



# The Vicissitudes of Representation

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## Abstract

This article turns to the issue of political representation that I argue is central to all forms of political thought and practice of the modern period. Taking political representation as its object, I argue that its crisis—that comes to a head in the travails of the Weimar Republic—provided the opportunity for forms of neoliberal representation to displace political representation with purportedly “neutral”, non-partisan and thus “fair” representational tools. In contrast, I seek to develop the idea of “self-representation” with a discussion of paths not chosen at Weimar and via Italian *operaismo*’s reflections on “class composition”, which combines collective self-representation with political organization. Representing each member of a collective to another as it develops epistemic and cartographic tools, it constructs group solidarity, organization and the capacity to act as it reclaims the collectivity alienated in modern political forms of representation and excluded from neoliberal ones.

**Keywords** Political representation · Neoliberalism · Weimar · Class composition · Workerism/ *operaismo*

*“In fact,  
one can achieve totality only by constructing it,  
by making it,  
by composing it,  
and it should be done in all frankness.”*  
(Brecht 1970, p. 103)

*“There is the people prior to the class. And there  
is the people that encounters the class,*

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*and along this path gains consciousness and power  
[...] and becomes subjectivity organised”.*  
(Tronti 2016, p. 62)

## 1 Precarious Order

The context for this article is the current instability of (neo)liberal democracy alongside the totalising forms of neoliberal representation (NR) that have displaced the contestable ones of modern political representation (MPR). MPR alienated the collective as it posited an indeterminate people as condition of legitimacy of political order during the period of the formation of nation states in the modern period: it served to unify unrelated individuals into a single body, underpinning institutions with a popular foundation; to enable a *stand-in-for* to *act-for* the people, so that even in their physical absence the people could be said to be represented in the political institutions; and to ward off private conflict, reinstating it as a public prerogative of the state, while rendering it as competition between individuals within civil society. MPR thus underpinned political order *and* economic growth—Hobbes with Smith. However, this model of representation ceased to have much purchase as capitalist growth expanded and the people—from indeterminate—became increasingly differentiated into substantive material groupings of those who live by wages, profits, or rent—to take up Marx’s “trinity formula” (Marx 1981, p. 953–70). The impervious wall built between a conjured up indeterminate popular unity underpinning the political and the realm of everyday exchanges between concrete individuals in civil society, crumbles, as socio-economic mutations engender concrete interest groups demanding representation. Taking Weimar as the high-water mark of this situation, the resulting “crisis” of MPR—and ensuing social destabilization, legitimation crisis and exacerbation of class tensions—came to be forcefully “resolved” through hypostatisation in the *Führerprinzip* underpinning the Total War economy. Neoliberals, thus awoken to the dangers of collective forms of representation in the 1930s–1940s, responded in many and varied ways, but ultimately generating theories for the disaggregation of special interest groups into individual utility-maximizers subordinated to (pseudo-)market forms of representation, with the aim of preventing specific *collective* interests from forming and being represented. When in the 1970s neoliberals again saw everywhere signs of “cultural and social breakdown” (Crozier et al. 1975, p. 42) that left ruling elites in business, government and security forces fearful of the ability of representative institutions (trade unions, mass parties, employer groups, central banks, independent journalism ...) to mediate, contain conflict or administer order for unhindered capitalist reproduction as they had in the post-War period, neoliberals legitimated the attack on those institutions (and the “intermediary bodies” that enabled them to operate—Urbinati 2015a, pp. 477–86). In part fearful of the authoritarian solutions that followed the “crisis of representation” of the Weimar period, and hopeful to overcome the post-war politics of compromise with labour, neoliberals saw the chance to put their ideas into action.

