of human inter-connectivity: they are both the form and content that constitutes so much of labour in the contemporary world. These factors, in addition, are key features of the ever-lengthening preparatory stages – education, training, reskilling – deemed necessary before (re)entry into the labour force:

Immaterial labor immediately involves social interaction and cooperation… cooperation is completely immanent to the laboring activity itself… Today productivity, wealth and the creation of social surpluses take the form of cooperative interactivity through linguistic, communicational and affective networks (Hardt & Negri 2000: 294).

Hardt and Negri focus on the ‘hegemonic’ effects that immaterial labour has at the broader level of society. So for them, in the earlier shift in mode of development from agriculture to industry, agriculture was not only forced to incorporate industrial logics – such as the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture. These logics, moreover, become increasingly manifest throughout society: society progressively resembled the factory and the assembly-line, the dominant institution of the industrial age that serves as its metaphor. Hardt and Negri argue that similar effects occur with the shift from industry to information. Industry is increasingly forced to adopt informational logics, the most prominent examples of which are the intrusion of ‘Toyotism’ in automobile production, and the proliferation of post-Fordist techniques – just-in-time, economies of scope, enhanced communication between factory and market place, and so on – throughout industry more generally. Likewise, agriculture becomes transformed by informational logics, most obviously through genetic modification technologies – productivity
improvements occur as a result of labour in the laboratory rather than in the fields. More broadly, for Hardt and Negri, society begins to operate according to the dominant metaphor of the informational mode of development, the network: “[t]his hegemonic figure [immaterial labour and production] serves as a vortex that gradually transforms other figures to adopt its central qualities” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 107). The network form increasingly transforms society:

the distributed network form that is typical of immaterial production is springing up throughout social life... This is the ultimate role of a hegemonic form of production: to transform all of society in its image (ibid.: 115).

The characterisation of immaterial labour as ‘hegemonic’ by Hardt and Negri underestimates its extent. Immaterial labour is, in other words, far more prevalent than they credit. Given this prevalence, it is important to contrast it structurally with industrial labour in order to grasp its effects on politics. I contend that Hardt and Negri have drawn over-optimistic political conclusions from their theorisation of immaterial labour and that, instead, its increasing prevalence renders an articulatory politics even more pivotal for a radical democratic politics.

In comparing the political effects of immaterial labour in the twenty-first century with industrial labour of the nineteenth century, the distinction originally drawn by Laclau and Mouffe between logic of equivalence and logic of difference is instructive.34 They write that, “[w]e, thus, see that the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 130). Nineteenth century industrial labour is characterised by equivalential effects, as it went hand-in-hand with urbanisation, gathering together small-scale, isolated rural communities into an
urban setting, thereby increasing the roles of communication, sociality and circulation in this emergent urban proletariat. They shared commonalities in terms of their place of work, time of work and performance of work, while also developed cultural mutualities outside of the work process. These commonalities are reinforced by the presence of an Other, the bourgeoisie, whose work practices and cultural pursuits differ markedly from the proletarians.

All these factors combine to produce hard identities in which the articulation of a politics of labour finds a receptive audience, thereby assisting the spread of social-democratic, socialist and communist ideologies. In comparison to these equivalential logics of nineteenth century industrial labour, twenty-first century immaterial labour is characterised by differential logics. The place, time and performance of work have all been carved up and fragmented, while domestic and cultural pursuits have been similarly dispersed. The articulation of an alternative politics to this dispersed and fragmented category of labour, in other words, is disadvantaged in comparison to that of nineteenth century industrial labour. This disadvantage, however, intensifies the value of articulation. There is no automatic combination, or easy articulation of identities, as there was in the nineteenth century. Instead, isolated and fragmented elements require combination and this heightens the complexity of the articulating function while increasing its significance for a radical democratic politics. In short, while their theorisation of immaterial labour requires adoption, Hardt and Negri have drawn over-optimistic conclusions and failed to grasp the political repercussions from this theorisation: the increasing prevalence of immaterial labour renders an articulatory form of politics more necessary.
vii. Assemblage

Hardt and Negri present the multitude in *Empire* as composed of two separate combinations, which I will term *social assemblage* and *political assemblage*. The concept of *assemblage* is theorised by Deleuze and Guattari and is, in turn, inspired by Spinoza’s account of the composition, decomposition and recomposition of bodies. As such, these are never permanent compositions, and are always susceptible to negotiation, such that any *assemblage* is liable to be reassembled with different component parts. In short, *assemblages* are contingent.

The *social assemblage* comprises three figures: the poor, migrants and immaterial labour. To each of these three figures corresponds the three ‘demands’ of the multitude that are announced in *Empire*’s concluding remarks: a social wage, global citizenship and the right to reappropriation. Two core questions can be asked of this *social assemblage*. In the first place, how will such a combination occur? As the previous section (II.1vi) displays, *immaterial labour* is a highly dispersed and segmented category in and of itself: it comprises employment categories as diverse as call centre workers, janitors, care workers, air stewardesses, computer programmers, journalists, media operators and hedge fund managers. It is not entirely clear, as a consequence, how it might – or even, how it can – achieve combination. Still more difficult to envisage is how *immaterial labour* can achieve common ground with the poor. Similar difficulties can be identified in the ability of the poor and migrants to combine: anti-immigration is an all-too-prevalent feature of contemporary western societies, and much of this hostility has emanated from traditional working class communities. In short, it is not clear how the three figures of the *social assemblage* can coalesce without some form of hegemonic politics. Such coalescence becomes even more problematic when situated in a politics conducted on the ‘plane of immanence’, which
anticipates a spontaneous convergence between these three figures of the social assemblage. Instead, what is required is the articulation of these three figures through a chain of equivalence, as theorised by Laclau.

The political assemblage introduced in Empire is composed of the multitude, the militant and the posse. The Hardt and Negri presentation of the posse is indecipherable. They stress:

the Latin term posse – power as verb, as activity. In Renaissance humanism the triad esse—nosse—posse (being—knowing—having power) represented the metaphysical heart of that constitutive philosophical paradigm... Modern European philosophy, in its origins and in its creative components that were not subjugated to transcendentalism, continually tended to pose posse at the center of the ontological dynamic: posse is the machine that weaves together knowledge and being in an expansive, constitutive process... Posse refers to the power of the multitude and its telos, an embodied power of knowledge and being, always open to the possible (Hardt & Negri 2000: 407-408).

In terms of the posse’s operation in postmodernity, Hardt and Negri write:

The posse produces the chromosomes of its future organization. Bodies are on the front lines in this battle, bodies that consolidate in an irreversible way the results of past struggles and incorporate a power that has been gained ontologically... The constitution of new bodies, outside of exploitation, is a fundamental basis of the new mode of production... The organization of the multitude as political subject, as posse, thus begins to appear... Certainly, there must be... a real event... This is the point when the modern republic ceases and the postmodern posse arises (ibid.: 410-411).

Beyond these somewhat cryptic embellishments, they don’t offer anything further on the posse in Empire. This is perhaps understandable given that the primary purpose of this text is to explicate its eponym. If this is the case, however, then it is only to be expected that Multitude fleshes out its own eponym, that is, to provide an exposition of those concepts associated with the multitude in Empire. Yet posse is not even mentioned in Multitude.
The posse’s absence in *Multitude* may be linked to the open process of subjectivation that Hardt and Negri conceptualise of the multitude, but the absence of an explanation incites at best conjecture, at worst confusion.

The other novel component of the multitude’s *political assemblage* in *Empire*, the militant, is also absent from *Multitude*. In contrast to the posse, however, their presentation of the militant is entirely comprehensible. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri reject the “ascetic” militancy of the Second and Third Internationals (ibid.: 411). Instead, they celebrate those twentieth century combatants engaged in communist and liberatory revolutions, anti-fascist struggles and resistance movements. For them, two figures serve as exemplars: the Wobblies of the Industrial Workers of the World and Saint Francis of Assisi. What unites these seemingly disparate figures, for Hardt and Negri, is that they both insert themselves within a struggle, and practice continuous agitation while promoting ‘horizontal’ forms of organisation. In other words, they sought to sow influence and inject “utopian thought and revolutionary knowledge” without claiming to represent those under their influence, and, more importantly, refusing to become their representatives:

*Today the militant cannot even pretend to be a representative... Revolutionary militancy today... must rediscover not representational but constituent activity. Militancy today is a positive, constructive, and innovative activity... This militancy makes resistance into counterpower and makes rebellion into a project of love* (ibid.: 413).

Through the militant, Hardt and Negri attempt to present a non-representational account, consistent with a politics practiced on the plane of immanence. Yet although this militant escapes the representative-represented distinction that typifies modern relationships, the militant retains a mediating function. Saint Francis of Assisi, the Wobblies and the militant of postmodernity all seek to
transform the understanding of those with whom they are engaged (which is presumably the wider multitude). In other words, this (unacknowledged) mediating function that the multitude performs indicates a proximity here with those theorists who advocate that politics should be conceptualised through an account of hegemony, such as Gramsci and Laclau. This unacknowledged mediating function contrasts precisely with their overarching theory of the multitude versus the people, or democracy versus sovereignty, which rejects or negates an account of articulation.

Both Gramsci and Laclau maintain that it is impossible to escape from mediation. For these theorists, society is increasingly affected by the pluralisation of mediating forces from the late nineteenth century onwards – in education, the media, and broader cultural and political forces. For Gramsci, hegemony is not a simple top-down arrangement conducted by political representatives, but occurs more widely across a number of sites within society. Laclau elaborates a complex yet coherent and convincing account of the inevitability of representation and the impossibility of the representative perfectly ‘re-presenting’ the represented in large-scale, industrialised societies, for two main reasons. In the first place, the identity of the represented occurs in a place A (for instance, an election campaign) which differs markedly from place B (for instance, a parliament) in which the role of the representative is to negotiate with other representatives. Representation, for Laclau, is:

> essentially the fictio iuris that somebody is present in a place from which he or she is materially absent. The representation is the process by which somebody else – the representative – ‘substitutes for’ and at the same time ‘embodies’ the represented (Laclau 1996: 97).

In the second place, the representative supplements the represented: through the act of representation, the representative
adds something to the identity of the represented. He writes, “no pure relation of representation is obtainable because it is of the essence of the process of representation that the representative has to contribute to the identity of what is represented” (ibid.: 87). For Laclau, as a result:

[t]his means that we cannot escape the framework of the representative processes, and that democratic alternatives must be constructed that multiply the points from and around which representation operates rather than attempt to limit its scope and area of operation (ibid.: 99).

The inescapability of representation, for Laclau, in turn points to the impossibility of a politics of immanence as advocated by Hardt and Negri through the multitude. It indicates the necessity of conducting an articulatory form of politics.

**viii. The ‘incommunicability’ thesis**

In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri develop what I’ve termed the ‘incommunicability’ thesis which states that, “struggles have become all but incommunicable” and follows with inexorable logic from their politics of immanence. It is this ‘incommunicability’ thesis that informs their rejection of the ‘extensive and horizontal’ struggles of modernity that sought to forge links between different elements and, instead, to favour the intensity of vertical struggles in the new epoch of postmodernity. This thesis is the point at which Hardt and Negri are most distant from Spinoza and his philosophy of communication (see I.3iii). The ‘incommunicability’ thesis is starkly at odds with a politics of articulation and it is here that the weakness of their account is most apparent. They may well be correct in asserting that struggles have become incommunicable. But the point of politics – and a politics of articulation and
hegemony, that is a politics of communication – is precisely to make them communicable with one another.

With the ‘incommunicability’ thesis, they attempt to forge another distinction between struggles in modernity and postmodernity. Modern struggles, for Hardt and Negri, are characterised by developing extensive links – a long, slow, protracted process that sought to extend collective forms of understanding and political activity linked to pyramidal forms of organisation (political parties, trade unions, and so on). Struggles in postmodernity, by contrast, lose such connective and extensive qualities. Instead, struggles in postmodernity are proliferating, increasingly intensive, striking directly at “the virtual center of Empire”:

This is certainly one of the central and most urgent political paradoxes of our time: in our much celebrated age of communication, struggles have become all but incommunicable.

The paradox of incommunicability makes it extremely difficult to grasp and express the new power posed by the struggles that have emerged... what struggles have lost in extension, duration, and communicability they have gained in intensity (Hardt & Negri 2000: 54).

Hardt and Negri highlight a series of struggles at the end of the twentieth century – Tiananmen Square, the Intifada against Israel, the Los Angeles riots of 1992, the Zapatistas, strikes in France (1995) and South Korea (1996) – in order to emphasise the local particularity of each: these struggles “cannot communicate, because their languages cannot be translated” (ibid.: 56). Languages “cannot be translated”, for Hardt and Negri, because of the particularity of these struggles. Each possess a specific set of local conditions – at once historical, economic, political, cultural and social – so that:
they could in no respect be linked together as a globally expanding chain of revolt. None of these events inspired a cycle of struggles, because the desires and needs they expressed could not be translated into different contexts (ibid.: 54).

Two points can be made in relation to this ‘incommunicability’ thesis, one historical and one theoretical. In terms of history, the list of struggles at the end of the twentieth century Hardt and Negri draw upon is selective. This is necessarily the case because the most significant struggle during this period is deeply problematic for their comparison between connective, extensive struggles in modernity, and the proliferating, intensive, incommunicable struggles of postmodernity. The significant struggle absent from their account is the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the liberation of satellite states from Soviet rule and, eventually, the implosion of the Soviet Union itself that occurred between 1989 and 1991. This momentous event illustrates the stubborn persistence of extensive struggles that can isolate an enemy, establish goals across numerous national borders – in short, which communicate with one another and set in motion a chain of reactions of epic proportion.39

In terms of theory, the ‘incommunicability’ thesis is a perfectly logical extension of a politics that celebrates immanence – ‘being-against’ rather than ‘being-for’ – in which particularity entirely negates any universality, irrespective of whether it ‘exists’ within reality (God, teleological accounts of history from Hegel and Marx through to Fukuyama, and so on) or is tentatively constructed through a chain of equivalence (as with Laclau). A politics of immanence, in other words, is one in which particularity (or, in the language of Hardt and Negri, singularity) necessarily overrides and flattens universality (or, in the language of Hardt and Negri, commonality). Logically, it is characterised by untranslatable languages and incommunicable struggles. Hardt and Negri recognise this problem. Indeed, one of their politico-philosophical
tasks is to resolve the gulf between what is common and what is singular, yet they lack the theoretical resources to achieve this resolution precisely through their utter rejection of transcendence and affirmation of a politics conducted on the ‘plane of immanence’ by the multitude. Later in *Empire*, they write:

the action of the multitude becomes political primarily when it begins to confront directly and with an adequate consciousness the central repressive operations of Empire... it is a matter of gathering together these experiences of resistance and wielding them in concert against the nerve centers of imperial command (ibid.: 399).

The ‘becoming-political’ of the multitude, in other words, occurs when the incommunicability of struggles has been overcome, that is a chain of equivalence is constructed that is capable of challenging and defeating the hegemonic power. Again, in *Multitude*, they acknowledge the inherent problem of the incommunicability thesis when they state that, “[e]xtensively, the common is mobilized in communication from one local struggle to another” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 213); and, that “[t]he communication with other struggles, in fact, reinforces the power and augments the wealth of each single one” (ibid.: 216); and, finally, that:

*India, however, is not merely different from Europe. India... is singular – not different from any universal standard but different in itself... This singularity does not mean, however, that the world is merely a collection of incommunicable localities* (ibid.: 128).

This backtracking from the incommunicability thesis is completed in the most recent collaboration by Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*. Its primary purpose is to elaborate an account of how the common operates and can be constructed. We might construe this backtracking as an unacknowledged recognition of Laclau’s critique. In ‘Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?’, Laclau writes:
the alternative is clear: either resistance to oppression is some kind of natural and automatic mechanism that will spontaneously operate whatever the circumstances or it is a complex social construction that has conditions of possibility external to itself. For me the second is the correct answer (Laclau 2004: 28).

These ‘conditions of possibility external to itself’ are precisely provided through a politics of articulation, which attempts to construct a *chain of equivalence*. Historical transformation, for Laclau:

requires the implementation of... the *logic of equivalence*, which involves acts of political articulation – precisely the horizontal linking that Hardt and Negri put aside. The “being-against” is, once more, a clear indicator of the antipolitical bias of *Empire* (ibid.: 28-9).

Hardt and Negri fail to recognise that this critique goes beyond merely rejecting the incommunicability thesis, but also requires overhauling their central thesis that politics occurs on the ‘plane of immanence’, and admitting the inevitability of constructing a *chain of equivalence* through *articulation*.

**ix. Democracy and democratisation**

Hardt and Negri regard democracy to be at a watershed at the turn of the millennium, akin to the situation confronting republicans, liberals and democrats in the eighteenth century. As in the eighteenth century, two core questions stand out. In the first place, there is an expansion of *scale*. In the eighteenth century, democracy’s locus shifted from the city-state to the nation-state; with the emergence of empire, Hardt and Negri see a parallel shift from the national to the global: “[t]he possibility of democracy on a global scale is emerging for the very first time” (Hardt & Negri
2004: xi). In the second place, there is the question of form. While levels of participation were decimated in the earlier shift from direct to representative models, Hardt and Negri claim that neither of these models are appropriate for the new millennium and that, in their place, a new form of democracy needs to be invented. Representation, for them, is responsible for the current crisis of democracy, for three key reasons: the failure of representatives to be representative of their constituents; the limited choice of representatives on offer; and the prolonged period of representation (ibid.: 270). With any shift beyond the level of the nation-state, these problems are exacerbated: “[r]epresentation decreases with each degree of separation” (ibid.: 272). Direct democracy, by contrast, is deemed inappropriate because it requires that, “each of us would take time out of our lives and our work to vote continually on every political decision” (ibid.: 350).

Instead, they favour weaving political decision-making into the very fabrics of work and life:

Biopolitical production presents the possibility that we do the political work of creating and maintaining social relationships collaboratively in the same communicative, cooperative networks of social production, not at interminable evening meetings... In this sense, economic production and political production would coincide, and the collaborative networks of production would suggest a framework for a new institutional structure of society. This democracy in which all of us through our biopolitical production collaboratively create and maintain society is what we call “absolute” (ibid.: 350-1).

This constitutes a faint outline of the new form of democracy Hardt and Negri attempt to develop. In terms of the ‘economic’ aspect referred to above, it is very difficult to envisage what they have in mind, and how this vision could operate. Economic forms of democracy have a long history both in terms of theory and practice. Yet all develop alongside a specific workplace. The Hardt and Negri account of immaterial labour (and Negri’s account of the social
worker), however, theorises the breaking down of the factory walls that constitute the workplace and the extension of production, exploitation and conflict beyond the realm of the workplace and into wider society. Given their argument that immaterial labour produces the dispersal of the *chronos* and *topos* of work, the mechanisms of economic democracy are equally dispersed. As a consequence, this presents real problems with the implementation and operation of their new project of democracy.

This new *form* of democracy Hardt and Negri seek to develop is a dramatic departure from all prior forms of democracy. These historical versions all interlink with their own institutional and formal structures: Athenian democracy was the democracy of the bounded *polis*, restricted citizenship and internal institutions (the Assembly, the Council and the courts); representative democracy, meanwhile, has a plethora of arrangements separating powers between executive, legislature and judiciary, while also holding infrequent elections. To put this slightly differently, all prior examples of democracy possess their particular forms of sovereignty. It will be remembered (see II.1.ii) that in *Insurgencies*, Negri declares that “the opposite of democracy is not totalitarianism but the concept of sovereignty itself” (Negri 1999: 29). This is repeated in *Multitude* (Hardt & Negri 2004: 328-336), although in a slightly amended form. Here, Hardt and Negri bemoan the “entire tradition of political philosophy” for providing one “absolute” choice: either anarchy or sovereignty – wherein sovereignty encompasses monarchy, aristocracy and (all prior examples of) democracy. They want to step outside this absolute choice, and develop a non-sovereign form of democracy.