The consequence of the neoliberal shift with its undermining of MPR was to destabilize a critical lever of political order. I argue that one cannot hope to re-establish MPR in a situation where its material conditions are lacking. Moreover, the undermining of collective forms of representation also eroded the possibilities for conscious collective action. Returning to Weimar—the point where the instability of MPR showed itself at its height—I uncover a possible way out, which allows us to re-activate political representation’s organizing potential

without alienating that power, in the reflection upon mass society by artist-worker-militants, who developed forms and practices of group *self*-representation (SR) as a form of political auto-effectuation of unity. This forecloses the invocation of the alienated “representative function of the political leader (the *Reichspräsident*)” (Kelly 2004, p. 134) and the reduction of the collective represented/-ing subject to the acquisitive individual of the “callous ‘cash payment’” (Marx 1976, p. 487) characteristic of NR.

So my argument takes a very different path from that which characterizes the recent “representative turn” in political theory (Näsström 2011, pp. 501–10), which while a welcome riposte to neoliberalism’s counter-offensive and the contemporary “disfigurement” (Urbinati 2014) of democracy or, more generally, political representation, for me tends too narrowly to confine the functions of political representation to the level of institutions (or their mediation) and misdiagnoses the problem by failing to think representative institutions as always already interwoven with those of capitalist accumulation, and so as always already “disfigured”. For instance, while “diarchy” usefully helps us think the partition of sovereignty within parliamentary systems of representation, where sovereign will is expressed by representatives in parliament and popular judgement is formed in the forums of public opinion (Urbinati 2014, p. 22); and it ably accounts for the transformation of “politics in[to] an open arena of contestable opinions and ever-revisable decisions” (Urbinati 2014, p. 25). It fails to note that “*circumstances for political judgement*” (Urbinati 2005, p. 215) in the representative structure rests upon separation between public and private that is precisely what allows—to take one example—for the compromising of “the independence of state-owned media” and the “exorbitant influence of private potentates” that disfigures it. In contrast to normative conceptions, such as Urbinati’s, my socio-theoretic account rests on the observation that the former approaches depend on a postulate unverified in any “Really Existing” liberal democracy: namely the political/socio-economic divide traceable to the structure of MPR. Such a postulate obscures the *complementary* interweaving of these two orders within “bourgeois modernity”—as Franco Moretti describes them in his study of the bourgeoisie (Moretti 2013). Moretti shows how the bourgeoisie serves as *representative* of the nation and of the “people” (requiring the latter’s consent whether “tacit” or otherwise), and as *agent* of capital—noting that to effectively operate, these had to be kept apart: capital and state in parallel. The demand for public/private, state/economy separation is one that traverses capitalist modernity and that has proven to be essential to defending the advancement of private profit that Urbinati—and many others—see as disfiguring or corrupting its political forms. While such observation are not lost on Urbinati, it informs her analysis only in a precautionary way—democracy need not overcome real inequality but somehow make sure that it is “unable to curtail the liberty of the people” (Urbinati 2015b, p. 178). To take another example, Mónica Brito’s Vieira’s otherwise pertinent discussion of “self-authorized representation” explored through an analysis of Occupy’s claim to *represent* the 1% by denouncing socio-economic inequality as “wronging” democracy’s “foundational principle: equality” (Brito Vieira 2015, p. 508), fails because MPR—including its democratic forms—might demand *political* equality, but makes no claims to *socio-economic* equality. Occupy conflates the two. In short, all too often, the issues are misdiagnosed. The institutions of MPR that allow for the “people” as a whole to be represented to the state (in Michael Saward’s expression—Saward 2008, pp. 271–86), both serve to overcome socio-economic inequality of real people, groups, classes, genders ... by affirming their political equality, and equally to sustain the very gap that enables the persistence of both material inequality and political equality, such that the gap becomes constitutive of “bourgeois” modernity and MPR itself: the people can be represented, symbolized as one and equal,

while real difference persists. The representative turn does not escape this situation. My account aims to be more sensitive to the intricate interweaving of socio-economic, cultural, technological, conceptual and political changes.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 The Structure of Political Representation

The formulation of MPR in the modern period is typically traced back to Hobbes<sup>2</sup> and the early theoretical reflections on the emerging modern state, where we find the concentration of political power accompanied by the privatization of economic power.<sup>3</sup> Typically, accounts of MPR ignore the inescapable inter-relation of state formation and the bedding down of capitalism. For heuristic purposes, we shall do the same as we outline the structure of MPR (although it will become clear that this structure was designed precisely to negotiate these material developments). For example, in Hannah Pitkin's account of political modernity, political representation structures those institutions the authority of which rests upon a relation to the demos—while at the same time the demos is “*not* present literally or in fact” in those institutions.<sup>4</sup> That is to say, representative institutions derive their legitimacy from a people who are not literally present in the institutions; the institutions represent them in their absence. The ambiguity of representation is useful precisely because it does not dictate any particular political forms, it is equally open to liberal, authoritarian, revolutionary or conservative solutions.<sup>5</sup> What it draws upon, however, is the necessary relation between demos and sovereign representative, the people and representative institutions, so that the popular foundation is ever-present (in its absence) in the forms by which it is organized and is thus always in excess of those forms. In secular modernity, the political essentially describes this structure of representation—as well as the struggle over it.

So, for Hobbes, while sovereign power is based upon the free decision of individual people to alienate their power, thereafter they have no “capacity to do anything, but by the representative (that is, the Sovereign). Thus, the sovereign is the sole legislator” (Hobbes 1996, p. 184). Without representation, “the people” do not exist; they remain an unrelated multitude of individuals that, living “without a common Power to keep them all in awe, [are] in that condition which is called Warre, and such a warre as is of every man against every man” (Hobbes 1996, p. 88). It is only when they agree via covenant to engender a representative that they become a people (Hobbes 1996, pp. 111–15, Skinner 2007, and Pitkin 1972, pp. 14–37). Once the individuals alienate their power, they have no capacity for political action other than through their alienated representative, who acts in their stead. This structure of MPR—the “cardinal point around which the entirety of Hobbes’ political philosophy rotates” (Biral 1999, p. 105)—remains the fundamental ground of political modernity.

<sup>1</sup> As Jameson argues, the “state is no longer an autonomous entity, to be theorized by its own intellectual and specialized discipline, but it has become so infiltrated by capital that any autonomous economic theory is impossible as well.” Jameson (2011, pp. 140–141).

<sup>2</sup> Azzariti (2016); Hobbes (1996); Nässtrom (2015, pp. 1–12); Pitkin (1972); Skinner (2007, pp. 157–180); and Tormey (2015)—amongst many others.

<sup>3</sup> The notion goes back at least to the medieval period, as Schmitt makes clear (Schmitt 2008b). On the relation between medieval and modern formulations of representation, see Nederman (2009, pp. 99–121).

<sup>4</sup> Pitkin (1972, p. 9); see also Accarino (1999); Duso (2003 and 2012, pp. 9–47).

<sup>5</sup> As Ellen Wood, amongst others, points out, both Locke and Hobbes both effectively claim that “every commonwealth is in principle a democracy in that it rests on the consent of the governed” (Wood 2015, p. 69).

In summary, the structure of MPR can be broken down into four parts. First, it serves to unify unrelated individuals into a single body: the People; it thereby underpins institutions with a popular foundation. Third, it serves to enable a *stand-in-for* to *act-for* the people, so that even in their physical absence the people can be said to be represented in the institutions. Fourth, it wards off private conflict, reinstating it as a public prerogative of the state (“*hostis not inimicus*”—Schmitt 1996, p. 28).

This structure traverses modernity and while undergoing modifications or differences of emphasis remains broadly similar throughout much of its history. Before turning to the moment when—most evidently—and dramatically MPR went into crisis, I want to highlight an important mutation to this classical model of MPR in the writings of Schmitt.