Hardt and Negri fail to indicate how this might develop. This is despite repeated attempts in their three collaborative works, *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. In the closing passages of *Empire*, for instance, they propose three key demands for the
multitude: a citizens income; global citizenship; and the right to reappropriation.\textsuperscript{42} Laclau has provided an exemplary critique of these three demands, which again highlights the theoretical problem with a politics conducted on the ‘plane of immanence‘. These three demands, according to Laclau, are formulated in the language of rights. That is, they are addressed by one group to another or, more accurately, to an exant institutional structure:

\begin{quote}
[\textit{e}]ach of these three demands, in order to be implemented, requires strategic considerations concerning the structure of the State, autonomization of certain spheres, political alliances, and incorporation to the historical arena of previously excluded social sectors. That is, we are in the terrain of what Gramsci called “war of position”. But this political game is strictly incompatible with the notion of a plurality of unconnected vertical struggles... Multitudes are never spontaneously multitudinarious; they can become so only through political action (Laclau 2004: 30).
\end{quote}

This political game, then, can only be secured by a politics conceptualised through an account of hegemony, with \textit{articulation} as its primary focus.

This project argues that the early modern republican theorists develop accounts of politics that anticipate Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Consent in Marsilius, the consent-force distinction in Machiavelli and the common notions in Spinoza, then, can in addition be viewed as forerunners to an articulatory form of politics. There is a genealogical line, in other words, ranging from Marsilius through Machiavelli and Spinoza that arrives at Gramsci and, eventually, Laclau, which develop an account that leads to hegemony and articulation. Gramsci is addressed in the next chapter (II.2), through a comparison between his theory of hegemony and the proposal of the common by Hardt and Negri.
II.2 THE COMMON AND HEGEMONY

This chapter argues that politics should be conceptualised through an account of hegemony, as against a politics of the common as Hardt and Negri develop. In Commonwealth, their most recent collaboration, they view the common as the foundation of a new paradigm in which the multitude call themselves into political being or, in their terms, how the multitude can build on its ontological ‘always-already’ condition and move to the political ‘not-yet’ state. This chapter discusses the theory of hegemony and aligns it with both an articulatory form of politics and a mobile account of sovereign power and, hence, the three early modern republican theorists covered in Part I. In other words, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony (alongside its subsequent conceptualisation by Laclau and Mouffe¹) should be viewed as emerging out of the earlier theorisations of consent in Marsilius, the role played by consent and force in Machiavelli’s account of political leadership, and the centrality of the common notions and communication in Spinoza. This chapter argues that there are many affinities between the common in Hardt and Negri and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, but that this theory (and its subsequent developments) allows us to rethink the notion of the common in Hardt and Negri. The concept of the common constitutes a recognition – although one that emerges far too late and far too weakly in the political project of Hardt and Negri – of the continuing value of Gramsci’s work in general, and his theorisation of hegemony in particular. Hegemony, in other words, adequately theorises what Hardt and Negri attempt to do through the common. The common, in addition, lacks the theoretical depth and relevance of the concept of hegemony. The notion of the common, finally, contradicts earlier aspects of their thought, most notably the ‘incommunicability’ thesis, which privileged ‘intensive and vertical’ struggles, over those that are
'extensive and horizontal’ (see II.1viii). As such, this chapter argues that politics should be conceived through an account of hegemony drawing on Gramsci and Laclau, and that such a conceptualisation offers the possibility of an alternative politics, as against the Hardt and Negri account of the multitude and the common.

The consideration of immaterial labour (in II.1vi) argues that Hardt and Negri capture many of the developments that have occurred within the world of work over the past decades. Immaterial labour has important implications for the conception and practice of politics in the twenty-first century. These implications, however, have not been appropriately considered by Hardt and Negri. They fail to recognise the role of articulation becomes even more necessary, as immaterial labour becomes more widespread.² The industrialisation drive of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produces material equivalential effects. These brought vast numbers together within a common work place, time, and performance – all of this, in addition, was supplemented by similar living spaces and cultural pursuits. The increasing ascendancy of immaterial labour, by contrast, has fragmentary effects in all these areas. That is to say, working class politics benefited enormously from these equivalential effects in forming and solidifying the identity of industrial workers. This is exemplified by the rise of trade unions, the labour movement, and socialist and communist political parties especially in the first half of the twentieth century. The increasing prevalence of immaterial labour in the past half century has caused a steady erosion of these favourable conditions. This means that more attention needs to be paid towards articulatory practices and political forms of organisation that are capable of developing the possibility of an alternative politics. It will be remembered from the chapter considering Negri’s political practice, in II.1, that he is opposed to political organisations in general, and
in particular to those that seek to endure and to play an active role within mainstream political debates.

In contrast to Negri’s position, this chapter maintains that these two features – endurance and a willingness to be situated at the centre of political discourse – are necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) to enhance the possibility of an alternative politics. These two features are also in line with the politics advocated by Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza. In other words, if this alternative politics is to be adopted by substantial sectors of the population, it needs to be expressed through the very channels that reach the widest possible audience. It is important to recognise that the spread of this message is limited at present for several reasons, most notably the concentration of ownership and control of the broadcast media, which increasingly operates at a global level. A politics of the multitude as proposed by Hardt and Negri lacks sufficient focus on this crucial role of articulation. This is because of its general hostility to forms of political organisation and its departure from the centre of political discourse. In sum, I argue that in this heavily mediated age, an alternative politics necessarily needs to prioritise the construction of an alternative hegemony through a politics of articulation.

A commitment to hegemonic politics also entails an inquiry into the genealogy of the concept’s development. And this, in turn, places into question the historical account of the multitude provided by Hardt and Negri. They maintain that the battle at the outset of modernity between the multitude and the people was not only the key battle of the era, but also was pivotal to the works of Machiavelli and Spinoza (on the side of the multitude) as against Hobbes (on the side of the people). This contest between the multitude and the people serves for Hardt and Negri as the political flipside of the philosophical dispute between immanence and transcendence that constitutes the ‘two modernities’. On the side
of transcendence, they trace a lineage represented by Hobbes-Rousseau-Hegel, which is counterposed to Machiavelli-Spinoza-Marx, the proponents of immanence. This latter lineage, however, is called into question at the socio-political level by the real differences in the conceptualisation of the political subject championed by each of these three theorists: the people in Machiavelli as was seen in I.2; the multitude in Spinoza, as was seen in I.3; and the proletariat in Marx. Beyond the different names selected, these political subjects also operate within vastly different political and philosophical systems from each other, and from the politico-philosophical system that Hardt and Negri outline. The historical analysis that this project develops also serves to question this altermodern lineage. Part I traces a republican line of thought which develops key concepts that serve as precursors to the concept of hegemony: through consent in Marsilius; the distinction between force and consent in Machiavelli; and the role of communication and the common notions in Spinoza. That is to say, in contrast to Hardt and Negri’s lineage of Machiavelli-Spinoza-Marx, a more appropriate connection can be made with Marsilius-Machiavelli-Spinoza. More accurately, a lineage can be traced through the concepts of consent, force-consent, and communication-common notions that are developed within early modern republican thought. All these theorists, in addition, theorise a mobile account of sovereign power which places communication and articulation at the centre of the political stage.

The purpose of questioning this historical line that Hardt and Negri propose is also to question the contemporary political line that they develop out of it. They see Foucault and Deleuze as the true inheritors of the immanent philosophy of altermodernity. So, bringing the line up-to-date, it would now read Machiavelli-Marx-Spinoza-Foucault-Deleuze-Hardt/Negri. Without wanting to question the contributions made by Foucault and Deleuze – still less Marx –
this lineage needs to be called into question through not only the concept of hegemony, but also – and more importantly – the ideal of politics with which it is associated.

In order to elaborate this, I explicate the concept of the common in Hardt and Negri, then consider Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and, finally, engage in a comparison which favours the latter over the former.

i. The common in Hardt and Negri
Hardt and Negri discuss the common in Multitude, and develop their analysis in Commonwealth. In Multitude, the common serves two purposes. First, it functions as an alternative to the debate between the public and the private. For them, globalisation theorists are the most vociferous contemporary exponents of this debate, who champion either neoliberalism (the ideological promoter of the private) or socialism – more precisely, its diluted version, social democracy (the ideological promoter of the public). They deem this to be a sterile and ultimately irrelevant debate. The common cuts across this debate, and is positioned to go beyond the public and the private. They share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced... Our communication, collaboration, and cooperation are not only based on the common, but they in turn produce the common in an expanding spiral relationship (Hardt & Negri 2004: xv).
In *Commonwealth*, this earlier elaboration is expanded, and two different usages of the common are proposed. The first corresponds directly to the title of the text. This can be understood as a reprise of early modern applications of the term, ‘the commons’.

By “the common” we mean, first of all, the common wealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty (Hardt & Negri 2009: viii).

The early modern use refers to the commonwealth as the bounty of the earth, and it is intended to reflect the commonality of this bounty, the collective ownership of the natural world. These commons resources are contrasted with alternative forms of ownership, most particularly, private property – which was expanding due to nascent forms of accumulation and enclosure. This earlier usage of the commons is most popularly associated with the movement against the ‘enclosure of the commons’, whereby land that had been used by the community for centuries for various purposes such as logging, gaming, and grazing was enclosed, parcelled up, and sold off to the highest bidder. The ‘enclosure of the commons’, then, corresponds to the initial privatisation drive of capitalism.

In the last few decades a further privatisation drive has been conducted, this time by the proponents of neoliberalism. So, ‘the common(s)’ has been invoked as a reaction against this contemporary privatisation drive. The contemporary drive is concerned with new forms of property to enclose and privatise. Whereas previously those enclosed commons involved forestry and grazing land – that is, material goods – current privatised property include both these material forms and, increasingly, new forms of property that are immaterial. What unites the enclosures from both these periods is that opposition to them is essentially protective. In
other words, the commons are invoked as a response to a privatisation drive, and it is invoked in order to protect the commons from such encroachment and enclosure. For analytical purposes, it is important to stress the retrospective aspect of this first form of the common. It is something that is shared (in common), and something that must be protected as such. There are, then, defensive and protective qualities to this form of the common. As such, I will refer to this first form of the common identified by Hardt and Negri as the ‘protective common(s)’.

These defensive and protective qualities contrast with the second use that Hardt and Negri apply to the common which I will refer to as the ‘generative common(s)’. This second use of the common corresponds to the knowledges, world-views, and languages that are held in common:

We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common (ibid.).

There are clear connections between the generative commons and some of the terms considered in Part I, namely consent, the common notions, and communication. There are, in addition, clear connections between this application of the common and Gramsci’s conception of hegemony, as will be shown later in II.2iii. It is this second use of the common – the generative common(s) – that forms the primary focus of this chapter.

In contrast to the first application of the common, the generative common is not solely defensive and protective. It is necessarily founded on common practices and qualities – languages, knowledges, habits, world-views, and so on – which
constitute the ground of the common. Yet the intention is not to preserve these practices and qualities at all costs but, rather, to treat them as a basis from which they can be extended, deepened, and developed. In this sense, they do not hark back to a distant past, to be studiously protected, but evolve and develop, thereby pointing to a future replete with possibilities. In other words, the generative common is founded on the present, yet looks ahead to the future; it is generative. This developmental aspect of the generative common situates it firmly within the realm of the social and, as such, affirms its artificiality, as opposed to the ‘natural’ qualities of the protective common. Hence, Hardt and Negri’s choice of these two terms – ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ – to describe the two versions of the common they identify.

Hardt and Negri ally this generative common with singularity, largely to contrast it with – and move beyond – the dyad of identity and difference. The identity and difference dyad involves the fixity of those elements involved, which means that different identities are organised in rigid oppositions and dichotomies: black/white, male/female, and so on.10 Within this presentation, fixed identities inhabit their own pre-constituted worlds; similarly their opposites are also confined to their own predetermined mode of existence. This fixity of identity-difference, for Hardt and Negri, is in stark contrast to the interactivity of the singularity-common dyad, in which interaction, mixture, and flux prevail – singularities engage with alterity.11 These features of interaction and mixture are key to the non-natural, artificial, forward-looking aspect of the common. In other words, the generative common emphasises becoming and expansivity:

the common is composed of interactions among singularities… every world is defined by becomings, constantly engaged with alterity. Whereas identity and difference stand in opposition, the common and
singularity are not just compatible but mutually constitutive (ibid.: 124-5).

So, for Hardt and Negri, whereas identity-difference is defined by being (a closed and static ontology), the common-singularity couplet is characterised by becoming, that is, a productive and expansive ontology. For them, encounters between singularities within the common are productive of new relationships (or singularities) which, in turn, feed back into the (newly constituted) common, which itself involves encounters between (newly modified) singularities, and so on. It is in this sense that encounters between singularities in the common are produced and producing, and entail an expansive process:

[accumulation of the common means not so much that we have more ideas, more images, more affects, and so forth but, more important, that our powers and senses increase: our powers to think, to feel, to see, to relate to one another, to love... this growth involves both an increasing stock of the common accessible in society and also an increased productive capacity based on the common (ibid.: 283).]

Hardt and Negri regard recognition of the common as the first stage of a politics based on it. That is, the commonality of some of the key aspects of human existence and growth need to be recognised and valued in themselves. The common factors that demand recognition include the rich variety of languages we use to communicate with, the long-held and intricately established knowledges that develop out of this communication, and, more recent developments that have fostered human growth, potential, and interconnectivity – information and computer technologies in general and, more particularly, the development and expansion of the Internet. It is not just that these commonalities need to be recognised in themselves for Hardt and Negri, it is additionally that they need to be recognised as the basis – the very foundation –
from which so much else flows. In other words, these core common qualities provide the very basis from which other activities can occur. In order for a recognition of the common to develop, they claim, the ideological distortions of the common that socialism and capitalism propagate need to be exposed and removed. These, respectively, seek to manage and regulate the common on the one hand, or privatise and marketise it on the other:

if language were made either private or public... then language would lose its powers of expression, creativity, and communication. Such an example is meant... to help readers [to] begin to retrain their vision, recognizing the common that exists and what it can do. That is the first step in a project to win back and expand the common and its powers (ibid.: ix).

Alongside the ‘ideological distortions’ of the public and the private that corrupt the common, Hardt and Negri list further threats, namely family, corporations, and the nation. For them, these three institutions are the most significant social bodies that serve capital, and obfuscate, obstruct, and limit the common. Hardt and Negri identify evil as the final corruption of the common:

Our proposition for political anthropology is to conceive of evil as a derivative and distortion of the common. Evil is the corruption of love that creates an obstacle to love, or... evil is the corruption of the common that blocks its production and productivity. Evil thus has no originary or primary existence but stands only in a secondary position to love (ibid.: 192).

What is most surprising about this is their presentation of evil as secondary and corrupting. It is, thus, secondary to and corrupting of something. This something is love, which they present as primary. To present something as primary is to identify it as essential. The presentation of love as an essentialism is strictly incompatible with the main thrust of the philosophy of Hardt and Negri, which celebrates expansion, excess and the infinite. There is,
then, a conceptual clash between their political anthropology of love and essentialism on the one hand, and their notion of the wild excess of the multitude on the other hand. This clash is also detectable in their account of the multitude in *Multitude*, which outlines two different temporalities for the multitude, considered in II.1i. The first temporality is the ‘always-already’ ontological multitude, while the second is the ‘not-yet’ political multitude. This first temporality, the ‘always-already’ ontological multitude, serves as a primary essence just as love does in the political anthropology of *Commonwealth*. These tensions are in turn linked to the unacknowledged impossibility of fully constituting many of the concepts and subjects that Hardt and Negri deploy. For instance, their presentation of a radical dichotomy between the people and the multitude (or sovereignty and democracy) ignores the fact that each term in these couplets, to a certain extent, depends on the other and, as a consequence, one cannot eliminate the other – that is, it is unable to fully constitute itself.

Also problematic for the Hardt and Negri conceptualisation of the common is precisely how and to what extent the common differs from the public. While the manner in which the common differs from the private is entirely comprehensible, the same cannot be said for the common’s difference with the public. Hardt and Negri themselves provide a series of cogent and apposite examples concerning how the private is encroaching upon the common, but they are far less forthcoming when considering the distinction between the common and the public. The following quotation serves as a useful example that demonstrates the lack of clarity they grant this distinction:

> [t]he *common interest*... is a general interest that is not made abstract in the control of the state but rather reappropriated by the singularities that cooperate in social, biopolitical production; it is a *public* interest not in the hands of a bureaucracy but managed
democratically by the multitude... In short, the common marks a new form of sovereignty... This would constitute a passage from *Res-publica* to *Res-communis* (Hardt and Negri 2004: 206; bold emphasis added).

This interchangeable use of common interest and public interest suggests a considerable overlap – rather than a sharp differentiation – between the two. In *Commonwealth*, however, they do provide a clearer indication of how they can be distinguished from one another:

> [t]he relationship of the common to the public is equally significant but often obscured. It is important to keep conceptually separate the common – such as common knowledge and culture – and the public institutional arrangements that attempt to regulate access to it... the common exists on a different plane from the private and the public, and is fundamentally autonomous from both (Hardt and Negri 2009: 282).

Yet the strategy of Hardt and Negri in differentiating the public and the common involves presenting a partial and restricted definition of the public in order to emphasise that all that remains constitutes the common. The public is, thus, limited to “what is managed by states and other governmental authorities” (ibid.: viii). Yet most considerations presume a more extensive understanding of the public. This entails the functioning of something akin to a public sphere or realm, inhabited by non-governmental actors. In addition, this also contains a *topos* from which public activities occur, and the role of the public here is far less a “management” function as Hardt and Negri claim, as the provision of a service that increases positive liberty\(^\text{12}\) (in public parks, green spaces, libraries, museums, exhibitions, and so on). These examples point to the cultural institutions that emerged with the enlightenment, and have subsequently been supplemented by other forms, such as public service broadcasting. In short, the public is a considerably more
expanded concept than their restriction of it to merely management by the state.

Additionally, a clear distinction between the public and the common has not been made within the existing literature on the common(s), which has garnered increasing attention in recent years. This literature focuses on the manner in which the common is increasingly colonised by capital and privatising forces. For instance:

A commodity is a good produced for sale, a common is a good produced, or conserved, to be shared. The notion of a commodity... presupposes private owners between whom this exchange occurs. The notion of the common presupposes collectivities – associations and assemblies – within which sharing is organised (Dyer-Witheford 2007: 82).

In addition, commons are defined against private property:

Commons are a particular type of institutional arrangement for governing the use and disposition of resources. Their salient characteristic, which defines them in contradistinction to property, is that no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource (Benkler 2003: 6).

And:

The commons paradigm helps us to understand this fact because it recognises value-creation is not just an episodic economic transaction, as market theory holds, but an ongoing process of social life and political culture (Bollier 2003: 10).

These quotations, moreover, are all taken from theorists who are either sympathetic to the political project of Hardt and Negri (as is the case with Dyer-Witheford), or are referenced by them in their conceptualisation of the common (as is the case with Benkler and Bollier). Despite this, the focus that Hardt and Negri have granted such debates is surely a welcome step in considering how to
confront the recent private (or neoliberal) onslaught on the commons/public. This issue is particularly pertinent with regard to three areas: information and computer technology, genetics, and science. Within these three areas, however, the distinction Hardt and Negri carve between the natural and artificial common – or, in my terms, the protective and generative commons – is at its least persuasive and productive.

The confusion over how the common and the public can be distinguished is heightened when the *topos* or space of the common is brought under consideration. For Hardt and Negri, the *topos* of the common and the multitude is the metropolis. The location of this *topos* corresponds to the shift that Negri identified in the 1970s from the mass worker to the social worker (as we saw in II.1i). More specifically, it corresponds to the breaking down of the factory walls such that the primary terrain of conflict moved from the factory to society at large:

*the metropolis is to the multitude what the factory was to the industrial working class...* The contemporary productive activities of the multitude... overflow the factory walls to permeate the entire metropolis, and in the process the qualities and potential of those activities are transformed fundamentally... The metropolis is the site of biopolitical production because it is the space of the common, of people living together, sharing resources, communicating, exchanging goods and ideas. Contemporary Italian, in fact, preserves the medieval Latin usage whereby the common – *il commune* in Italian – is the word for city... The metropolis, then, is entirely inserted in and integral to the cycle of biopolitical production: access to the reserve of the common embedded in it is the basis of production, and the results of production are in turn newly inscribed in the metropolis, reconstituting and transforming it. The metropolis is a factory for the production of the common. In contrast to large-scale industry, however, this cycle of biopolitical production is increasingly autonomous from capital (Hardt & Negri 2009: 250).

While the steadily increasing importance of the metropolis, and urban existence in general, is unquestionable, it doesn’t follow that this entails the passage from a ‘public’ paradigm to a
'commons’ paradigm. It is undoubtedly the case that there are urban spaces that have not been enclosed by (private) capital or the (public) state, but most urban spaces cannot be strictly and rigidly classified as either public, private, or common – even according to the differentiation in Hardt and Negri: the actuality is much more muddy. It is not only the case that all three realms have coexisted in urban zones but that, moreover, at times it is impossible to separate them. Once again, it is not clear how the common differs from those enlightenment public spaces – museums, libraries, galleries, exhibitions – already mentioned and further public spaces, such as squares, parks, and so on. In fact, it is more likely that this myriad of public spaces constitutes the very topos that enable the common to occur. There is, then, a considerable overlap between the common and the public. As such, they are not in opposition with one another as Hardt and Negri claim: they are, at times, mutually supportive and constitutive while, at other times, indistinguishable from one another. In the previous quotation, Hardt and Negri draw on the Italian word for city, il commune, to advance their case. Yet the Italian city-states of the late medieval period also exemplify the overlap between the public and the common: these were also known as republics, res publica, the spaces in which the common good, bene comune, was constructed.¹⁷

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the Hardt and Negri presentation of the common in Commonwealth is that it doesn’t propose, let alone develop, the radically significant analysis that Negri posits. In The Porcelain Workshop: For a New Grammar of Politics, a series of lectures he delivered in Paris during 2004 and 2005, Negri indicates that the increasing sway of immaterial labour produces a profound shift in the ownership of the means of production. For him, in earlier industrial (or agricultural) forms, the locus of the means of production was in the plants, factories and
mines. These sites also contained the increasingly complex equipment and technologies that were required in order to conduct production. With the increasing sway of the common and immaterial labour, by contrast, he argues that the locus of the means of production is steadily internalised within the labourers themselves: it is increasingly situated within the hearts and minds of those that perform the immaterial tasks required by the twenty-first century economy. Within the terminology developed by Marx in *Das Kapital*, variable capital (V) – that is, the labour force – assumes ascending importance over constant (or total) capital (C), which is composed of fixed and circulating capital. More importantly, the labour force (V) becomes increasingly autonomous from capital itself.

The implications of such a break are both profound and radical. He develops the argument in a workshop entitled ‘Beyond Public and Private: The Common’. It is worth quoting at length to highlight Negri’s argument in this passage:

Today, however, the organization of capital has altered. What has essentially changed is V, the totality of the labor force. First of all, today’s labor force has incorporated certain elements of fixed capital (in other words, it carries with it certain means of production, in the brain [...])). When speaking of cognitive work, we are speaking of this new faculty of the work force: *the means of production has become internal to the singularities engaged in the organization of labor*.

Secondly, if the labor force has internalized elements of fixed capital, variable capital will henceforth be able to circulate independently, inasmuch as its autonomy in regards to constant capital allows for its independence. If all this is phenomenologically verifiable, we should arrive at the conclusion that constant (and/or total) capital can no longer contain the labor force (and subordinate it exclusively). Marx’s concept of capital was unitary, or better yet, it was a dialectical synthesis of fixed [sic] and variable capital. This synthesis no longer occurs. *Variable capital – the labor force – has acquired a certain autonomy [...]* All this leads us to define the common, essentially, as the open field in which living labor (the labor force, V) moves independently. It is the terrain where the results of the production of independent subjectivities and the cooperation of singularities is accumulated and consolidated. *The common is the sum of everything that the labor force (V) produces independently of C (constant capital, total capital) and against it* (Negri 2008c: 66-67).
Given these profound and radical implications, alongside the fact that Negri was presenting this analysis in the same period that *Commonwealth* was drafted, it is all the more surprising that this is absent from their most recent collaboration.

While Negri’s assessment in *The Porcelain Workshop* merits further consideration, there are alternative, pessimistic analyses that can be drawn. For instance, the increasing role that living labour (V) performs within the means of production merely results in an intensification of exploitation and alienation, by delving ever deeper into the character and personality of the worker. That is, the rise of immaterial labour, as presented in II.1vi, indicates that capital’s expansive drives are now dependent upon the central traits – intellectual and affective qualities, the ability to communicate – that constitute the character and personality of a growing number of workers. This not only entails, in Richard Sennett’s words, the ‘corrosion of character’, but also points to a ‘purchase of’, even a ‘distortion of character’.

Whatever the explanation for the absence in *Commonwealth* of this radical and profound analysis, the absence itself is consistent with other instances of backtracking in the text. In other words, Hardt and Negri rework certain claims made in their earlier collaborative works. Here, I concentrate on two. First, and most pertinent to this study, the focus on the common – and particularly what I’ve termed the generative common – marks an acute departure from the ‘incommunicaibility’ thesis proposed in *Empire*. A previous chapter (II.1viii) contains a critique of this thesis, and notes that the authors rein back from this position in *Multitude*. Yet, the theorisation of the incommunicaibility of local struggles in *Empire* contains associated claims, most notably their favouring of ‘vertical struggles’ that leap up at the heart of empire, as against those ‘horizontal struggles’ they regard as characteristic of
modernity. It seems to follow that their recent considerations of the (generative) common would involve a reversal of their earlier proposals regarding horizontal and vertical struggles. In other words, the rejection of the incommunicability thesis and the ‘smooth space’ that Hardt and Negri develop in *Empire* consists in an unacknowledged and untheorised recognition of the role of articulation in politics.

The second area in which *Commonwealth* performs a *volte-face* is also pertinent to this study, namely in its (partial) embrace of Gramsci. An earlier chapter, II.1, repeatedly shows that Negri sets out his political stall against Gramsci and his followers in the PCI, and this opposition continues in his collaborative work with Hardt. Yet, in the final pages of *Commonwealth* when considering ‘Governing the Revolution’, Hardt and Negri (begrudgingly) acknowledge the significance and merit of Gramsci’s contribution. This is certainly a qualified accommodation, but it is an accommodation nevertheless. Hardt and Negri praise Gramsci’s farsightedness as “the prophet of the biopolitical diagram”. They also seek to extend his analysis by calling for the “‘becoming-Prince’ of the multitude” (Hardt & Negri 2009: 366-367). This is a reprise of Gramsci’s development of Machiavelli, who names the Communist Party ‘the modern Prince’, the successor to Machiavelli’s Prince. This accommodation of Gramsci is, however, a weak one, that not only fails to take into account the complexity of his thought, but also the concepts and institutions that are associated with his thought. Most importantly, it ignores Gramsci’s master concept: that of hegemony. A careful analysis of Gramsci’s account of hegemony would have enabled Hardt and Negri to develop a more productive proposal of the (generative) common – due to the clear affinities between the two concepts, as II.3iii shows. It is to a consideration of Gramsci’s thought – and particularly his development of the theory of hegemony – that we now turn.
ii. Gramsci and hegemony

There are three broad applications of the term hegemony. The first is the most traditional stretching back to ancient Greece, and refers to the leadership of a dominant state over its allies and/or its subordinates. The international dimension of this understanding ensures that it is still deployed in International Relations, International Political Economy, and related disciplines. The second hails from Lenin, initially in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, in which hegemony refers to political leadership (by the proletariat) within a class alliance (which also contains the peasantry). The extent to which this second understanding of hegemony differs from the third is subject to debate. The third application is Gramsci’s contribution. Gramsci uses the term hegemony according to the first two understandings – and primarily according to the second, Leninist version – in his political writings prior to his incarceration in 1926. It is only in his more reflective *Prison Notebooks* – concerning which he declares that he was “obsessed with the idea that I ought to write something für ewig [forever]” – that Gramsci’s own application of hegemony is developed. This indicates that, his project involves the development of concepts, and this is not just restricted to hegemony: witness his treatment of the category of intellectuals, for instance, or even the state (and, related to this, civil society).

Most presentations of Gramsci’s theorisation of hegemony trace a direct lineage with Machiavelli’s portrayal of leadership. This divides leadership into two core elements: the lion and the fox, or force and consent, represented by the Italian verbs, *dominare* and *dirigere*. These presentations align Gramsci’s version of hegemony with the latter elements, consent or the fox. That is, hegemony is a process by which leaders seek to gain the consent of the governed in order to practice their leadership and, indeed, to use that consent
as a vindication for their leadership. The approach I adopt to hegemony is not in opposition to this presentation. Rather it is supplementary to it. It is supplementary because this traditional presentations does not capture the full complexity of Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony and, moreover, open up the possibility of a misinterpretation of Gramsci’s politics.\(^24\) (Hardt and) Negri’s deployment of the term hegemony, for instance, differs markedly from Gramsci’s. Their deployment of the term hegemony corresponds to ‘sway’. They use the term hegemony most regularly alongside the concepts of immaterial labour and biopolitical production in order to indicate the sway that these new forms of organisation increasingly exercise over all other areas of life (see II.1vi).

The *Prison Notebooks* is littered with a variety of terms relating to the phrase “conception of the world”. This phrase could in fact encapsulate the overriding concern of Gramsci’s project. The following passage, on ‘The Intellectuals’, is exemplary:

> Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a “philosopher”, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (Gramsci 1971: 9).\(^25\)

Other closely related terms – perhaps even intended as synonyms – that Gramsci deploys include “new modes of thought”, “world-view”, “conception of life”, and Weltanschauung. Here is a selection – a necessarily limited selection – of the variety of uses in which Gramsci deploys these terms in the *Prison Notebooks*: “the magical conception of the world and nature” (34); “the traditional culture and its conception of life and of man” (40); “a new conception of morality and religion, a new world-view” (134); “‘common sense’... the traditional popular conception of the world” (199); “in language,
there is contained a specific conception of the world” (322); “[t]he position of the philosophy of praxis is the antithesis of the Catholic. The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the “simple” in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life” (322). The following passage illustrates the intimate connection between hegemony and world-view in Gramsci:

Thus the unity of theory and practice is not just a matter of mechanical fact, but a part of the historical process, whose elementary and primitive phase is to be found in the sense of being “different” and “apart”, in an instinctive feeling of independence, and which progresses to the level of real possession of a single and coherent conception of the world. This is why it must be stressed that the philosophical development of the concept of hegemony represents a great philosophical advance as well as a politico-practical one. For it necessarily supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception (333-334).

It is not, however, purely the concept of a “world-view” or “conception of the world” that Gramsci prioritises. His primary interest is the two related concerns of what constitutes the dominant world-view, and how these conceptions of the world contrive to take hold, how they stick; it is a question of their grip. It is through these two related concerns that an alternative account of Gramsci’s hegemony can be gleaned. Hegemony, for Gramsci, is a dominant world-view. This dominant world-view is never static, always shifting because of the highly complex manner in which it is constructed. There are numerous agencies and institutions that constantly fight for their own conception of the world to become incorporated within the hegemonic framework. This is an open conflict that occurs at a myriad of different levels within society and is one whose range of penetration occurs from quotidian experiences at the local level all the way through to core debates.
conducted around the globe. As such, Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony is also closely related to other key concepts within his theoretical framework, including intellectuals, philosophy, and common sense. It is, in addition, closely related to the mechanisms through which hegemony operates. These involve institutions such as the state and those contained within civil society, including the media, the education system, political parties, trade unions, the churches, and other cultural institutions.

All this brings into focus the related questions of who exercises hegemony, how does it operate, and where are its sites of operation. First of all, Gramsci insists that a dominant world-view must appear to be a ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ conception of the world: acquiescence to it must be spontaneous and developed from within; it must never feel imposed and inserted from without:

Men must respect this legal order through spontaneous assent, and not merely as an external imposition – it must be a necessity recognised and proposed to themselves as freedom, and not simply the result of coercion (34).

This suggests a complex interplay between the dominant groups and their world-view on the one hand, and those subordinate – or, in Gramsci’s terminology, subaltern – groups who view such a conception as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’, on the other hand. In order to normalise their world-view, the dominant group need to make concessions to the subordinated, but such concessions would never fundamentally challenge their core power base:

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function
exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity (161).

This quotation highlights a further manner in which Gramsci uses hegemony: the ‘hegemonic’ is distinguished from the ‘economic-corporative’. Gramsci isolates three distinct stages in which conceptions develop. The first refers to identification between members of the same trade; the second refers to a broader identification between members of the same social class; the third is the moment of hegemony, in which the narrow economic-corporate interests have been transcended in order to assimilate further elements of society into this newly dominant world-view. It is also the moment in which a politics of articulation comes to the fore. This third ‘hegemonic’ phase emphasises the role politics plays in the establishment of a new hegemonic formation:

A third moment is that in which one becomes aware that one’s own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become “party”, come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a “universal” plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups... But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the “national” energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a constant equilibria... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point... It is also necessary to take into account the fact that international relations intertwine with these internal relations of nation-states, creating new, unique and historically concrete combinations (181-2).
This quotation indicates the extent to which Gramsci understands hegemony as both a dynamic and complex process. The logic of the argument, moreover, very much points beyond class essentialism. Yet, at the same time, Gramsci remains wedded to structural factors – that is, the two core classes of capitalism, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – ultimately revealing themselves.32

The construction of hegemony, then, occurs throughout the many levels, institutions, and operations within society at a given moment, and involves a highly complex and unstable relationship between disseminator and disseminated:

the relationship between teacher and pupil is active and reciprocal so that every teacher is always a pupil and every pupil a teacher... This form of relationship exists throughout society as a whole and for every individual relative to other individuals. It exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, élites and their followers, leaders and led, the vanguard and the body of the army. Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field (350).

A missing relationship in this quotation involves that between the media and the mediated. Gramsci’s understanding of the extant media – largely newspapers, journals, and books – is not that of an independent entity but, rather, one that is intimately and directly linked to political parties.33 Subsequently, however, not only has this link been superseded, but the level of penetration of the media has intensified and developed, and the number of forms through which it operates has increased – most notably, through film, radio,34 television, and the Internet. So, any interpretation of hegemony in the twenty-first century needs to update a consideration of hegemonic relationships accordingly.

Despite this absence, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony involves an account of mediation. First and foremost, relations
between the social and natural orders are mediated by work – and the awareness of this mediation represents the shift from an “intuition of the world free from all magic and superstition” (34), by providing the basis for a modern conception of the world. Beyond this, certain key actors can have a disproportionate influence over wider sectors of society:

it is not true, in any sense, that numbers decide everything, nor that the opinion of all electors are of “exactly” equal weight. Numbers... are simply an instrumental value, giving a measure and a relation and nothing more. And what then is measured?... precisely the effectiveness, and the expansive and persuasive capacity, of the opinions of a few individuals, the active minorities, the elites, the avant-gardes, etc... Which means it is untrue that all individual opinions have “exactly” equal weight. Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously “born” in each individual brain: they have a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion (192).

The “expansive and persuasive capacity” indicates that Gramsci attached significance to the skill of the rhetorician in moving the masses to a particular position or world-view; this, once again, highlights the importance of representation and articulation in his account, in line with the early modern republican theorists considered in Part I of this project.

Gramsci envisages the progressive erosion of the educator/educated, or intellectual/simple relationship in order for the philosophy of praxis to become hegemonic. In other words, the balance between “intellectual” and “mass” or “simple” has to be fundamentally altered – both in terms of quantity and quality – in order for the world-view that Gramsci advocates to move into sight. This corresponds to a stage in which the masses no longer passively receive information, but begin to critically engage with it. Although Gramsci considers the erosion of the boundary between intellectual and mass as a progressive development, it is not linear:
there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders… But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried… The process of development is tied to a dialectic between the intellectuals and the masses. The intellectual stratum develops both quantitatively and qualitatively, but each leap forward towards a new breadth and complexity of the intellectual stratum is tied to an analogous movement on the part of the mass of the “simple”, who raise themselves to higher levels of culture and at the same time extend their circle of influence towards the stratum of specialised intellectuals… In this process, however, there continually recur moments in which a gap develops between the mass and the intellectuals… a loss of contact, and thus the impression that theory is an “accessory” (334-5).

Perhaps the primary concern of Gramsci’s investigation of hegemony is the question of how new conceptions of the world stick. Within this investigation, his particular interest involves how to make Marxism ‘grip’ the masses.\textsuperscript{36} He regards this process to be already underway – “the philosophy of praxis is beginning to exercise its own hegemony over traditional culture” (462) – in light of the Russian Revolution, and the birth, growth, and consolidation of worker-oriented ideas (communism, socialism, and syndicalism, for instance), institutions (trade unions, soviets and workers councils), and political parties (such as the PSI and PCI in Italy). As a result of this concern, Gramsci turns to two popular texts which specifically target the widest possible audience (or, to use the phrase Gramsci adopts from Machiavelli, “those who are not in the know”): \textit{The Prince} by Machiavelli,\textsuperscript{37} and Nikolai Bukharin’s \textit{Popular Manual}.\textsuperscript{38} Beyond the founding fathers of Marxism, Bukharin’s is the only Marxist text that Gramsci considers in the \textit{Prison Notebooks} – and this was a lengthy critical analysis. It is through the prism of the \textit{Popular Manual} that Gramsci considered Marxism. The reason for this lies beyond the contemporaneity of Bukharin’s text. The \textit{Popular Manual} was first published in Moscow, in 1921, and was commissioned in order to disseminate the (new) conception of the world that Marx expounds to the population of the (new) Soviet
order and to a wider international audience. It was the text produced to explain Marxism, using the most simple language and terminology, such that this emerging world-view could be explained to – and, as a consequence, understood by – the widest possible audience, or “those who are not in the know”.

Gramsci’s historical work is oriented around whether and how emergent world-views develop and stick: how the ideas of the French Revolution initially penetrate throughout French society and thereafter beyond, such that it becomes hegemonic in Europe and, eventually, with ever wider audiences; the failure of the Risorgimento in Italy to create a national-popular will; and so on. In order to understand these developments:

[a] study of how these innovatory forces developed, from subaltern groups to hegemonic and dominant groups, must therefore seek out and identify the phases through which they acquired: 1. autonomy vis-à-vis the enemies they had to defeat, and 2. support from the groups which actively or passively assisted them... It is precisely by these two yardsticks that the level of historical and political consciousness which the innovatory forces progressively attained in the various phases can be measured (53).

It is only, however, the dominant social groups that can construct hegemony. Within capitalism, these correspond to the fundamental classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – but, in order to do so, the subordinate groups have to become aware of the core fissures within society:

the contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes... But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group (327).
The sedimentation of traditional conceptions of the world is directly related to the extent to which the masses remain in the realm of common-sense which, it will be remembered, is an incoherent and fragmentary view of the world for Gramsci. The absorption of an emergent world-view is, as a consequence, a protracted affair:

These considerations lead, however, to the conclusion that new conceptions have an extremely unstable position among the popular masses; particularly when they are in contrast with orthodox convictions (339-40).

As a result, Gramsci indicates that there are certain basic requirements for any new conception of the world to become hegemonic:

Specific necessities can be deduced from this for any cultural movement which aimed to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general:
1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments... repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular mentality.
2. To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element (340).

This quotation points once again to the importance of targeting the relationship – the ratio – between the intellectuals and the masses or the “simple”. This is what makes the philosophy of praxis distinctive from all other conceptions of the world: its aim – and, indeed, the requirement for its success – involves raising the simple to the level of the intellectual:

What matters is that a new way of conceiving the world and man is born and that this conception is no longer reserved to the great intellectuals, to professional philosophers, but tends rather to become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying... popular thought and mummified popular culture (417).

iii. The common or hegemony?
The last two sections trace two concepts: the common in Hardt and Negri, and Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. This final section of the chapter compares these two concepts – a comparison that casts hegemony as most appropriate for the possibility of an alternative politics in the twenty-first century.

To begin this comparison, it is helpful to dwell briefly on the context of Gramsci’s theorisation of hegemony. Standard accounts tend to portray this as a response to the failure of historical practice to match up with Marxist theory. More particularly, it is viewed as a response to the failure of proletarian revolution to arrive in advanced western countries. As with the presentation of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony in the previous section of this chapter, I want to provide a supplementary account to the context of the development of hegemony in Gramsci’s thought. Once again, this account should be viewed as additional to, rather than oppositional to, the standard presentation of the context of Gramsci’s theorisation of the hegemony.