### 3 Representation as a Moment of Political Form

Writing in Germany in what might be considered the pivotal decades of the twentieth century, 1920s–’30s—pivotal because very different historical possibilities presented themselves—Schmitt’s account of representation also grounds itself on the demos as foundation of political power, but as with Hobbes, it also serves to ward off the actual, active *participation* of the demos (Schmitt 2008b, pp. 240–9). But in *contrast* to Hobbes, for Schmitt the people are *immediately*, existentially *present* in all political forms—of whatever type—and, as such, are *unrepresentable*: “only something absent, not something present, may be represented” (Schmitt 2008b, p. 272).<sup>6</sup> For representation takes the place of, *stands-in-for* that which is not present. Were it present, as a “publicly assembled people”, it would not need to be represented; hence a people must be present in its immediate *identity* in all political unities (Duso 2003, p. 148). And yet representation plays a critical role for Schmitt, since it is critical for the people to “assume an effective political form” (Galli 1996, p. 590, Schmitt 2008a), since it is only *through* representation that the political *presence* of the people can be made to *order* social existence, to give a shape, *form* or *organization* to the people through an imposed telos or idea.<sup>7</sup> So, for Hobbes, the people are *indeterminate*, existing only as rhetorical ground of political order, whereas for Schmitt the people are concretely present at the same time as *un-formed*—representation steps in here *to organize, to form*. How else might one distinguish between the “people” and a gathering of individuals? In short, the mere presence of individuals tells us very little other than that they are bunch of countable individuals. Their *unity* only exists through their representation—united as the sovereign people, united as football *ultras* lining up to support their team, as the workers’ vanguard, etc. This paradox of unity—where that which exists as united must pre-exist its unification—describes the structure of representation itself, where representation is the “activity that produces” form (Duso 2003, pp. 148–9 and 156–7). *The political is therefore the bringing of form to bear on the unrepresented presence of the people, drawing together existential presence and its formed absence, to organize it as a collectivity through the alienating or “idealizing*

<sup>6</sup> See also Galli (1996, pp. 587–89). The *locus classicus* of this position is of course Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk. II, 199.

<sup>7</sup> It is sometimes claimed that plebiscitary democracies (via ‘*acclamatio*’) of the people exhibit the pure, unmediated presence of the people in the expression of assent/denial; but this united will or “pure identity” is mediated by the question posed to them and hence by a representation of available options (see Duso 2003, pp. 159–160).

*function of the process of representation*” (Urbinati 2005, pp. 195–6). This organizational function of representation is something that Schmitt rightly emphasizes, and which we shall return to in our conclusion when considering how organization can become decisive to a collective, self-representing political subject able to reclaim this alienated function through its own collective practice. It is also a critical reason why the two “principles of political form”—Identity and Representation—lead neoliberals to detect a “threat” in MPR itself.

My claim is that the structure of MPR presupposes (or posits) an indeterminate (Hobbes), form-less (Schmitt) people, combining the necessity of the people in any legitimate political order with a twofold *indeterminacy*. It is indeterminate in terms of *agency*, because although (for Schmitt) the presence of the people cannot be eluded, the modality of that *presence*, the mode by which it is represented (via acclamation, via election ...) confirms its *absence* in any political decisions taken other than through its representative. The mode of that *absence* remains critical for the specific character of the political form, distinguishing between—say—parliamentary democracy and authoritarianism, certain similarities remain: once the compact is reached, then only the sovereign is active (Hobbes); once the people united in a plebiscite assent, the sovereign authority alone acts (Schmitt); once the people have spoken at the ballot box, then parliament enacts laws, government governs—the people are silent. It is equally *constitutively* indeterminate, in that its very form-lessness is the condition for being politically represented, such that representation provides the people with whatever qualities it is said to possess (e.g. the body of the nation, the sovereign people, the assembled army and the Roman Forum). The indeterminacy of *constitution* points instead to another critical aspect we have mentioned as characteristic of “bourgeois” modernity: formally at least, bourgeois power is impersonal, based upon a posited separation between state and civil society, between political and economic power—which is to say that economic power is based upon the concentration of wealth that, in itself, is not the source of political legitimacy and where economic power does not stem from political favour of the sovereign power.<sup>8</sup> Hence, bourgeois power supports itself by postulating the irrelevance of the socio-economic determination of the people to the political issue of representation: the people are *constitutively* indeterminate from the MPR standpoint.