Gramsci’s theorisation of hegemony dovetails closely with the emergence of modern forms of representative democracy, and particularly alongside the increasing development of the universal adult franchise. Within this context, the importance of the concept of hegemony amplifies considerably. That is, the conceptions of the world held by the population – who are now, additionally, the electorate – becomes key to the consolidation or attainment of political power. Politicians can no longer ignore the electorate: they now have to present their world-views as beneficial for the electorate. This requirement is itself part of a broader historical process:

After the formation of the party system – an historical phase linked to the standardisation of broad masses of the population (communications, newspapers, big cities, etc.) – the molecular
process takes place more swiftly than in the past, etc. (Gramsci 1971: 195).

The importance of hegemony, and the ruling-classes’ increasing concern with the world-views of the electorate, has been best elaborated in the historical analysis undertaken by Eric Hobsbawm *et al*, in *The Invention of Tradition*.

The development of the concept of hegemony in Gramsci should be viewed as continuing a line that Part I traces. This involves the notion of *consent* in the thought of Marsilius of Padua and Machiavelli. These two political theorists are associated with the Italian city-states of Padua and Florence respectively and, moreover, travelled to the celebrated cities of Europe – Paris in the case of Marsilius, and several cities on diplomatic missions in the case of Machiavelli. Their works can be viewed as pointing towards, and ushering in, a future increasingly characterised by urbanism.

The Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century, in which Spinoza proposes the common notions within a theory of communication, is one in which the city not only comes of age, but where connections between cities in close proximity are forged. These connections eventually inaugurate the conurbation. This urban context fosters both movement and mixture which, in turn, furthers the practice of communication that Spinoza theorises. Spinoza is well aware of these connections between cities, as a result of a number of relocations imposed upon him by authorities hostile to his philosophy. The three early modern republican theorists are all grappling with the emergence of combination, association and interdependence. These factors combine to deepen the significance of communication, and this is inserted into their accounts of politics. With Gramsci, these factors become more explicit and their theoretical elaboration is more focused and sophisticated. In many respects, Hardt and Negri are dealing with a further development of this process, as they acknowledge at the very outset of
Commonwealth: “One primary effect of globalization... is the creation of a common world... a world that has no “outside”” (Hardt & Negri 2009: vii).

The above consideration of the context of hegemony’s emergence in Gramsci points to a similarity that exists between the concept of hegemony and the theorisation of the common by Hardt and Negri. Laclau is perhaps the most prominent contemporary theorist of hegemony, and when his development of the concept is brought under consideration, further similarities emerge. In fact, at one point, Hardt and Negri provide a description of the common that uses the same tools – the universal and the particular – that Laclau and Mouffe use for hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe write:

This relation by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is what we call a hegemonic relation. As a result, its universality is a contaminated universality: (1) it lives in this unresolvable tension between universality and particularity; (2) its function of hegemonic universality is not acquired for good but is, on the contrary, always reversible (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: xiii).

While Hardt and Negri state:

the experience of the common provides a framework for breaking the epistemological impasse created by the opposition of the universal and the particular... The common cuts diagonally across the opposition between the universal and the particular (Hardt & Negri 2009: 120).

These quotations point to divergences and convergences between these two collaborations. The convergence relates to their both transforming the traditional distinction between the universal and the particular. In terms of divergences, they have different conceptions of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Hardt and Negri describe the common as operating in between the universal and the particular. Laclau and Mouffe elaborate a more complex account in which one particular (from a
field of multiple particulars) stands in for and represents the universal. This particular that acts as the universal, however, is a false or contaminated universal, or fills in for the very absence of a ‘real’ universal.

Laclau has been closely associated with two themes. First, in theorising the constitutive nature of politics – whereby political articulation involves the transformation of (always incomplete) identities. In other words, Laclau problematises the question of identity and argues that, as identities are formed discursively, they are never totally fixed. As a result, each identity is liable to undergo transformation due to the circularity of discourse. Second, in linking together different groups and their demands within a chain, whereby the linking together of the chain itself has the effect of transforming the links contained within. Both of these themes can be found in the following quotation from Hardt and Negri:

When we speak of intersections that contribute to the making of the multitude, we have in mind something different from what is traditionally conceived of as alliance or coalition. The multitude is composed through the encounters of singularities within the common... alliances and coalitions can never get beyond the fixed identities striving for emancipation that form them. The process of articulation accomplished in insurrectional intersections does not simply couple identities like links in a chain but transforms singularities in a process of liberation that establishes the common among them. This articulation is an ontological process that transforms social being in the making of the multitude... Democratic decision making must determine and sustain this process of articulation and composition (Hardt & Negri 2009: 350).

The reference in this quotation to alliance and coalition closely mirrors Laclau’s account of hegemony in Gramsci. Laclau argues that, for Lenin, hegemony involves the (temporary) alliance between the peasantry and the proletariat, an alliance formed to achieve a political objective that has no transformative effects on either of these social classes. Laclau contends that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, by contrast, goes beyond the Leninist conception and,
in particular, theorises that the hegemonic operation serves to transform the identities of those involved. In this sense, the 'alliance' is not temporary, but transforms the peasantry and the proletariat by creating new and more complex identities. Put differently, for both Hardt and Negri and Laclau, the move beyond alliances is also a move beyond the essentialism of political subjects and a move towards an open and continual process of political subjectivation. There are, thus, core similarities in terms of moving beyond alliances and coalitions between the Hardt and Negri conception of the "making of the multitude" in the common and the hegemonic operation in Laclau. The key difference is that Hardt and Negri argue that politics should be conducted on the 'plane of immanence', whereas Laclau insists that no immanence is self-contained, and that their theorisation of the conditions of politics points to the impossibility of any self-contained political order. And this impossibility requires articulation to manage and channel this excess, for Laclau.

There is another broader similarity between the common and hegemony: what is held 'in common' bears clear resemblances to a dominant world-view (that is, a hegemony). The common, then, treads on terrain that has already been adequately theorised by hegemony. I maintain that hegemony's theorisation of this terrain is both better and more productive than the Hardt and Negri conceptualisation of the common, as the following paragraphs elaborate.

Hegemony's deployment in academic and wider political discourses is now long established. Hardt and Negri, thus, seek to redefine it, thereby marginalising it, so as to diminish its theoretical potency vis-à-vis the common. It has already been pointed out in the previous section (II.2ii) that Hardt and Negri deploy hegemony as 'sway' or leadership. This differs from most general accounts which focus on the role that consent plays in propping up rule, or
alternative ones (including this one) that propose hegemony as ‘a dominant world-view’. In continuing their attempt to marginalise the concept in *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri further associate hegemony with three further themes: representation, unification, and anti-spontaneity. These associations will now be critically assessed.

First, in terms of representation, Hardt and Negri portray hegemony as politically archaic – more in keeping with aristocracy (that is, sovereignty) rather than democracy:

The needs of biopolitical production, however, directly conflict with political representation and hegemony. The act of representation... restricts the production of the common by undermining the necessary freedom and plurality... The hegemony created by the division between the representatives and the represented, furthermore, is also an obstacle to the production of the common... any instance of hegemony or control exerted from outside the multitude over the productive processes corrupts and restricts it. Democracy – not the aristocracy configured by representation and hegemony – is required to foster the production of the common and the expansion of productive forces (Hardt & Negri 2009: 305).

We have already seen that Gramsci theorises hegemony within a context of democratisation through the extension of the adult franchise. Its theorisation is not, as Hardt and Negri imply above, an attempt to rein back democracy and maintain aristocracy; it, rather, attempts to explain the persistence of certain social and political forces, and how this is achieved. Alongside this descriptive exercise, hegemony is also prescriptive in that it enables an alternative politics to conceive, develop and implement a plan to overturn these persistent social and political forces. Put differently, it theorises the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’.

The construction and maintenance of hegemony is a far more complex process than Hardt and Negri give credit here. It is much more than a simple relationship between political representatives and those they represent, as they imply. It occurs at all levels of
society: in Gramsci’s terms, it operates at three different levels – the economic, political society and civil society; in Laclau’s terms, the political (that is, the hegemonic) invests the entire realm of the social. Indeed, this is a logic that has unraveled in modern forms of democracy. Whereas political discourse in ancient forms of direct democracy are contained, certainly within the walls of the polis or, as is more likely in the case of Athenian democracy, within the Assembly itself, modern forms of democratic discourse escape and explode the walls that representatives and parliaments attempt to construct, such that communication circulates throughout society, at every level. That is, the terrain of modern political discourse is invested throughout society, thereby unsettling any arbitrary boundaries between the levels of the political and the social.47 To say this is also to say that the relationship between representative and represented is not one that merely occurs between a member of parliament and their constituents, but that political articulation occurs throughout society (at work, at home, at school, in bars and cafes, in the media, on the streets, and so on).48 Laclau argues that the simple representative-represented relationship that Hardt and Negri portray is no longer tenable in complex, plural societies such as ours. Rather than occurring at a primary point, as Hardt and Negri claim, the representative-represented relationship occurs at multiple points. The representative, additionally, plays a role in the constitution of the represented: as identities are characterized by an original lack, the articulation of a (chosen) representative can (temporarily) fill in this gap. Rather than limiting it, Laclau concludes that extending the number of sites at which the representative-represented relationship occurs, enhances democracy.49

As regards the second association, unification, Hardt and Negri assert:
The first set of questions deemed the multitude incapable of politics because it is not unified by hegemony. At issue here is whether only hegemonic, unified subjects or also horizontally organized multiplicities are capable of political action (ibid.: 173).

Once again, Hardt and Negri offer a simplistic choice: unification or horizontal organisation, which is another way of saying, sovereignty or democracy. Hegemony resists such unification on two accounts: one numerical, the other temporal. First, while any hegemony is dominant, it is never total: a hegemonic force can never subsume the entire society. To put this in Laclau’s terms, wherever hegemony operates, politics contains a frontier, and different groups necessarily inhabit either side of this frontier. There is always a number of alternative world-views that jostle to position themselves such that they can challenge the prevailing hegemonic force. This unification, then, is only partial. And, second, it is only temporary: due to the circulation of discourse, the hegemonic power is constantly forced to rearticulate its position. The success of this rearticulation is never guaranteed, and can result in previously supportive groups crossing the frontier, thereby threatening or undermining the hegemonic equilibrium.

Finally, it is not the case that the multitude and the common are horizontally organised, while hegemony is a strictly vertical arrangement, as the previous quotation implies. In Laclau, for instance, hegemony operates through a series of demands that coalesce. These serve as a number of links within a horizontal chain but, in order for them to become hegemonic, they need to collectively transform themselves, which inevitably entails a shift in their status at the horizontal level. During this ‘moment’, they collectively become vertical (or hierarchical), although it must be stressed that this ‘moment’ is only temporary, and its persistence is dependent upon each demand remaining within the hegemonic chain. In summary, the operation of hegemony is a complex
process when vertical and horizontal factors are brought under consideration, as opposed to the simple relationship portrayed by Hardt and Negri.\textsuperscript{50}

In terms of the third association, anti-spontaneity, Hardt and Negri argue:

It is true that the organization of singularities required for political action and decision making is not immediate or spontaneous, but that does not mean that hegemony and unification, the formation of a sovereign and unified power – whether it be a state, a party, or a people – is the necessary condition for politics. Spontaneity and hegemony are not the only alternatives. The multitude can develop the power to organize itself through the conflictual and cooperative interactions of singularities in the common (ibid.: 175).

It has already been shown that hegemony is more complex than this simplistic top-down portrayal. Gramsci writes specifically that a population must ‘spontaneously assent’ to hegemony: “it must be a necessity recognised and proposed to themselves as freedom, and not simply the result of coercion” (Gramsci 1971: 34). The theory of hegemony, moreover, increasingly calls into question a world that is characterised by simplistic dichotomous choices between unification and spontaneity, above and below. There are not two levels: democracy, the site of spontaneity; and sovereignty, the site of order. Within a complex, pluralistic society, such rigid boundaries are called into question. It has already been shown that ‘the Other’ is required in an antagonistic relationship and identities are, as a consequence, never fully constituted. The same applies to concepts such as spontaneity and unification. In fact, the portrayal of democracy and immanence as purely spontaneous by Hardt and Negri reveals their ‘one-eyed’ view of politics, based upon an anthropology which views love as primary. As Laclau writes, “[m]ultitudes are never spontaneously multitudinaries; they can become so only through political action” (Laclau 2004: 30).
Wherever hegemony is in operation, political action needs to train its sights on articulation.

The next fundamental reason to favour the concept of hegemony over that of the common, is that the former considers ‘what is’ while the latter has a tenuous relationship with it. This difference relies on a further distinction. The second common of Hardt and Negri, the ‘generative common’, is oriented towards the future or, more accurately, the “time-to-come”. A consideration of hegemony, by contrast, takes into account the past and the present in order to redirect the future. While the generative common does not entirely ignore ‘what is’, it fails to engage with it. Due to the political strategy of withdrawal and ‘being-against’, the multitude vacates the terrain of ‘what is’ and locates its ‘what ought to be’. It fails, in other words, to establish the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’, and consigns ‘those who are not in the know’ to perpetuate their condition. There is an echo here with the manner in which Machiavelli regards Savonarola: the abstract ought of Savonarola and Hardt and Negri, versus the route between the is and the ought of Machiavelli, Gramsci and Laclau. There is, then, a disengagement with ‘what is’ in Hardt and Negri.

This ‘what is’ consists of sedimentation and established forms of power. The concept of hegemony, to recap, deals not only with the various strands that mesh together to form a dominant worldview, it also surveys the array of social forces that construct this content. A consideration of hegemony, in other words, entails first and foremost “a concrete analysis of a concrete situation”; it involves a rigorous investigation of the social field and the forces contained therein; it involves not only an assessment of the present, but also takes account of the very processes through which the present came to be. This analysis serves a clear purpose: it is only by a clear understanding of ‘what is’ – its content and the various social forces that construct it – that any ‘what ought to be’
can be proposed and worked towards. In other words, any politics of hegemony has to consider the past and the present in order to form a channel towards the future. By considering ‘what is’, and using this as a starting-point, a counter-hegemonic politics is able to construct both the demands and the forms of political organisation that would initiate a move from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’. By disengaging from ‘what is’, in contrast, an alternative politics is left to – and necessarily consigned to – drift aimlessly, lacking a rudder which would enable it to orient itself and navigate towards the appropriate destination. As Laclau and Mouffe write:

the project for a radical democracy as an alternative for the Left... cannot consist of the affirmation, from positions of marginality, of a set of anti-system demands; on the contrary, it must base itself upon the search for a point of equilibrium between a maximum advance for the democratic revolution in a broad range of spheres (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 189).

The “affirmation” “of a set of anti-system demands” “from a position of marginality” is precisely the fate of a politics of the common, as proposed by Hardt and Negri. It suffers such a fate because it disengages from ‘what is’; it vacates the centre. Put differently, its focus is on the future rather than an intense concern with the past and the present in order to redirect the future:

the internal differences of the multitude must discover the common that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced (Hardt & Negri 2004: xv).

The Hardt and Negri concept of the common, in other words, disengages from ‘what is’. For them, the common is concerned with the multitude, not empire. Or, in Spinoza’s terms, it seeks ‘salvation’ but ignores the role of servitude. Although Hardt and Negri provide a rich description of ‘servitude’ through their account
of empire, they fail to adequately theorise the movement from servitude to salvation, or from empire to the multitude. The earlier chapter on Machiavelli, I.2, presents the Florentine as the theorist of the route from ‘what is’ to ‘what ought to be’. As a politics conceptualised through an account of hegemony focuses intently on both ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ and, more importantly, the route from the former to the latter, it is far more in keeping with the early modern republican politics of Machiavelli and Spinoza. In Machiavelli this involved the establishment of a nation state in Italy by the prince and the subsequent ‘becoming-prince of the people’; for Spinoza, this was provided by the movement to democracy within sovereignty, the process of democratisation, enabled by the expansion of communication and the common notions. In contrast, Hardt and Negri merely provide assertions – rather than convincing demonstrations – as to how adherence to the common increases. We are merely left with platitudes along the line of the following:

The biopolitical production of the multitude, however, tends to mobilize what it shares in common and what it produces in common against the imperial power of global capital (Hardt & Negri 2004: 101).

Their account is so weak at this point because they have come to the common late in their analysis. There is a clear tension (contradiction, even) between the ‘incommunicability’ thesis they develop in Empire and their project of the common(s) in Commonwealth. This tension has not been resolved. The former entails a strategy of exodus, refusal and flight for the multitude. The purpose of this strategy is for the multitude to generate a new common – or a new hegemony – elsewhere from empire. Yet, they also insist that there is no outside of empire. “One primary effect of globalization”, they write in the very first paragraph of Commonwealth, “is the creation of a common world, a world that,
for better or worse, we all share, a world that has no “outside”” (Hardt & Negri 2009: vii). A world that has no “outside” necessarily entails a struggle over what constitutes the common in that world. And this is precisely where an articulatory form of politics is indispensable. A strategy of exodus, by contrast, abandons such a struggle, and attempts to construct an elsewhere. As Hardt and Negri acknowledge in Commonwealth, there is no elsewhere (that is, “outside”) in empire. To reject a politics of hegemony and articulation is to grant sedimented forms of power an open playing field in this struggle.

The final fundamental reason to favour a politics of hegemony over that of the common follows on from the previous analysis. The latter’s hostility to sovereignty and transcendence produces a weak account of forms of political organisation. A politics conceptualised through an account of hegemony, by contrast, takes the question of forms of political organisation seriously. For Gramsci, forms of political organisation – whether in the form of an ‘organism’ or ‘the modern Prince’ – are intimately linked to hegemony. For Laclau, hegemony is the struggle over which set of demands link together in a chain of equivalence, and succeed in projecting this chain as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. Hardt and Negri and their politics of the common and the multitude, by contrast, are largely hostile to forms of political organisation – as has been shown throughout II.1. They are especially hostile, moreover, to those organisational forms that endure: witness, their rejection of the traditional organisational forms of the left, political parties and trade unions. Hardt and Negri argue that these organisational forms should be discarded because they are rigid in terms of structure, exclusive in terms of membership and, ultimately, become self-serving and merely interested in their own survival. They are, in Negri’s terms, forms of constituted power, and not forms of constituent power. Yet these institutions serve functions additional to those identified by Hardt
and Negri. Most importantly, they contribute to, intervene in, and affect the discursive structure – they help to consolidate or transform world-views. Their account also ignores the fact that the dissemination of these views occurs within a *topos* (such as a media space) in which conservative-hierarchical views are expressed. To vacate this *topos*, as Hardt and Negri advocate, merely results in the articulatory loss of alternative analyses, and leaves the space entirely swamped by these sedimented forces.

It is worth quoting Gramsci at length here to emphasise not only the role of organisational forms, but also the manner of their development in the early twentieth century:

A further element which, in the art of politics, leads to the overthrow of the old naturalistic schema is the replacement by political organisms (parties) of single individuals and individual (or charismatic, as Michels calls them) leaders. With the extension of mass parties and their organic coalescence with the intimate (economic-productive) life of the masses themselves, the process whereby popular feeling is standardised ceases to be mechanical and causal... and becomes conscious and critical. Knowledge and a judgment of the importance of this feeling of the part of the leaders is no longer the product of hunches backed up by the identification of statistical laws, which leaders then translate into ideas and words-as-force... Rather it is acquired by the collective organism through “active and conscious co-participation”, through “compassionality”, through experience of immediate particulars, through a system which one could call “living philology”. In this way a close link is formed between great mass, party and leading group; and the whole complex, thus articulated, can move together as “collective-man” (Gramsci 1971: 429).

In this quotation, Gramsci reveals his views on the complexity of the emergent organisational form, its historical movement, and its effects on society. As II.1.iv demonstrates, Hardt and Negri have begun a process of rapprochement with organisational forms. This rapprochement acknowledges that the role of institutions is more complicated than the theorisations of constituent power and constituted power allows. Yet, Hardt and Negri have only taken a few steps down a long road. The organisational form that they have
come to praise, and view as most relevant to current and future political activity, is the network form. For them, this network form is characterised by a horizontal form of organisation:

Multitude is a form of political organization that, on the one hand, emphasizes the multiplicity of the social singularities in struggle and, on the other, seeks to coordinate their common actions and maintain their equality in horizontal organizational structures (Hardt & Negri 2009: 110).

Recent historical examples of network forms of political organisation they draw upon include the Zapatistas in Chiapas (ibid.: 106-107), Bolivian struggles against water privatisation at the turn of the millennium (ibid.: 108-112), and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (ibid.: 356-7). Yet, with all these examples, the purpose of activity is not merely to maintain and sustain the ‘horizontal’ network form. They all result in some form of accommodation with ‘vertical’ or hierarchical forms of power: the Zapatistas entered into negotiations with, and sought compromises from, the Mexican state; the Bolivian groups resisting water privatisation were active in supporting the campaign that eventually resulted in Evo Morales’ presidency in 2005; and, finally, the anti-apartheid campaign was motivated by the transformation of the South African state – an aim which eventually proved successful in 1994 – and has subsequently resulted in a rare and curious situation, namely, one that effectively involves a single-party (modern, representational) democratic state. These three examples all reveal both the persistence and the significance of political forms of organisation, a mobile account of sovereign power, and an articulatory form of politics, just as much as they reveal the emergence of a new network form of organisation.53

The Internet serves as the most widely disseminated network form that Hardt and Negri use to announce a new, transformed situation. This is in keeping with their epochal analysis, wherein an
epoch – as opposed to an era – entails a systemic rupture. They argue that this epochal transformation is so profound that our most basic political concepts and vocabulary require revision. One feature of this epochal transformation is immaterial labour. Yet, the development of immaterial labour is best understood as an historical process that develops in the nineteenth century and steadily progresses into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This differs markedly from the abrupt change associated with an epochal transformation.

As another example, Hardt and Negri argue that this new epoch heralds the end of mediation. Although this treatment of mediation is only implied in their collaborative works, Negri has provided a fuller account in a recent work, entitled *In Praise of the Common: a conversation on philosophy and politics*, in which he declares: “we live in a world without mediations” (Casarino & Negri 2008: 109). Here, Negri explains the role of and eclipse of mediation in the following three passages:

Antonio Negri: When writing my book on Job, for example, I had to go back and reread much Jewish mysticism and to engage with one of its most recurrent concerns, namely, the relationship between human beings and God, the relation between the human and the divine. In Jewish mysticism, such a relation is a direct one. This is much unlike what we see in Catholicism, where everything is so highly structured, so well organized...
Carlo Casarino: In Catholicism, in other words, there is always mediation.
Antonio Negri: Yes (ibid.: 173).

Contemporary logicians aside, this has been absolutely clear at least since Descartes: the professional philosopher posits himself as mediator of thought. That is all that the social and political function of the philosophical profession amounts to: mediation. To my mind, Pascal and Spinoza constitute the first cluster of thinkers who reject and negate this function absolutely, while Marx and Nietzsche constitute the second cluster (ibid.: 184).
(When we talk of the end of dialectics, we talk about this definitive, monstrous eclipse of mediation.) Therefore, today is the moment to verify whether dialectics has truly ended (ibid.: 203).

The Internet, for Hardt and Negri, constitutes the form *par excellence* in which this new unmediated realm has come into fruition. For them, the Internet spreads its influence into other realms, which in turn prompts the spread of further unmediated networks. It is not entirely clear, however, that the Internet has ushered in a brave new world in which mediation has been consigned to the dustbin of history. For instance, outside of search engines, the most popular sites are precisely those that have been traditionally involved in mediation: newspapers, broadcasters, and so on. These have now extended their output to the platform of the Internet, and have proved successful on this platform as they elicit more trust from their audience, a level of trust that new media providers are yet to establish. The continued success of these traditional media institutions, moreover, contrasts with the lack of progress of emergent information providers on the web that are celebrated by Hardt and Negri in their earlier collaborative works. Here the example of *Indymedia* is salutary. When Hardt and Negri drafted *Multitude*, in the early years of the millennium, *Indymedia* is an emergent alternative news provider attracting growing levels of support, interest, and readership. Subsequently, this momentum has seized up, and it remains a marginal presence on the Internet. Although new providers have emerged whose very foundation is on new interactive relations (*Wikipedia*, for example), and these traditional media forms have had to adapt to the web by encouraging interactivity, the stubborn persistence of these traditional media forms seems to call into question the insistence by Hardt and Negri that mediation has ended, and that the Internet is the exemplar of this process. This is not so much an eclipse of mediation, but rather its intensification. Certainly this intensification
has expanded the number and range of mediating voices but, in the language of Barabási, the Internet is just as much dominated by connectors and hubs.\textsuperscript{55}

In terms of forms of political organisation, the above demonstrates that traditional forms – political parties, trade unions, consolidated media players, and so on – will continue to play a crucial role in twenty-first century politics. This influence will be achieved through articulation, and be felt at the level of the formation and consolidation of world-views and conceptions of the world. In other words, forms of political organisation act as vectors, that is as carriers of messages, views, and ideas that transmit from one place to another. To neglect this role of organisational forms as vectors – as Hardt and Negri do – is to abandon arguably the most important topos through which politics occurs in the twenty-first century, namely the media.\textsuperscript{56} It is also to abandon an articulatory form of politics and, in so doing, vacating this media space and leaving it wide open for sedimented forces to operate unchallenged.

Such an approach not only leaves the possibility of an alternative politics neutered, but is also at odds with the three early modern republican theorists considered in Part I. These theorists all developed an account of politics in which articulation was pivotal to the possibility of an alternative politics. It was only through the establishment of consent in Marsilius, the development of consent as a force in Machiavelli, and through the construction of the common notions and a philosophy of communication in Spinoza, that an alternative politics could be constructed. This chapter has shown that a politics theorised through an account of hegemony remains faithful to the alternative political project initiated by these three early modern republican theorists. An alternative politics based on an account of hegemony and articulation, in turn, enables a mobile account of sovereign power. These factors all militate
against a politics of the multitude and the common as proposed by Hardt and Negri.
CONCLUSION

The multitude has featured widely in the history of western political philosophy, and Hardt and Negri have revivified a debate begun many centuries ago. In comparison to other political subjects – the individual, the people and especially since the nineteenth century, the proletariat – it had been ignored. An historical consideration of the multitude, then, is long overdue.

The recent intervention by Hardt and Negri, however, brings this lacunae into sharper focus. In their collaborative work, they make certain claims about the multitude, with specific reference to two periods. In the first place, they assert that in the early modern period, the multitude was engaged in a decisive battle against the people. The first part of this project contests the historical account of this battle, as portrayed by Hardt and Negri. In an analysis of concepts in three early modern republican theorists, I argue that their account is simplistic and erroneous. It is simplistic because these early modern theorists do not presuppose a stark and rigid opposition between the multitude and the people (alongside related dichotomies, such as democracy and sovereignty, immanence and transcendence, and so on). They instead provide a more complex account of politics, and develop a mobile account of sovereign power. It is erroneous because, in presenting this rigid opposition, Hardt and Negri are unable to isolate the specific character of the new and alternative form of politics that these early modern theorists develop. This involves situating articulation at the very centre of their account – through the notions of consent in Marsilius, the force-consent couplet in Machiavelli, and the common notions and a philosophy of communication in Spinoza.

The theorists they explicitly cite – Machiavelli and Spinoza – had complex, yet very different responses to the question of political subjects, despite a great deal of consistency on other
political questions. For Machiavelli, the multitude is a marginal figure, one incapable of completing, let alone maintaining, the primary task he sets for politics in the sixteenth century and beyond. He, instead, isolates the people as his preferred political subject, but argues that an active people is essential if the state is to endure but only a new prince can bring a new nation state into being.

Spinoza, in contrast, identifies the multitude as the political subject of democracy and as the ‘time-to-come’. He contends that the multitude is the key protagonist in the shift from monarchy, theocracy and aristocracy to democracy. There is no ‘determinism’ – that is, no necessity – in the democratic project of the multitude for Spinoza. This is a conflicted political subject that must create a new being through the development of the (all too absent) common notions. In other words, although Spinoza identifies and favours the multitude, his is by no means a naïve and wholehearted celebration of this political subject. It is, rather, a qualified adoption.

A close analysis of the role that the multitude plays within the thought of Machiavelli and Spinoza, then, casts considerable doubt on two related claims made by Hardt and Negri. In the first place, the claim that there is an *immanent* philosophical tradition that develops in early modernity which can be detected in the work of Machiavelli and Spinoza. This they contrast with a *transcendent* tradition most substantially developed by Hobbes’ metaphysical project, and his account of a sovereign body politic. In the second place, they argue that this period can be conceived through the battle between the multitude (through Spinoza) and the people (through Hobbes). This is an oversimplistic claim that can be countered by both Machiavelli’s adoption of the people and his marginalisation of the multitude (despite being a purported representative of the *immanentist* tradition) and by Spinoza’s qualified identification with the multitude.
What an interrogation of the role the multitude plays in early modern republican thought throws up, however, is a consistent and evolving political undertaking. The contours of this undertaking are laid out in Marsilius of Padua, an early advocate of the multitude. These entail two key elements traced throughout this project: *a mobile account of sovereign power*; in which *articulation* – through *consent* in Marsilius, the *force-consent* distinction in Machiavelli, and the *common notions* and a *philosophy of communication* in Spinoza – is critical in establishing an alternative account of politics.

This brings us on to the second period in which Hardt and Negri consider the multitude: our contemporary one. They claim that the multitude is pivotal to a communist politics in the twenty-first century and beyond. Yet these two key elements that inform the political project of Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza are absent from the contemporary account of the multitude and its politics, proposed by Hardt and Negri. Instead, these are far more evident in the alternative accounts of politics proposed by Gramsci and Laclau. The role that consent plays in early modern republican thought serves as a precursor to and anticipation of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. In placing articulation at the centre of politics, Gramsci and Laclau argue that any alternative politics needs to engage with articulation in order to seek gains in the hegemonic struggle.

Three clear conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. In the first place, this project has presented a range of interpretations of the multitude, as Marsilius, Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Hardt and Negri all provide differing accounts of the multitude. The same principle applies to the people. Hardt and Negri consider the people through the prism of Hobbes. For them, Hobbes presents a unified political subject – the people is One – whose will and interests are ‘represented’ by the sovereign. Yet, Laclau’s account of the people differs from Hobbes. For him, the people can never be One as that which serves as the One – the universal – is always false, always
fails. It is permanently liable to be rearticulated such that a One at one moment, can become a different One at the next. The people are also not One, for Laclau, because the social is never unified, but is riven by conflicts, in which politics is separated by a frontier either side of which stand two camps. Just as with the multitude, there are a greater range of interpretations of the people than Hardt and Negri allow.

In the second place, it raises questions regarding received wisdom on sovereignty. Accounts of sovereignty within the tradition of western political philosophy more often than not begin with Hobbes, and move on to Carl Schmitt. For Hobbes, sovereignty is unified, and grasped by the Leviathan. This Leviathan is constructed in the passage from the state of nature to civil society, in which the multitude (of the state of nature) hands over their sovereign power and invests it in the Leviathan (of civil society). The Leviathan, thereafter, possesses the right to exercise power over life and death, to decree right and wrong, to write the law, and to declare the exception. Yet the mobile account of sovereign power traced in this project suggests an alternative account of sovereignty. We might, alongside Hardt and Negri, term this alternative the ‘altermodern‘ project, yet this would require substantial amendment of their own account of sovereignty, which remains trapped within the Hobbesian logic. Their account of sovereignty proposes democracy, the multitude and altermodernity in a stark and rigid opposition with sovereignty, the people and modernity. The mobile account of sovereign power traced in this project sidesteps this alternative, and subverts the Hobbesian logic, rather than performing an inversion as is the case with Hardt and Negri. Part I of this project has shown a consistent mobile account of sovereign power developed prior to Hobbes’ invention of the contours of the question of sovereignty, and not in opposition to it.
Finally, this project contributes towards our understanding of republicanism. It does so by stressing the importance of *articulation* to the republican project. This can be seen in the role that *consent* plays in Marsilius, the *force-consent* couplet in Machiavelli, and the *common notions* within a wider philosophy of *communication* in Spinoza. Through this stress, *articulation* can be conceptualised as an umbrella term that captures many of the central themes of republicanism which could, in turn, seek to widen its scope and broaden its contemporary political relevance. Moving away from the early modern period, articulation could also encompass *rhetoric* associated with Roman republicanism in general and Cicero in particular. It could also encompass a range of contemporary political and philosophical positions, which go under the banner of post-Marxism or – more pertinently, for this example – *discourse theory*. A focus on *articulation* has not featured in recent accounts of republicanism,¹ but may serve to reanimate theoretical debate in this tradition.
NOTES

Introduction
1 This account is contained in these two authors collaborative trilogy entitled Empire, Multitude and Commonwealth (Hardt & Negri 2000, 2004, 2009). The problem with terming this as a trilogy is that – in due course – further texts may appear. It also ignores an earlier collaborative text, Labor of Dionysus: A Critique of the State-Form (Hardt & Negri 1994), although this has a markedly different feel to its three successors, which collectively constitute a clear project. I will call this a trilogy on the basis that Hardt has indicated in a lecture that Commonwealth constitutes the conclusion of their collaboration. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtoEeO7ZGeo, date accessed 19.11.2010.

2 ‘Time-to-come’ is a phrase that Negri uses to differentiate from the ‘future’. The future, for Negri, is associated with chronos, with the regularity of historical time, that is, the ultimate predictability and continuity of history to produce a future that is entirely knowable. ‘Time-to-come’, by contrast, is associated with kairos, which entails the disruption of the regularity and order of chronological time. In this sense, our understanding of history – or, more particularly, the development of history – involves contingency which inevitably distorts the regularity and predictability of the movement and development of history. The ‘new course’ that Negri is attempting to direct history towards, through kairos, is communism.

4 See Burke (1968).
8 See, especially, The Communist Manifesto in Marx (1973a).
10 A number of attempts to theorise what lies beyond the political subjects of modernity are contained in Cadava, Connor & Nancy (1991). This edited collection contains a range of responses to the question posed by Nancy (which also forms the title of the collection): who comes after the subject? On subjectivation specifically, see Balibar (1994b).
12 Despite the clarity and lucidity of the passage just quoted from Leviathan, Hobbes is a far subtler thinker than many give credit for. In fact, this is also the case in his treatment of the multitude, as I develop elsewhere in an as yet unpublished paper. In this, I argue that if the entirety of Hobbes’ oeuvre is considered, Hobbes’ treatment of the multitude is far more ambiguous than is usually credited. Most pertinent here is the absence of the multitude in Hobbes’ historical reflection on the English Civil War. This event overhangs so much of Hobbes’ writings, yet this is precisely where one would expect the multitude to appear in his account, as it is a real situation in which order has disintegrated or, in
Hobbes’ terminology, it is a state of nature in which the multitude comes into play. Having stated this, however, I will continue to follow Hardt and Negri’s approach to the multitude (and people) in Hobbes throughout this project for the purposes of clarity and simplicity.

13 This quotation originally featured in Raymond Williams ‘Beyond Actually Existing Socialism’, in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (Verso, 1980), pp.252-3.


15 ‘War of movement’ is sometimes translated or used as ‘war of manoeuvre’.

16 See Laclau & Mouffe (2001), Laclau (2005a), Laclau (2005b)

17 Laclau and Mouffe, and Laclau singly, never specify a precise periodisation with regard to modernity. I regard that hegemony becomes central to politics as a result of two combinatory factors. The first is the increasing extension of the franchise, culminating in universal adult enfranchisement. This necessitated the ‘ruling-classes’ to express their political views – to articulate – to those that they ruled over, and to include them within that articulation, by presenting these views as beneficial to, in the interest of, both. The second is the development of a ‘public mind’, or ‘imagined community’, through the extension of communication and connections, in the form of newspapers, railways, telegraphs, and the broadcast media. It should come as no surprise that Gramsci should theorise hegemony as these two factors solidify.

In terms of modernity, there are a plethora of debates that will remain unexplored. Berman (1984) has theorised this aptly. I have described the three theorists considered in Part I as ‘early modern theorists’. This is, in part, as a response to the Hardt and Negri claim that modernity commenced with a choice, between the people and the multitude – advocated by Hobbes and Spinoza, respectively. This claim is interrogated in Part I. Berman pinpoints modernity’s first wave to 1500. In this respect, it is futile to claim that Marsilius of Padua lived in modernity (Machiavelli, too, spent more of his life in premodernity, according to this classification). They have been described as early modern theorists, because they are of modernity, in the sense that they formulated and developed certain of its key theoretical apparatus.

I.1 Marsilius of Padua

1 See Marsilius (2005).


3 All references to the *Defensor Pacis* in this chapter are presented in parentheses, and feature the relevant discourse, chapter and section, along with the page number from Brett’s recent translation. For example: I.13.8, 80.

4 The question of the subject has attracted increased attention and interrogation over recent decades, especially with the announcement of ‘the death of the subject’. It is beyond the scope of this project to add to this fascinating debate. For the purposes of clarity, I will use the term ‘political subject’ when discussing the three early modern theorists – Marsilius, Machiavelli and Spinoza – but will problematise this term when
contemporary theorists – especially Hardt and Negri, and Laclau – are brought under consideration. For two insightful and penetrating overviews that probe the concept of the subject, see Cadava et al (1991) and Williams (2001).


6 For a more detailed (and more complex) account of ‘the people’, see Canovan (2005). For a discussion of the Roman people specifically, see Canovan (2005: 11-16).


8 The distinction drawn here between conflict and contained conflict is analogous with the distinction Mouffe draws between antagonism and agonism (Mouffe 2005).

9 This is related to Marsilius’ rejection of the ‘final causes’ that animated much classical and medieval philosophy, in favour of ‘efficient causes’ (see Gewirth 1951: 36). The distinction between ‘final’ and ‘efficient’ causes can be found in the works of Aristotle.

10 For examples of such uses, see II.6.13, 205-207; II.16.9, 326; II.17.7-10, 339-343; II.17.14-15, 346-348; II.22.13, 400; II.24.2, 418; II.28.2-3, 484-5; II.28.13, 495; II.28.17, 499; II.28.18, 501

11 See Gewirth (1951: 127).


13 At another point in Politics, Aristotle offers a different classification of the economy, which can be found at (1998: 1290b37 -1291a33, 141-143). Here, he lists eight parts, which are: (1) agricultural; (2) mechanical (“those who are occupied in the various arts and crafts”); (3) marketing (“all those who are occupied in buying and selling, either as merchants or as retailers”); (4) hired labourers; (5) military (“the defence force”); (6) the judicial and deliberative (“the legal organization of justice, and... the part engaged in deliberation, which is a function that needs the gift of political understanding”); (7) the ‘wealthy’ (“those who serve the city with their property”); and (8) statesmen (who serve “the public and undertakes duties connected with public office. No city can exist without rulers”).

14 This final category – the judicial office – was also described by Marsilius as the pars principans, or governmental part, and should be regarded as serving the role of the executive within a separation of powers consisting of two distinct powers: the executive and the legislature (legislator humanus), or state. This legislative power is equivalent to the multitude.

15 For a general account of the interaction of will and reason in Marsilius, see chapters 2 and 4 of Nederman (1995: 29-52; 73-98). In chapter 2, Nederman writes, “[t]he structure of Marsiglio’s perfected political community thereby posits a strict division between private and public spheres, paralleling an equally careful distinction between will and reason” (41), and, “Marsiglian creatures are, in a sense, trapped between reason and will... By starting with this predicament and recognizing that, for Marsiglio, it constitutes the basic human condition” (48). Nederman stresses the interaction between reason and will to bolster his thesis that consent is integral to the formation and maintenance of the state in Marsilius. Consent, according to Nederman, is the outcome of the interaction between reason and will in Marsilius. Nederman is undoubtedly correct to place consent at the centre of Marsilius’ system, and much of
the argument in this chapter has been drawn from Nederman’s account of Marsilius on consent. Yet Nederman does not pursue the logic of the argument that he raises elsewhere, particularly with regard to the economic parts – or, in his language, communal functionalism – which is the third factor that operates alongside those of will and reason to form Marsilius’ political subject.

16 The distinction between ‘living’ (zoe) and ‘living well’ (bios) is introduced by Aristotle in the opening chapters of Book I of Politics. Here, Marsilius reformulates the relationship between zoe and bios. For a contemporary account that considers zoe and bios, see Agamben (1998).

17 For a recent commentary on the subject of rhetoric, see Richards (2007).

18 Laclau has criticised the distinction between rhetoric and consent, for the very reason that rhetoricity has been extended to the ensemble of language, see Laclau (2001).

19 As indicated in endnote 13, this governmental part has been variously translated from Marsilius’ Latin phrase pars principans, but – within the contemporary division of powers – it fulfills the functions of the executive and judiciary.

20 Negri’s concept of ‘constituent power’ – which is crucial for an understanding of the multitude in Hardt and Negri – will be considered in II.1ii.