This postulate becomes ever harder to maintain by the end of the nineteenth century, for the people’s *presence* became increasingly not only rhetorically present, but very concretely, if not always at ballot boxes, definitely as material basis of contemporary societies, visible in industrial heartlands, concentrated in ever-expanding urban conurbations, strewn across battlegrounds of the Great War, and in the revolutionary movements challenging the *Ancien Regimes*. Despite Schmitt’s aforementioned attempts to salvage the structure of MPR (particularly evident in *Constitutional Theory* as he tries to account for the presence of the people that can no longer be easily conjured away), the form he gives it is unable to save it from the challenges it faces, as we shall see. Nevertheless, his diagnosis of the problem sets the stage for the shift of terrain away from MPR exemplified by NR.

<sup>8</sup> In contrast say to feudalism where economic power was derived from political position. For an exhaustive discussion of the “impersonal power” of the bourgeoisie, see the impressive (but not unproblematic) account by Heide Gerstenberger (2009).

## 4 The Crisis of Representation

Characteristic of some of the earliest neoliberal texts is the concern to put an end to the troubling tension between the capacity of state representatives to represent the people as a whole, and the fracturing of that capacity into partisan interest-groups in conflict. Such a tension is particularly evident following the expansion of suffrage across much of Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as well as the intensifying of industrialisation and urbanization that draws a mass of people together in factories, cities, working class districts, etc., making it increasingly difficult to elude the *determinate* character of the people. What underpins this dynamic tension is that capitalist growth—in part set free by the structure of MPR we have been discussing—erodes the posited state/capital duality which that structure served. For example, alongside states arise the giant German *Konzerne* (cartels) and the US vertically integrated firms that challenged the monopoly power of the state,<sup>9</sup> at the same time the war economy would undermine the “cosmopolitan economy” (Lippmann 1935, p. 16) of the market and establish a new interweaving of political and economic structures.<sup>10</sup> These points of active power and authority *within* the state—and increasingly across states—are accompanied by the growth of evermore powerful employer groups, trade unions, mass parties, and working class cultural, health and educational institutions, the power of which unsettle and erode the structures of MPR. Schematically, the unity of the state fragments into diverging ideological forms, aggregating different groups requiring representation in turn; the separation between political power and economic power—underpinning MPR—is undermined by groups representing *specific* interests (no longer form-less, indeterminate populations); hence, the state representative institutions cease to represent the people as a whole as differentiated groupings actively make a claim on the state; and conflict can no longer be externalized in a relation between states, but is now brought within state unity itself (and across states, as in the case of the international workers’ movement pitting workers against representatives of international capital). A turn to Schmitt will help to unpack this argument.

In contrast to much (not only) contemporary political philosophy, Schmitt displays a great sensitivity towards how technical and socio-economic change impacts upon political and juridical order, and on political representation in particular<sup>11</sup>—an analysis that neoliberals would appropriate. While the changing form of the state and of the political was evidenced by many thinkers—V.I. Lenin’s notion of “state monopoly capitalism”, Antonio Gramsci’s “integral state”, etc.—the travails of Weimar, in which Schmitt was a direct participant, are a particularly dramatic testing ground for MPR. Its operations challenged; it is found wanting. While many in music, literature, painting, even physics were noting a “crisis of representation”, Schmitt’s focus led him to argue that MPR was being eroded to the point that diverse interest groups appeared in a parliament reduced to a “showplace of special interests’,