21 This separation of powers differs from modern incarnations, which are generally derived from Montesquieu, in which three powers – the executive, the judiciary and the legislature – operate within the state. For Marsilius, there were effectively two powers: the pars principans which broadly carried out the functions of Montesquieu’s executive and judiciary; and the legislator humanus or multitude, which carried out the function of the legislature. This can help explain the varying terminology bestowed upon the pars principans (see endnote 13).

22 For Marsilius, “election is the most perfect and superior way of instituting the principate” (I.10.1, 51). Later, Marsilius sets out three questions to consider before the pars principans can be recalled by the multitude: when their transgressions are serious rather than slight; when transgressions occur frequently, as opposed to irregularly; and whether the offence is inside or outside of the extant law. See I.18.4, 125.

23 Note that the common good in Marsilius is not a fixed, objective category, but is rather historicised according to the laws at a particular historical moment. These laws result from the interaction between the three inputs – will, economic part and reason – on the one hand, and the historical conditions and challenges that face this multitude, on the other hand. This rejection of an absolutist account of the common good runs parallel to Marsilius favouring efficient causes over final causes, as discussed in endnote 9.


25 The extent to which this occurs has been challenged by Nederman, through assigning the level of the household to the private realm, which he subordinates to the public realm (1995; 29-52)


On this, see also “any convenience or inconvenience that can affect all ought to be known and heard by all” (I.12.7, 71), and “because laws that have been passed in this way, through a hearing and consent on the part of the entire multitude, will be better observed.” (I.13.8, 80)

Discourse II is an extended consideration of the conditions pertaining to the removal of the priestly part.

For further details on contraventions of the law by the pars principans, see I.18.3-7, 124-126

This classification parallels the distinction between the popolani and the magnati that existed in late medieval Italian city-states. See Waley (1969), chapter 5. The numerical superiority of the vulgaris may explain Marsilius’ adoption of Aristotle’s concern with democracy – conceived of as ‘the rule of the poor’. Due to this numerical disproportion, it is likely that a qualitative distinction would be introduced to ensure that the state didn’t merely serve the interests of the poor. Unfortunately, Marsilius doesn’t indicate how this would operate. The notions of quantity and quality are bound up with the concept of the valentior pars, which plays an important role in Marsilius’ work. This has been variously translated as ‘weightier part’, ‘stronger part’, ‘prevailing part’ and ‘greater part’, and has attracted considerable attention in the secondary literature, see especially Gewirth (1951: 182-199), Brett (2005: I-li) and Nederman (1995: 85-88).

McIlwain (1955) has suggested that Marsilius’ treatment of the vulgaris, honorabilitas and valentior pars provides an anti-democratic flavour to Marsilius’ politics. The evidence for this claim, however, is insubstantial. As the Defensor Pacis fails to address the subject of voting procedures, there is no evidence to suggest that Marsilius favoured either one-man one-vote, or bloc-voting in which the six economic parts are given equal weight. The qualitative angle may have been invoked, rather, to ensure equality of voice – rather than equality of vote – for each of the (numerically disproportionate) six parts of the state.

The actual term that Marsilius uses here is mechanicis, which is contrasted with the prudentes. This division is equivalent to the division between the vulgaris and honorabilitas raised in endnote 31.

“Simple whole with complex parts” is a phrase that is used to describe Spinoza’s ontology. See I.3.

I.2 Machiavelli

On Machiavelli’s ‘solitude’, see Althusser (1999: 115-130). This chapter is considerably indebted to the analysis that Althusser forwards in his lectures on Machiavelli, which were posthumously published under the title Machiavelli and Us.

Gramsci and his theorisation of hegemony will be considered in the final chapter of this project, see II.2.

See Croce (1946).

See Gramsci (1971); Althusser (1999); Fontana (1993); Del Lucchese (2009); and, Lahtinen (2009).

See Negri (1999).

See also: “Machiavelli and Spinoza... conceive of the conflict that grounds institutions along not only the clearly defined paths of resistance and rebellions against authority and oppression but also, and more important, the fractured and changing paths of conflict within the multitude.” (Hardt & Negri 2009: 356)

Hardt and Negri term this modern line of alternative thought ‘altermodernity’. Their proposal of altermodernity in Commonwealth is an attempt to distance themselves from, firstly, their earlier celebratory, yet qualified, embrace of postmodernism and, secondly, their description of postmodernity as an epoch that succeeds modernity, developed in Empire. For a fuller consideration of this, see II.1. For Hardt and Negri on altermodernity, see Hardt & Negri (2009: 67–130).

In Empire, Hardt and Negri tackle Machiavelli briefly (as is the case with so many theorists). Despite this brevity, they are explicit in attempting to align Machiavelli with the multitude and constituent power, as the following quotations demonstrate: “in the Machiavellian project there is an ineluctable distance between the subject (the multitude) and the object (the Prince and the free state). This distance leads Machiavelli in The Prince to search for a democratic apparatus capable of linking subject to object” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 63–64); and “there is the Machiavellian concept of power as a constituent power – that is, as a product of an internal and immanent social dynamic. For Machiavelli, power is always republican; it is always the product of the life of the multitude and constitutes its fabric of expression” (ibid.: 162).

There is also a passage in The Prince that is almost identical to this: “the people and the nobles. These two different dispositions are found in every city; and the people are everywhere anxious not to be dominated or oppressed by the nobles, and the nobles are out to dominate and oppress the people” (Machiavelli 1961: IX, 31).

Lahtinen (2009: 297) has a similar – although not identical – list of the various terms Machiavelli uses to classify social groups.

There are plenty of other examples that could be drawn on to illustrate this: “Not only can the prince not take into account the people, when faced with a social conflict that is polarized between the people and the Grandi, but also he must not hesitate to side with the multitude” (Del Lucchese 2009: 124). This slippage in Del Lucchese is all the more surprising for two factors. Firstly, the richness of his account, and the real contribution he has made to our understanding of the connections between Machiavelli and Spinoza. Secondly, because he explicitly states that the preferred political subject in Machiavelli is the people, while in Spinoza it is the multitude: “the subjects of politics: Machiavelli’s popolo and Spinoza’s multitude” (ibid.: 115).

Throughout this chapter, quotations will be lifted directly from recent popular editions of Machiavelli’s key texts in English. Where the term moltitudine has been translated into terms other than ‘multitude’, this will be followed by the Italian/Florentine original in parentheses (for a discussion of the development of the Italian language post-Risorgimento, see Ives (2004)). This will illustrate the varying ways in which the term
moltitudine has been rendered into English. Where it is deemed significant, the original words Machiavelli uses for other political subjects will be included in parentheses after the relevant English translation of that word.


14 The Histories by Polybius was the source of this account of the cyclical nature of governments, known as anacyclosis. It can also be found in Book III of the Politics by Aristotle (1998).

15 This movement will be explored in the following section of this chapter.


17 Hardt and Negri develop the notion of ‘altermodernity’ in Commonwealth, viewing this as an alternative, subterranean project that develops within and alongside the project of modernity. See Hardt & Negri (2009: 67-130).


19 For a masterful consideration of Machiavelli on virtù, fortuna and necessità, see Skinner (1981). To this tripartite designation of virtù, fortuna and necessità, Lahtinen insists that a fourth term needs to be inserted, namely occasione, in keeping with Machiavelli’s conjunctural analysis. See Lahtinen (2009: 115).

20 Note that the preface to Commonwealth, Hardt and Negri’s most recent collaboration, is entitled ‘The Becoming-Prince of the Multitude’.

21 This importance is best illustrated by Lahtinen (2009), whose text is a consideration and celebration of Althusser’s encounter with Machiavelli, contained in Machiavelli and Us. Lahtinen’s example is part of a growing interest in the work of the late Althusser, with a focus on aleatory materialism (or ‘the philosophy of the encounter,’ or ‘the materialism of the encounter’). See also Borderlands (2005) – entitled Althusser and Us – and Kang (2008).

22 Althusser elaborates these accounts in the second chapter of this text, entitled ‘Theory and Theoretical Dispositive in Machiavelli’, pp. 33-52, especially pp.33-42.

23 See also: “all human affairs are ever in a state of flux and cannot stand still, either there will be improvement or decline” (Machiavelli 1970: I.6, 123)

24 Althusser is by no means alone in stressing ‘the state that endures’ as the aim Machiavelli set politics within his particular conjuncture. Quentin Skinner, for instance, from a very different philosophical tradition and approach to Althusser, stresses the centrality Machiavelli held for ‘mantenere lo stato’, or maintaining the state. See Skinner (1981).

25 The different approaches to Machiavelli’s approach to epistemological questions has been well set out by Fontana, who contrasts Croce’s account of Machiavelli with that offered by Gramsci (Fontana 1993: chapter 4, 52-73).

26 For an alternative approach to Croce on Machiavelli and realism, see Del Lucchese (2009). Del Lucchese does not define realism as the correspondence theory of truth, or the view that theory can be eliminated from study in order to arrive at the truth, but rather adopts an open-ended approach to realism, deploying it as a hermeneutic tool: “What exactly does “realism” refer to? The term is somewhat ambiguous and certainly presents a multiplicity of meanings... No univocal and rigorous definition of political realism is thus put forward in this study. The term is
used, rather, as a concept that refers in its turn to a number of specific themes that have been developed as part of this multifaceted current of thought. Our investigation will proceed in two directions. On the one hand, political realism will serve as a hermeneutic tool for the reading of Machiavelli and Spinoza. On the other hand, the relationship between these two authors provides an opportunity for inquiring into and honing the meaning of realism, especially as it appears in its political forms.” (2009: 8).

See Lahtinen (2009: 109-214). It is worth intervening at this point to indicate that Lahtinen deploys key words – such as philosophy and politics (which will be explained in the ensuing passage in the core body text) – with a different meaning to how Croce uses them.

Following Althusser, Lahtinen makes a further distinction between Machiavelli and such a ‘universal’ philosopher, who views things from the ‘outside’: a philosopher is concerned with universal laws (as is also the case with the natural scientist), whereas the ‘man of action’, the politician is concerned with general constants. This distinction highlights that, while there are numerous continuities between events, each separate event will contain individuating factors that resist and prevent a universal framework being imposed upon it.

There is a parallel passage in the Prison Notebooks which makes a similar point, and is worth quoting at length: “A distinction must be made between “diplomat” and “politician”, but also between political scientist and active politician. The diplomat inevitably will move only within the bounds of effective reality, since his specific activity is not the creation of some new equilibrium, but the maintenance of an existing equilibrium within a certain juridical framework. Similarly, the political scientist has to keep within the bounds of effective reality in so far as he is merely a scientist. But Machiavelli is not merely a scientist: he is a partisan, a man of powerful passions, an active politician, who wishes to create a new balance of forces and therefore cannot help concerning himself with what “ought to be” (not of course in a moralistic sense)... The active politician is a creator, an initiator: but he neither creates from nothing nor does he move in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams. He bases himself on effective reality, but what is this effective reality? Is it something static and immobile, or is it not rather a relation of forces in continuous motion and shift of equilibrium? If one applies one’s will to the creation of a new equilibrium among the forces which really exist and are operative – basing oneself on the particular force which one believes to be progressive and strengthening to help it to victory – one still moves on the terrain of effective reality, but does so in order to dominate it and transcend it (or to contribute to this). What “ought to be” is therefore concrete; indeed it is the only realistic and historicist interpretation of reality, it alone is history in the making and philosophy in the making, it alone is politics.

The opposition between Savonarola and Machiavelli is not an opposition between what is and what ought to be... but one between two concepts of what ought to be: the abstract and phantasmagorical concept of Savonarola, and the realistic concept of Machiavelli – realistic even if it did not in fact become direct reality, since one cannot expect an individual or a book to change reality but only to interpret it and to indicate the possible lines of action” (Gramsci 1971: 172-173).
See also, “as men’s appetites change, even though their circumstances remain the same, it is impossible that things should look the same to them seeing that they have other appetites, other interests, other standpoints, from what they had in their youth” (Machiavelli 1970: II.preface, 268). In other passages, Machiavelli calls into question the relation between a name and the thing to which that name refers: “since ‘gentlemen’ in this republic [Venice] are so in name rather than in point of fact” (ibid.: I.55, 247).

As Crick notes in his introduction to the Discourses: “The message is clear enough: princes to create or restore states, but republics to preserve them” (Crick 1970: 35).

On general constants, see endnote 28.

See also: “In provinces thus organized [Machiavelli is referring to Naples, the Papal States, Romagna and Lombardy as examples in which the nobility held power] no attempt to set up a republic could possibly succeed. To reconstitute them, should anyone want to do so, the only way would be to set up a monarchy there. The reason for this is that, where the material is so corrupt, laws do not suffice to keep it in hand; it is necessary to have, besides laws, a superior force, such as appertains to a monarch” (Machiavelli 1970: I.55, 246).

See ‘Machiavelli’s Solitude’ (Althusser, 1999: 115-130). In this Althusser writes: “Machiavelli is alone because he has remained isolated; he has remained isolated because, although there has been ceaseless fighting over his thought, no one has thought in his thought” (ibid.: 123), and “This is perhaps the ultimate point in Machiavelli’s solitude: the fact that he occupied a unique and precarious place in the history of political thought between a long moralizing, religious and idealist tradition of political thought, which he radically rejected, and the new tradition of the political philosophy of natural law, which was to submerge everything and in which the rising bourgeoisie found its self-image. Machiavelli’s solitude lay in his having freed himself from the first tradition before the second submerged everything” (ibid.: 124).

Del Lucchese detects a transformation in the notion of the bene comune in Machiavelli. This common good is no longer a common good for all. Satisfying all is no longer an option, because what constitutes the bene comune for the many (that is, the people) will disappoint a few (that is, the nobility). The bene comune, then becomes directed at the many rather than all. This is because of the two basic dispositions, in which the nobility seek to oppress and dominate. The introduction of a politics of the bene comune will inevitably suppress and, therefore, disappoint the nobility’s disposition. See Del Lucchese (2009: 30).

Machiavelli writes of Bruni and Bracciolini: “I found that in the descriptions of the wars waged by the Florentines with foreign princes and peoples they had been very diligent, but as regards civil discords and internal enmities, and the effects arising from them, they were altogether silent about the one and so brief about the other as to be of no use to readers or pleasure to anyone” (Machiavelli 1988: preface, 6). He goes on to insist: “if no other lesson is useful to the citizens who govern republics, it is that which shows the causes of hatred and divisions in the city, so
that when they have become wise through the dangers of others, they may be able to maintain themselves united” (ibid.).

See Discourses I.4. Here, Machiavelli writes: “To me those who condemn the quarrels between the nobles and plebs, seem to be cavilling at the very things that were the primary cause of Rome retaining her freedom... in every republic there are two different dispositions, that of the populace and that of the upper class and that all legislation favourable to liberty is brought about by the clash between them” (Machiavelli, 1970: I.4, 113).

“Channelled activity” involves the mass orienting politics around the common good; it is to be contrasted with both passivity (Christianity) and blind, directionless activity (the multitude). Blind, directionless activity will always enable the nobles to regroup and re-establish their rule.

“Channelled activity” is associated with the people, the common good, and serves as a useful starting-point for rendering virtù into English.

Although this theme is developed in chapter XVIII, there are allusions to the metaphor that run throughout The Prince. See: “power is brought into being by ingenuity or by force” (Machiavelli 1961: III, 13); and, “between those who to achieve their purposes can force the issue and those who must use persuasion” (ibid.: VI, 19), for example.

See also: “those who have known best how to imitate a fox have come off best” (Machiavelli, 1961: XVIII, 57).

See Althusser (1984a).

On this, Hardt and Negri write: “Machiavelli teaches us that only good weapons make good laws. One might infer, then, that bad weapons – and in Machiavelli’s language, mercenaries are bad weapons – make bad laws. The corruption of the military, in other words, implies the corruption of the entire political order” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 50). This is an accurate assessment of Machiavelli, but it is an assessment that is seriously at odds with a thesis that contends Machiavelli is a proponent of the multitude, constituent power and immanence, and an opponent of sovereignty, the state, the people and articulation. The “good laws” that Hardt and Negri refer to in this quotation indicate that Machiavelli is engaged in a conflict over what constitutes a “good state” (and how it is constituted).

Althusser writes that the constitution of a popular army involves:

“Recruitment of the army from the popular strata of town and country, in the form of standing popular militias... This constitutes the blending of town and country... It involves imparting a popular content to the army and, at the same time, making it the school and crucible of popular unity... To have peasants enrol in the army en masse undermines the power of the feudal lords... in the army common to them, the men of the towns and countryside begin to become – learn to become – one and the same people” (Althusser 1999: 87). This is a view developed earlier by Gramsci: “Any formation of a national-popular collective will is impossible, unless the great mass of peasant farmers burst simultaneously into political life. That was Machiavelli’s intention through the reform of the militia, and it was achieved by the Jacobins in the French Revolution. That Machiavelli understood it reveals a precocious Jacobinism” (Gramsci 1971: 132).

At this stage only a brief account of constituted power and constituent power can be offered. These concepts are expanded upon in II.1.vi.
The following quotations illustrate the inconsistency in Negri’s account of political subjects in Machiavelli: “From now on, the Discourses will be nothing but the demonstration that the only content of the constituent form is the people, that the only constitution of the Prince is democracy. A research toward the “institutio populi”.” (Negri 1999: 66); “the subject as collective identity – plebs, multitude, people” (ibid.: 69); “Here is the democratic republic that gets founded, the constitutional form of the multitude” (ibid.: 76); “The historical rationality that triumphs here [the first four books of the Florentine Histories] is that founded on the constituent power of the multitude” (ibid.: 85).

I.3 Spinoza

1 Montag exaggerates in stating that the multitude has been debated for the past century. Spinoza was a major influence on the French academy in the 1960s, which prompted a string of important commentaries, including Matheron, Deleuze, Macherey and Guerolt. For an anthology with contributions from many of these authors, see Montag and Stolze (1997). It is only really since the 1980s that the concept of the multitude in Spinoza has emerged as worthy of consideration. This was to a large extent inspired by Negri’s Savage Anomaly, although the multitude only directly forms a minor part of his analysis in this text. His account of the multitude in Spinoza was developed subsequently, see Negri (2004a).


5 For a now classic introduction to this pivotal distinction in Spinoza, which has received enormous attention in subsequent commentaries, see Hardt (1991).

6 There is no evidence that Spinoza read Marsilius, accordingly it will be assumed that Spinoza was not acquainted with the works of the Paduan.

7 Hereafter, these will be referred to as the TPT and the PT respectively. As with Machiavelli, Spinoza’s chapter and section headings will follow references to these texts, followed by the page number within which these appear in recent editions in English. For example, TPT XVI.2, 195.

8 For a discussion of the religious and political scene in the Dutch republic of the second half of the seventeenth century, see Balibar (1998: 1-24) and Prak (2005). An alternative approach to the TPT has been forwarded by Strauss (1952). He claims that Spinoza’s concerns in this text were long-term. Spinoza recognised that the position of freedom, according to Strauss, would only be widely accepted through the expansion of the intended audience of the TPT. This intended audience can be gleaned from a three-fold classification that Spinoza adopts: philosophers, potential philosophers, and anti-philosophers (for this classification, see TPT: preface.15, 12). It is the potential philosophers that Spinoza sought to attract in the TPT, and Strauss maintains that – as the expansion of this category would inevitably be a drawn out process – this constitutes a long-term project for Spinoza. Balibar, on the other hand, cites that Spinoza abandoning his work on the Ethics indicates the immediate concerns he had in drafting the TPT (see Balibar 1998: 25-49).
It is worth highlighting that, in this passage, the epistemological account that Spinoza provides of the multitude – that reason and the passions are in a zero-sum relationship – differs markedly from the account he develops of reason and the passions in *Ethics*, and from his conceptualisation of the multitude in the *PT*.

The argument forwarded here is, effectively, merely an expansion of Spinoza’ association of power and right (which will be considered shortly in this section). At other points in the *PT*, Spinoza forwards different arguments against absolute monarchy: “those who believe that one man by himself can hold the supreme right of the commonwealth are greatly mistaken. For right is determined by power alone, but the power of one man is far from being capable of sustaining so heavy a load. As a result, the man whom the people has chosen as king looks about him for generals or counsellors or friends to whom he entrusts his own security and the security of all citizens, so that the state, which is thought to be purely a monarchy, is in actual practice an aristocracy – not indeed overtly so, but a concealed one – and therefore of the worst kind” (*PT*: VI.5, 65). In addition, absolute monarchy is threatened by the very fact of the multitude and the fear it inspires in the monarch and his entourage. This fear causes him to moderate his policies to prevent provoking the multitude’s ire: “The king, then, whether motivated by fear of the people or by his desire to win over the greater part of an armed populace, or whether he is led by nobility of spirit to have regard to the public interest, will always ratify the opinion that is supported by most voters... Thus he will be most fully in control of his own right and most fully sovereign when he has most regard for the general welfare of his people” (ibid.: VII.11, 81-82).

Spinoza’s definitions here provide further proof of his association of sovereignty with the state and the commonwealth, of which democracy is one of the three forms that it can take. This reinforces the critique of (Hardt and) Negri who insists that Spinoza opposes democracy to sovereignty.

Spinoza additionally uses various derivatives of these terms. As with Machiavelli, English translations have been inconsistent in their rendition of these terms, veering away from Spinoza’s language and often collapsing one term into another. At best, this approach results in the loss of distinctiveness in Spinoza’s language; at worst, it leads to a misrepresentation of his thought.

This section will not consider citizens or subjects as these are clearly and adequately described in *PT* III.1, which has just been quoted.

I don’t intend to pursue Balibar’s method of classification in the consideration of the multitude, but it is worth indicating at this point that the multitude, in Spinoza, combines an ‘epistemological’ aspect (as will become apparent in the subsequent discussion of the multitude and reason) with a ‘socio-political’ one.

It must be said that there are counter-examples to this presentation. Spinoza was not strictly consistent in the terminology he uses to describe different political subjects. The presentation here is, however, clearly in line with the predominant account of Spinoza’s terminology. For another excellent discussion of Spinoza’s terminology relating to political subjects, see Montag (1999: 76-83).
On contractarianism and social contract theory, see Boucher & Kelly (1994) and Gough (1957).

The indirect reference occurs at the outset of the PT, where Spinoza rejects those philosophers whose political treatises concern themselves with utopian projections, and contrasts such accounts with those whose political theory has “practical application” and for whom “experience has been their guide” (PT: 1.1-2, 33-34). Spinoza directly refers to and praises Machiavelli in the crucial fifth chapter, entitled ‘The Highest Aim of Society’ (PT: V.7, 63).

Compare this with Hobbes’ reaction to Spinoza’s philosophy, which is tinged with admiration for his bravery and audacity. Aubrey recalls that Hobbes, when asked to comment on the TPT, enthused about the boldness of Spinoza’s intervention: “He told me he had outthrown him a bar’s length, for he durst not write so boldly” (Aubrey 2009: 357). For a consideration of this quotation, see Curley (2005).

There is a parallel passage in the PT which states: “the natural right of Nature as a whole, and consequently the natural right of every individual, is coextensive with its power. Consequently, whatever each man does from the laws of his own nature, he does by the sovereign right of Nature, and he has as much right over Nature as his power extends” (PT: II.4, 38).

For a consideration of ontology in Spinoza, see Viljanen (2009).

See Den Uyl (1983), Rice (1990), Barbone and Rice (2000) and Smith (2005). In their championing of the individual, these liberal theorists ignore the role that the multitude plays within Spinoza’s thought. Their strategy is either to ignore it completely, or to displace it entirely. The latter is the approach of Barbone and Rice, who translate multitudo as people. They write, “In what follows, multitudo is usually rendered as “people”, the English term “multitude” having a somewhat pejorative connotation more akin to Spinoza’s term vulgus. The phrase is common in seventeenth century juridical writings” (Barbone & Rice 2000: footnote 44; PT II.17, 44).


For presenting the various parts of this text, I follow the convention set out in the recently published The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics. For a guide, see Koistinen (ed.) (2009: ix). I use Shirley’s translation of the Ethics from the Latin to the English, see Spinoza (1992).

This passage is heavily influenced by Montag (1999: 31-32).


In this quotation, Spinoza speaks of statesmen, in the plural, but the allusion appears to be aimed a single statesman, namely Machiavelli himself.
For a recent account arguing for the realism of Spinoza (and Machiavelli), see Del Lucchese (2009: 7-38).

Negri’s differentiation between the future and the “time-to-come” has a parallel differentiation in Greek discourses on time between chronos and kairos. Chronos refers to ‘clock-time’ which plods along from the past through the present to the future with intricate regularity – or, put another way, utter predictability. Kairoi, by contrast, is the ability to act in chronos to disrupt that predictability and reorient the future differently, into the “time-to-come”. See Negri (2003).

The reference here is very much to Althusser’s later writings in general and the brilliance of the essay entitled ‘The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’ in particular. See Althusser (2006: 163-207).

In making this claim, I am specifically dealing with the knowledge available in the mid-seventeenth century. More recent democratic theorists have unearthed earlier examples of democracy, democratic forms of government and forms that were oriented towards democracy. The most obvious example is the Icelandic assemblies of the tenth century (see Dahl 2000: 7-25). For a more recent account, which provides a ‘democratic’ history (or, a plural account) of democracy, see Keane (2009: 78-158), who periodises the origins of democracy several centuries earlier than standard accounts that focus on ancient Greece. The implication of Keane’s plural, ‘democratic’ analysis, of course, is that isolated pockets of democracy or, at the very least, democratic-oriented forms of organisation spread throughout Asia Minor predated Athens. Such forms, if they existed, closely resemble the ‘earliest communities’ that Spinoza refers to.

Pericles funeral oration is generally regarded to be the most celebrated advocacy of democracy, but this speech was penned from memory by his rival, Thucydides.


See Balibar (1998: 114-5). It is worth noting that elsewhere in this text, Balibar does argue that the theological power of the Counter-Remonstrants was an equally important factor to explain the events of 1672.

See TPT: XVI.11, 202. The full passage reads: “The democratic republic... seems to be the most natural and to be that which approaches most closely to the freedom nature bestows on every person. In a democracy no one transfers their natural right to another in such a way that they are not thereafter consulted but rather to the majority of the whole society of which they are a part. In this way all remain equal as they have been previously, in the state of nature.”

The centrality of communication to Spinoza’s philosophy will be considered in the following and final section of this chapter.

There is some dispute whether this sub-title was written by Spinoza or inserted by his editors. More recent accounts favour the former option. Barbone and Rice claim that “there is no evidence for” the claim that the sub-title was inserted by editors, adding that it “does provide a good summary of the chapter” (Barbone & Rice, note in Spinoza (2000: 95)).

See Battisti (1977). Battisti was also one of the earliest to contribute to the debate on political subjects in Spinoza, in ‘Spinoza, l’utopia e le
It is worth stressing at this point that this contrast perfectly illustrates Spinoza’s account of freedom. Freedom is opposed to slavery and not necessity. An understanding of necessity, moreover, expands the realm of freedom.


See Feuer (1958).


Negri discovers the importance of the distinction between potestas and potentia in The Savage Anomaly. See, especially, Hardt (1991). Negri develops this distinction in Insurgencies through the concepts of constituted power and constituent power. These concepts have been extended in Negri’s collaborative works with Hardt to differentiate the multitude and democracy on the one hand, from the people and sovereignty on the other hand; see Hardt & Negri (2000; 2004; 2009).

This quotation aligns Spinoza with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony – which is explored in II.2. Hegemony, for Gramsci, focuses on the dominant world-view, and seeks to shift this prior to a change in power, which is sometimes formulated as: a revolution is required prior to a revolution. Spinoza’s assessment of the English Civil War clearly indicates that such a revolution in thought had not occurred sufficiently to usher in a thoroughgoing revolution in practice.

See Mouffe (2005).

See also, when commenting on Spinoza’s theoretical shift between the TPT and the PT, Negri writes: “In place of the contract he puts consensus, and in place of the methodology of individuality he puts that of collectivity. The multitude becomes a constitutive power” (Negri 2004: 16). It should be noted that the concepts of consensus and constitutive power are both incompatible with a presentation of Spinoza that opposes democracy to sovereignty and constituent power to constituted power.

The theme runs implicitly throughout their entire work, whether through contrasts between constituent power and constituted power, multitude and people, or immanence and transcendence. For an explicit expression of the opposition between democracy and sovereignty, see the section entitled ‘Sovereignty and Democracy’ (Hardt & Negri 2004: 328-340), which contains the following quotation: “the multitude cannot be reduced to a unity and does not submit to the rule of one. The multitude cannot be sovereign. For this same reason, the democracy that Spinoza calls absolute cannot be considered a form of government in the traditional sense because it does not reduce the plurality of everyone to the unitary figure of sovereignty” (Hardt & Negri 2004: 330).


See Deleuze (1988, especially 54-58) and Deleuze (1990, especially 273-288).

See Arrighi (1994), and also Wallerstein (1980) and Braudel (1984). These economic historians also emphasise a less attractive feature of the seventeenth century Dutch Republic: colonial invasion and expansion.

See De Vries (2000: 453) “The Dutch population grew rapidly. Indeed, in the five centuries since 1500 it has grown 16-fold... The population of the Netherlands grew rapidly throughout the sixteenth century, and when
general European growth flagged between 1620 and 1650, the Dutch growth continued for several additional decades, until about 1670, when the population had doubled in size.”

Between 1560 and 1670, Holland’s urban population grew by 250%, while Amsterdam’s population quadrupled to 200,000 in the first half of the seventeenth century. For a century from 1570, towns and cities absorbed 90% of total population growth, such that Holland’s population was 60% urban, while the figure for the entire Dutch Republic was 45% (De Vries 2000: 455). It is not merely that individual towns and cities grew and became more populous, perhaps the most extraordinary development is the growth in connections and contact between them. The canal network that emerged during this century stretched to a total of 658 kilometres by 1665, linking no fewer than thirty cities together (Wallerstein 1980: 45; Prak 2005: 251-253).


See Israel (2001), and particularly 119-156 on the rise of journals and libraries.


Until a different text is used, all references from this point are from the Ethics.

In 2p40s1, Spinoza writes: “The human body, being limited, is capable of forming simultaneously in itself only a certain number of distinct images... If this number be exceeded, these images begin to be confused, and if the number of distinct images which the body is capable of forming simultaneously in itself be far exceeded, all the images will be utterly confused with one another.”

Most propositions in the Ethics are followed by a proof. 2p13 is explicated through a series of techniques – proofs, axioms, corollaries, scholia, lemmata and postulates. 2p13 is the only proposition that receives such a wide-range of techniques in the Ethics. It is reasonable to assume, as a consequence, that Spinoza attaches considerable importance to this. Postulates are rarer still in Spinoza’s system. In fact, there is only one other in the Ethics. Here, they do not follow a proposition (and its proofs, axioms, corollaries, scholia and lemmata), but follow the definitions that appear near the beginning of the third part. This third part, and the definitions contained within it, refer to the emotions. These postulates read:

1. The human body can be affected in many ways by which its power of activity is increased or diminished; and also in many other ways which neither increase nor diminish its power of activity.

   This postulate or axiom rests on Postulate 1 and Lemmata 5 and 7, following Pr.13,II [this is 2p13].

2. The human body can undergo many changes and nevertheless retain impressions or traces of objects (see Post.5,II) and consequently the same images of things; – for the definition of which see Sch.Pr.17,II. (3def3po1&2).

Spinoza repeats this formulation in the Ethics: “if two individuals of completely the same nature are combined, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one singly” (4p18s).

Joy, for Spinoza, is counterposed to disappointment, see *Ethics* 3p18s2.

Although there is insufficient space to develop this theme, it is worth highlighting a substantial difference between Balibar and Del Lucchese on Spinoza’s epistemology. As indicated in the previous quotation from Balibar, he regards the crucial epistemological distinction to be between the first and second kinds of knowledge, and pays very little attention to the third kind of knowledge in *Spinoza and Politics*, and the essay ‘Spinoza, the anti-Orwell: fear of the masses’ in *Masses, Classes, Ideas*. Del Lucchese, by contrast, places a far greater emphasis on the third kind of knowledge (Del Lucchese 2009). The third kind of knowledge, of course, has generated a great deal of attention, confusion and controversy in Spinoza commentaries. The most notable contributors to this debate are Bennett (1984) and Curley (1988).

**II.1 Multitude, political subjects, subjectivation**

1 Étienne Balibar and Michel Foucault are two theorists that tackle this open process of subjectivation. See Balibar (1991, 1994b) and Foucault (1994b). In addition, this theme is addressed by an array of French figures in the edited collection *Who Comes After The Subject?* (Cadava et al., 1991).

2 Negri’s political practice – and, hence, his theoretical development – was strictly limited to Italy during the 1960s and 1970s. He escapes to Paris in 1984, and this involves a broadening of his focus to the west. The collaborative work with Hardt extends this theoretical gaze further still to the entire globe.

3 Assemblages are considered in an ensuing section of this chapter, see II.1vii.

4 This, however, is not a thoroughgoing embrace of postmodernism. Hardt and Negri reject Lyotard and Baudrillard – they could hardly be accused of incredulity to metarratives – while accepting Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari. It is important to highlight the personal connections between Hardt and Negri on the one hand, and Deleuze and Guattari on the other. For instance, Negri collaborated with Guattari on *Communists Like Us* (Guattari & Negri 1990). Hardt, additionally, has been based at Duke University since the 1990s, working alongside Frederick Jameson, with whom *Empire* shares a similar allegiance in the periodisation of postmodernity.

5 See Deleuze and Guattari (1987)

6 This will be considered in the following section (II.1ii) – ‘Being-against’ – through the discussion of constituent power.

7 This text developed from a series of articles that Tronti wrote in the early and mid-sixties for *Quaderni Rossi* and *Classe Operaia*, a journal that Tronti and Negri formed after a doctrinal disagreement with Panzieri. This was to be a feature of the extra-parliamentary left – and particularly its leading academic-intellectual members: none of the journals or groupings endured, causing, numerous splinterings around policy (and, no doubt, personality). For a mapping of the various groups during the 1960s and 1970s, see Red Notes (1979: 196-7), while Bologna (1980) provides details of the publications associated with the movements, alongside brief biographical details of their key figures. Finally, there is an overview of
the groups and their publications provided by an ex-member of Lotta Continua in Red Notes (1978: 109-112).

8 This essay was originally written for the first issue of Classe Operaia, and also forms a part of Operai e capitale.

9 It is worth noting at this point that Negri’s description of the “pitiful state” of the Italian left in the 1970s is just one of many examples that indicate his tendency to misread the political scene, and the possibilities for constructing an alternative politics.


11 The opening pages of the seventh book of the Grundrisse serve as the inspiration for this presentation of the possibilities for labour.

12 See Negri (1999). In this section, all quotations from and references to this text will be presented by the page number(s) in parentheses.

13 The Latin words potestas and potentia both translate as ‘power’ in English, while continental languages retain the distinction: pouvoir and puissance in French; potere and potenza in Italian; macht and vermögen in German. Certain English translations render the former as ‘power’ and the latter as ‘strength’ to emphasise the difference. Michael Hardt provides a useful discussion of this distinction in this text, see Hardt (1991).

14 This period of Negri’s writings involves a shift in spatial focus. His thought in the 1960s and 1970s is closely related to the political practice of operaismo and autonomia, and hence very much confined to Italy (and, at most, western Europe). Following his escape in 1984, Negri relocates to Paris, and his focus widens to the western world (Insurgencies, for instance, fails to consider revolutionary periods in Asia, Africa and Latin America). In his collaborative writings with Hardt from the late 1990s, the gaze widens to the entire globe. Whether this widening of focus has been accompanied with an appropriate consideration of the historical and political role of these continents has been subject to debate. See, for instance, Boron (2005), Dunn (2004), Hutnyk (2001), Mishra (2001), Moore (2001), Seth (2003) and Surin (2001).

15 Additionally, the closing passages of this text include the following claims: “To take [constituent power] away from the political means to take everything away from it; it means to reduce it to pure administrative and diplomatic mediation, to bureaucratic and police activity – that is, exactly to that against which constituent power, as origin of the political, continually struggles in order to emerge as strength”, and “constituent power... does not come after the political... No, constituent power comes first, it is the definition of the political” (Negri 1999: 335). This resembles the distinction between ‘police’ and ‘politics’ in Jacques Rancière, see Rancière (1998).

16 This insight is elaborated in the chapter entitled ‘The ‘People’ and the Discursive Production of Emptiness’ in Laclau (2005a: 67-128), and in the essay ‘Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?’ in Laclau (1996: 36-46). It is a challenge not just to (Hardt and) Negri, but to any revolutionary political theorist or activist. Laclau is a radical, though neither a revolutionary nor an anti-revolutionary, political theorist.

17 Insurgencies was first published in Italian in 1992, and was written while the Soviet satellite states and, eventually, the Soviet Union itself discarded their totalitarian regimes. These events themselves will in all
likelihood prove to be of a similar magnitude to those considered in this text.

Negri does admit that constituent power is diluted during the quieter moments of history – “Eventually, a pale reproduction of constituent power can be seen at work in referendums, regulatory activities and so on... Finally... the idea of constituent power... is in fact absorbed in the notion of political representation” (Negri 1999: 3) – but does not expand on its operation. This admission would seem to be a step too far for Negri, as it indicates a compromise with – perhaps even an insertion in – constituted power, a step that would inevitably blunt the piquancy of his conceptualisation. Later Negri writes, “[t]he problem of constituent power thus becomes a question about the construction of a constitutional model capable of keeping the formative capacity of constituent power itself in motion” (Negri 1999: 25). Despite posing this problem, it is not elaborated.

For a recent contribution to our understanding of ontology, see Badiou (2004).


Again, Badiou (2004) develops a philosophical justification for subtraction, although with a markedly different object of focus than Hardt and Negri. Despite this difference in focus, the effects are much the same.


See, for instance, Gilbert (2004).


See Barabási (2003) and Castells (2000; 2011). For an account of networks – with a particular focus on the Internet – more in line with the political and philosophical position of Hardt and Negri, see Galloway & Thacker (2007).

On UK Uncut, see Finlayson (2011).


See Castells (2000: 13-18). He cites feudalism, capitalism and statism as examples of modes of production, while agrarianism, industrialism and informationalism are examples of modes of development.

See Gorz (1982) and Rifkin (1995). It must be stated that Negri’s political practice with autonomia, centred around the ‘refusal of work’, also aimed at the elimination of labour – or, perhaps more precisely, the transformation of labour such that it sheds the negative connotations of drudgery, and instead becomes enjoyment.

Hardt and Negri deploy the term ‘hegemony’ in a non-Gramscian manner, as leadership or sway. This will be addressed in greater detail in the following chapter (II.2).
It is important to note that Laclau has deployed and developed these concepts subsequently, and they have acquired additional characteristics and, in so doing, become far more complex than the manner in which they are being deployed in this chapter. See, for instance, Laclau in Butler, Laclau & Zizek (2000: 281-307, particularly 301-306).

For Deleuze & Guattari, see (1987). For an account of Spinoza on bodies, see I.3 of this project, and 2p13po1-6 of Spinoza (1992).

A fuller comparison between Hardt and Negri on the one side, and Laclau and, especially, Gramsci on the other side is undertaken in II.2 through the respective concepts of “the common” and hegemony.

It is crucial for Laclau’s entire philosophical approach – and this specific aspect of it in particular – that an identity is permeated by an original lack. Due to this original lack, the identity of a subject always requires ‘filling’, a process which is never once-and-for-all, but is always ongoing. In other words, the identity of a subject, for Laclau, is always contingent, always liable to be transformed as a result of the circulation of discourses that attempt to constitute the ‘filling’ that plugs the original lack of the identity of the subject.

The role of this ‘supplement’, for Laclau, has changed during the twentieth century. Society has become increasingly complex as the century develops, such that each identity itself comprises “multiple selves”. “As a result”, writes Laclau, “the need to ‘fill in the gaps’ is no longer a ‘supplement’ to be added to a basic area of constitution of the identity of the agent but, instead, becomes a primary terrain. The constitutive role of representation in the formation of the will, which was partly concealed in more stable societies, now becomes fully visible” (Laclau 1996: 99). The multiplication of selves that Laclau refers to bears a close resemblance (although one that remains unacknowledged in Laclau) to Spinoza’s claim that every body is, in fact, itself a plurality of bodies (see I.3).

Without wanting to overstress the connections between all these struggles, there are marked similarities in the way that 1989 spread to engulf an entire region of the world with two further momentously historical events: 1848 (in Europe) and 2011 (in north Africa and the Middle East). This Arab Spring is ongoing at the time of writing (February) and although the only current successes (themselves tenuous) are in Tunisia and Egypt, they look set to unfurl into other polities in the region. For a justifiably popular account of 1848, see Hobsbawm (1988a: 138-163, 359-372; 1988b: 13-42). See Laclau (2004; 2005a: 239-244).

The concept of representation has been considered earlier in this chapter through a brief examination of Laclau’s account of representation. See II.1vii.

In a similar fashion, Commonwealth culminates with the call for three “platforms”: securing the basics of life; improving rates of political participation through the provision of core services (education, health); and open access to the common against the barriers erected by private property.
II.2 The common and hegemony

1 The reading of Gramsci by Laclau and Mouffe has attracted a number of responses from (more classically) Marxists. It is perhaps best to consider these through the recent contribution by Ives (2004). Classical Marxists tend to limit Gramsci’s departure from the defining features of (classical) Marxism: economism, or the primacy of the economic base within the base-superstructure model – alongside related positions such as essentialism, reductionism, determinism and epiphenomenalism. For a recent elaboration of such an account, see Harman (2007). Laclau and Mouffe consider Gramsci to be a pivot, with one foot in this economistic camp, the other in an alternative camp. This alternative is difficult to accurately pinpoint, as it involves a number of (largely) philosophical developments that occur as the twentieth century develops, including phenomenology, the linguistic analysis associated with Wittgenstein, pragmatism, structuralism and post-structuralism. All of these, however, can be broadly categorised under the realm of the superstructure. Laclau and Mouffe argue that, as Gramsci has one foot in each camp, he is unable to fully embrace one or the other. They view their project as developing the second of these two camps. In contrast to earlier (classical) Marxist critiques of the Laclau and Mouffe reading of Gramsci which stress Gramsci’s economism, Ives rejects their claim that Gramsci is still too much of an economic reductionist. Ives insists that Gramsci’s interest in language, linguistics and culture more generally combine to produce a far more complex account than Laclau and Mouffe allow. For a consideration of the various responses to Gramsci in the past half century, see Martin (1998: 139-165). It is not the purpose of this chapter to consider the ‘truth of’ Gramsci, nor is it to defend the reading of Gramsci by Laclau and Mouffe. Rather, it is to insist upon the ‘use of’ Gramsci, and the way in which the logic of his theory of hegemony can be developed and applied to contemporary politics.

2 Laclau and Mouffe develop their account of articulation in chapter 3 of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (2001: 93-148). For a consideration of the role of articulation and its wider deployment in the theories of Mouffe and, especially, Laclau, see Howarth (2000: 101-125). In this, Howarth (2000: 102) writes, ”Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 113) characterise the practice of articulation as ‘the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning’. This fixation of meaning is always partial because of what they call ‘the openness of the social’, which in turn is a consequence of the ‘constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity’ Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 113).”

3 See Hardt and Negri (2000: 69-92), 2.1: ‘Two Europes, Two Modernities’. In their most recent work, they call these two modernities, modernity and ‘altermodernity’, which should be understood as a major and minor line running through this period, see Hardt and Negri (2009: 67-130), Part Two: ‘Modernity (and the landscapes of altermodernity)’. The philosophical distinction that Hardt and Negri draw between immanence and transcendence – which, in turn, reflects the socio-political distinction between the multitude and the people – is mirrored at the institutional level through the distinction between sovereignty and democracy.

A wealth of primary material concerned with such debates is contained within Wootten, ed. (1986). Scott contains a good analysis of the material, especially in chapter 3, (2007: 63-84).

See Marx (1976: 762-895), chapters 25-27, especially chapter 27. For a contemporary Marxist account on the role of accumulation, which considers ‘accumulation by dispossession’, see Harvey (2003).

For an historical account of the commons, see Boyle (2002).


Hardt and Negri themselves sometimes characterise these as the ‘natural common’ and the ‘artificial common’. The terminology deployed here is inspired by Nonini, in his concise and rich consideration of the commons (2007: 1-25). Here, Nonini refers to a ‘natural-resource’ or ‘common social resource’ commons on the one hand, and ‘intellectual and cultural’ commons, on the other. Instead, I deploy the terms ‘protective’ and ‘generative’ largely for analytical purposes. The following passage is particularly pertinent to any consideration of the commons: “These social resources are finite and thus depletable... But they [are] also renewable, if investment by their users in maintaining them within the commons occurs at a rate sufficient for their replenishment... Common social resources are rival goods... but they also possess ‘positive externalities’ – that is, positive effects on the lives of people who are not their users. The more people who use pure drinking water, the fewer the number of people who need access to health care... In short, the greater the number of people who have equal access to these social resources, the less stress placed on their stocks as a whole. Intellectual and cultural commons are organized around shared intellectual and cultural resources, such as scientific concepts, theories, methods, data, technologies and devices of research, and artistic and musical products, artistic and creative skills, artistic and artisanal technologies, etc... Although like all resources they are finite, intellectual and cultural resources are non-rival goods; that is, one person engaged in learning a scientific method or playing music does not diminish the learning or pleasure of other people simultaneously doing the same. To the contrary, one can argue that intellectual and cultural resources can be created and regenerated only through social exchange and sociability... Unlike natural-resource and social commons, which are subtractive, intellectual and cultural commons are both non-subtractive and generative. Both intellectual and cultural commons operate on the basis of a “gift economy”” (ibid.: 6-7).

The notion of opposition was considered alongside contradiction and antagonism in II.1iv.

The Hardt and Negri presentation of identity and difference is somewhat simplistic and has been challenged by many recent considerations, which reject the rigid opposition between identity and difference. These more recent considerations argue that the presence of the Other destabilises the very capacity of an identity to be fully stable and fixed. See, for instance, Laclau (1990: 89-92; 1996: 20-35) and Connolly (2002).

On positive (and negative) liberty, see Berlin (1969).

Beyond the contribution from Hardt and Negri, see also, for instance, Boyle (2002) Benkler (2003), Bollier (2003), Nonini (2007) and Harvey (2011).
The overlap between the public and the commons is firmly established in the literature on this topic. See, for instance, the edited collection by Nonini (2007), in which “the public commons” is referred to (97). It also contains the following: “Nor is common property easily distinguished from state property” (4); “all polities have some variant of social commons, often organized and administered in part by the state” (6); “the commons and commons-making are all about struggles to defend community by containing markets” (96).

The enclosure of these three areas has been briefly but cogently tackled in the sub-section ‘Life on the Market’ of Hardt & Negri (2004: 179-188).

United Nations statistics reveal that in the last few years, the world’s urban population has overtaken the rural population, and they project that by 2045, the ratio will reach two to one. See United Nations (2007).

Fontana, for instance, writes “the city-state, a res publica – that is, a public realm that defined the bene comune” (1993: 135).

There are two other significant and prominent instances. In the first place, Hardt and Negri adopt a different epochal periodisation from their earlier works. In both Empire and Multitude, they embrace postmodernity as an historical epoch that supersedes modernity, alongside all the attendant philosophical shifts that this new historical epoch contains. In Commonwealth, they propose altermodernity as a more appropriate concept to define our contemporary period (Hardt & Negri 2009: 101-118). In the second place, they rein back on one of the more controversial claims made in Empire, namely that it is characterised by “smooth space” – as against the “striated spaces” of modernity (Hardt & Negri 2000: 190). This distinction made by Deleuze & Guattari (1987) drew comparisons between Hardt and Negri and the ‘flat world’ thesis developed by Thomas Friedman. In Commonwealth, Hardt and Negri explicitly reject such a ‘flat world’ thesis and, correspondingly, their earlier ‘smooth space’ claims: “Recognizing that imperialism is over and a new imperial order is materializing does not in any way imply the end or even a lessening of division and hierarchy between and within societies. The claim by some proponents of capitalist globalization that the world is becoming “flat”, that the global economy is becoming one smooth space [...] is pure ideological mystification” (Hardt & Negri 2009: 228).

For a now classical account of the genealogy of the concept of hegemony, related to the theoretical concerns of Marxism within the Second and Third Internationals, see Laclau & Mouffe (2001: 7-92), on Lenin and hegemony, see (ibid.: 55-65). For a more recent account, providing a detailed overview of the historical precedents to Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, see Lester (2000: 1-51).

This refers back to the consideration raised in endnote 1. Those classical Marxists that seek to align Gramsci’s theory of hegemony with Lenin’s analysis deny any substantive difference between the second and third applications. They stress the centrality of class, revolution and communism in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. While acknowledging the importance of the debate, this section avoids an engagement with it and focuses on the ‘use of’ rather than the ‘truth of’ Gramsci’s theory of hegemony.
Gramsci’s political writings comprise newspaper articles and editorials, letters to comrades, and party political documents. As such, these are characterised by their brevity, and their concern with practical, organisational and immediate affairs. They contrast markedly with the theoretical and conceptual qualities displayed in the *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci wrote ‘Notes on the Southern Question’ (1978: 441-462) over a longer duration immediately prior to his arrest and imprisonment, and this essay can be seen as a bridge between the two forms of writing, and also the text in which Gramsci begins to theorise his own understanding of hegemony.

Gramsci rarely invents new terms or concepts but instead works with previously existing terminology… and transforms them… Much of Gramsci’s analytic process is the ‘subversion’… of given language and concepts by stretching and altering them” (Ives 2004: 65). See also Morera (1990: 4-5).

For a brief summary of the complexity of Gramsci’s theorisation of hegemony within the *Prison Notebooks*, see McNally (2009b: 188), which presents “four key conflicting accounts of hegemony”.

A number of other commentators are aligned with this approach. See, for instance, “The most important aspect of Gramsci’s hegemony… is the aspect of intellectual and moral leadership and the way in which this is achieved” (Mouffe 1979: 183); “Gramsci considers that a world-view is manifest in all action and that this expresses itself in a very elaborate form and at a high level of abstraction – as is the case with philosophy – or else it is expressed in much simpler forms as the expression of common sense” (ibid.: 186); “Hegemony… is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting… It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives” (Williams 1977: 110); “[a] lived hegemony is always a process… it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. We then have to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony” (ibid.: 112-113); “The reality of any hegemony… is that, while by definition it is always dominant, it is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society” (ibid.: 113); “Gramsci’s stress on cultural and intellectual factors underlies his celebrated doctrine of ‘hegemony’ (*egemonia*), or ideological ascendancy. He saw… that the rule of one class or group over the rest of society does not depend on material power alone; in modern times, at least, the dominant class must establish its own moral, political and cultural values as norms of practical behaviour” (Femia 1981: 3); “Gramsci seized upon an idea marginal (or, at most, incipient) in earlier Marxist thought, developed its possibilities, and gave it a central place in
his own thought. In so doing, he rerouted Marxist analysis to the long-neglected – and hopelessly unscientific – territory of ideas, values, and beliefs” (ibid.: 35); “The masses, Gramsci seems to be saying, are confined within the boundaries of the dominant world-view, a divergent, loosely adjusted patchwork of ideas and outlooks, which, despite its heterogeneity, unambiguously serves the interests of the powerful, by mystifying power relations, by justifying various forms of sacrifice and deprivation, by inducing fatalism, and by narrowing mental horizons” (ibid.: 45); “the struggle for hegemony involves not simply changing people’s passing political opinions, but their entire way of conceiving the world and interpreting their common experience. At the heart of Gramsci’s political thinking lies a paradox: a revolution must occur before the revolution” (ibid.: 236); “[b]y ‘hegemony’ Gramsci seems to mean a socio-political situation, in his terminology a ‘moment’, in which the philosophy and practice of society fuse or are in equilibrium; an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation” (Williams 1960: 587); “[h]egemony becomes a process including negotiations and critical alterations of one’s world-view. The goal is to achieve a common language… Various and opposing perspectives can be expressed in such a language. However, this hegemonic (or counterhegemonic) language must be unified enough, coherent enough, to yield effective resistance to capitalist hegemony (and its language). This is what separates counterhegemonic projects from loose alliances of different movements” (Ives 2004: 114); “the space of hegemony is... a space in which bursts forth a whole conception of the social” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001: 93).

27 An excellent treatment of Gramsci’s theorisation of intellectuals can be found in Showstack Sassoon (1987: 249-284). This theorisation also relates to the development (and therefore changes within) capitalism and, as a consequence, also contributes to the themes covered in the previous chapter on immaterial labour (see II.1vi). In fact, it highlights further deep connections and continuities between the methodology adopted initially by Gramsci and, subsequently, by (Hardt and) Negri.

28 For considerations of Gramsci on common sense, see Liguori (2009), Martin (1998: 99-100) and Robinson (2006). I prefer the analyses of Martin and Robinson to Liguori. Liguori opines that Gramsci sought the conditions in which a ‘new common sense’ supplants the prevalent common sense. In other words, he sought the replacement of one form of common sense by another. It is clear, however, that Gramsci regards common sense to be in opposition to philosophy, because the former is fragmentary and incoherent, while the latter is cohesive and coherent. While Gramsci didn’t consider the elimination of common sense to be a viable option, he did envisage its substantial reduction – and concomitant replacement by philosophy – to be a necessary condition for the success of a communist hegemonic formation: “the position of the philosophy of praxis is the antithesis of the Catholic. The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the “simple” in their primitive philosophy of common sense,
but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life” (Gramsci 1971: 332).

29 The relationship Gramsci portrays between state and civil society is a complex and shifting one, and considerations of time and space dictate that this cannot be considered here. The debate over the role of civil society in Gramsci was laid out by two articles in the edited collection by Mouffe (1979): Bobbio (1979) and Texier (1979).

30 Gramsci tends to deploy the term ‘groups’ in order to circumvent the censor, but this should be viewed as a euphemism for class.

31 It is at this precise point that the different interpretations of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony are brought to light. Laclau, for instance, highlights this distinction between the economic-corporative and the hegemonic to pursue his development of the theory of hegemony, and his account of politics. This account is influenced by the specific historical conjuncture within which Laclau operates, but also by extending the logic of this distinction that Gramsci raises between the economic-corporative and the hegemonic (a logic that is supplemented by an array of subsequent philosophical developments, including phenomenology, Wittgenstein’s linguistics, pragmatism, structuralism and post-structuralism). Those accounts of hegemony that hail from the more classically-inclined Marxist tradition downplay this distinction between the economic-corporative and the hegemonic. One of the more convincing responses to this question is provided by Martin, who describes Gramsci as “anti-deterministic... yet teleological” (Martin 1998: 11).

32 Continuing the theme considered in the previous endnote, the presence of the structure points to the ultimate simplification of society into two camps, à la Marx and Engels of The Communist Manifesto. This simplification, however, contrasts markedly with the complex descriptive picture of early twentieth century Italian society that Gramsci carefully reveals, which is more akin to the Marx of the Eighteenth Brumaire. This tension between structural simplification and complex description can be explained by Martin’s position that depicts Gramsci as “anti-deterministic... yet teleological”. For the purposes of the analysis in this project, however, I want to keep these two aspects of Gramsci’s thought separate.

33 Note Gramsci’s personal involvement as a journalist from the very first moments of his active political career, starting with Il Grido del Popolo in 1914, Avanti! throughout the war and during its immediate aftermath, most famously with L’Ordine Nuovo thereafter during the period of the factory councils and beyond, and, finally, through the organ of the PCI, L’Unità.

34 Within Gramsci’s Political Writings (1977, 1978) and the Prison Notebooks (1971), there is scant attention paid to film and radio, which both spread in the early years of the twentieth century. His focus is restricted to newspapers, journals, and books.

35 As an aside, this indicates that labour is central to Gramsci’s theory. This relates to Marx’s central insight on human anthropology in the opening sections of The German Ideology and also points to the necessity of an account of labour in any contemporary political theory. In this respect, Negri’s focus on and theoretical development of labour is far more ‘Gramscian’, despite his professed hostility to Gramsci, than is the focus of Laclau.
“This brings us to another aspect of Gramsci’s interest in Machiavelli. Gramsci and Machiavelli, unlike many other political theorists, are both primarily concerned with the problem of how to establish a new State rather than defining in any detail the exact configuration of this State” (Showstack Sassoon 1987: 153).

“In the conclusion [of The Prince], Machiavelli merges with the people, becomes the people; not, however, some “generic” people, but the people whom he, Machiavelli, has convinced by the preceding argument – the people whose consciousness and whose expression he becomes and feels himself to be, with whom he feels identified. The entire “logical” argument now appears as nothing other than auto-reflection on the part of the people – an inner reasoning worked out in the popular consciousness, whose conclusion is a cry of passionate urgency. The passion, from discussion of itself, becomes once again “emotion”, fever, fanatical desire for action” (Gramsci 1971: 126-127).


The editors of the Prison Notebooks state: “it is with the creation of intellectuals from the working class that he [Gramsci] is ultimately concerned, and his life was precisely the history of the formation of such an intellectual” (Gramsci 1971: 25).

For instance, see the articles in Mouffe (ed.) (1979).

See also Laclau & Mouffe (2001: 138).

“Gramsci writes that under feudalism... the cohesion of society was not based on hegemony” (Showstack Sassoon 1982: 104). See also: “In the period after 1870, with the colonial expansion of Europe, all these elements change: the internal and international organisational relations of the state become more complex and massive, and the Forty-Eightist formula of the ‘Permanent Revolution’ is expanded and transcended in political science by the formula of ‘civil hegemony’. The same thing happens in the art of politics as happens in military art: war of movement becomes war of position” (Gramsci 1971: 243).


Since the publication of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Mouffe’s interest has been in political and democratic theory, see Mouffe (1993, 2005, 2009), while Laclau’s project has centred around the theory of hegemony. See Laclau (1990, 1996, 2005a) and Butler, Laclau & Zizek (2000).


As regards Gramsci and his conception of politics, when considering the level in which a class has transcended its own economic-corporate (or second moment) limits to become active on the very level of hegemony (or third moment), Showstack Sassoon asserts: “This phase is political not because the object of the struggle is the State in a narrow sense but because the struggle is manifest not only in the realm of the economic or in the area of the present State machinery but it concerns the full range of human activity. The political struggle... is conducted in terms of
establishing an alternative hegemony. It is thus conducted on the intellectual and moral fronts as well as the economic and strictly political. Consequently, in the context of this struggle for hegemony all of these areas of society acquire a political significance” (Showstack Sassoon 1987: 118).

48 “The classical liberal schema of an unmediated relationship between citizen and state, where the rational, isolated individual makes choices... had been made anachronistic by history [in the early twentieth century, according to Gramsci]. The individual counts in modern mass politics only if organised and s/he is represented not just by representatives elected to legislatures but by a variety of groups... The relationship between individual and state therefore is mediated by a web of relationships not least through state institutions themselves as state services expand” (Showstack Sassoon 1987: 258).

49 For Laclau on representation, see the essay ‘Power and Representation’ in Laclau (1996: 84-104), especially 97-104.

50 See Laclau (2005a: 65-171). For Negri, “when Gramsci speaks of hegemony, he transforms it into a kind of “dictatorship of the proletariat”... Mouffe and Laclau... provide a purely sociological interpretation of hegemony, as if it could be defined as a majority of public opinion and as if its functioning could be organized transcendentally within civil society” (Negri 2008c: 114-115). Negri, additionally, has recently fleshed out his views on Gramsci and hegemony in the excellent discussion with Casarino (Casarino & Negri 2008: 160-167).


52 On a brief history of the Zapatistas, see Castells (2004: 75-86).

53 This is not to suggest that the state remains in its traditional pyramidal and hierarchical form of organisation. Recent developments have witnessed a growing interconnection between the state and capital, which has fundamentally changed the former’s structure. This has gone under several different names and specifications, including the ‘capital-state nexus’ Harvey (2005; 2010); ‘private finance initiatives’ and ‘public-private partnerships’ Monbiot (2001); ‘a market state’ Soundings, 24. These processes have additionally seen the substantial expansion of consultants from the private sector advising the state, see Craig & Richards (2006).

54 For a recent study that considers the relationship between traditional media outlets in the press and broadcasting, and websites on the Internet, see Castells (2011).

55 For a more pessimistic account of the role of the Internet for left politics, see Dean (2009). For a wider analysis of the role of networks, see Galloway & Thacker (2007) and Barabási (2003).


Conclusion

1 See Pettit (1999).
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