<sup>9</sup> See Chandler (1962); Cacciari (1979); Villari (1976, pp. 71–92, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> The literature on these transformations is now enormous: classic studies by Rathenau (1976 and 1980); Franz Neumann (1942); Karl Polanyi (1957); and Charles S. Maier (1975). Equally rich are Luciano Ferrari Bravo (1972); Giacomo Marramao (1979); Antonio Negri (1994); Tronti (1979); and Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978), as are numerous works by Frankfurt School scholars, such as Friedrich Pollock (1990). From a very different perspective, see Friedrich A. Hayek (2007) and Ernst Jünger (2017). For a popular contemporary account of some of these transformations, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch (2007). For more scholarly treatment, Halperin (2016) and Adam Tooze 2007 are both extremely informative. Robert C. Allen (2003) provides a fascinating reappraisal of the 1920s and ’30s industrialisation of Soviet agriculture.

<sup>11</sup> On how contemporary political philosophy “largely overlook[s]” political economy, see Eggers (2016: 265–66).

dominated by political parties [...] ‘tightly organized corporations’ whose business was to win votes” (cited in Ellen Kennedy 2004, p. 146). Norberto Bobbio calls this the “revenge of the representation of interests over political representation” (Bobbio 2009, p. 428), which is to say that the structure of MPR fragments as concrete groups demanding partisan representation undermine the government’s claim to *represent* the people to the point that state rule appears without assent, as force not legitimacy in contrast to the representativity—of interests—delegated down to interest aggregators (mass parties, employer groups, etc.). In such a “State of the parties” (Negri 1977), where social interests are directly present in the (parliamentary) structures of the state in the form of rival parties, eroding the gap between state and civil society, the state could no longer stand above the people and claim to represent them; moreover, “all social and economic problems become directly state problems”; thus “state unity is increasingly put in danger”—resulting in the resolution of sorts of 1933 (Schmitt 2007 [1931], pp. 245–6, 253).<sup>12</sup> As the gap between state/society, political/civil power erodes, so in turn the state as representative of the united people is torn in asunder and fractures. Schmitt’s reflections on the political are often reduced to the friend/enemy distinction (Schmitt 1996). I wish to emphasize how he turns political representation into a receptive surface able to register the mutations of the modern, to organize them conceptually, and intervene in them politically.<sup>13</sup> This provides an insight into subsequent developments.

Let us first note that neoliberals and ordo-liberals cannot simply be seen as capitalist “stooges”. It is often horror at the Nazi-fascist experience following the collapse of Weimar that informs their critiques. Their cognisance of how instability led to totalitarian solutions—combining protectionism, state intervention and planning—was critical.<sup>14</sup> The neoliberals of the Walter Lippmann Colloquium (1938) and later Mont Pèlerin Society (1947) highlighted the uncertainty, “irrationality”, and partisanship of the fractured forms of MPR that they accused—not without some justification—of being breeding grounds for authoritarian anti-liberalism.<sup>15</sup> However, one may fairly ask whether MPR per se is the issue, for can freedom from an overbearing state be defended without MPR (such freedom is, for liberal theory, its *raison d’être* after all)? It is important to note also that neoliberals can in no way be considered a homogeneous current,<sup>16</sup> although they do have some common features. Here, I wish to highlight how—like Schmitt—they focus on how partisanship, opportunism, and instability follow *from* the failure of MPR to respond adequately to the forces undermining it. As Lippmann, for instance, writes: “in one form or another the state is compelled to intervene deeply in economic order; if it cannot achieve sufficient independence of special groups and of temporary opinions to govern in the general interest, it cannot meet the obligation which under

<sup>12</sup> See also Kervégan (2005, pp. 85–109) and Kennedy (2004). Liberal democracy’s attempt to make the structure of alternation of different representatives itself something around which different groups could unite, as a means to maintain a form of MPR, was insufficient when “interest groups” could command greater assent than the formal structure itself or when members gained greater capacity to act within the organized interest groups (mass parties, employer groups, etc.) than as mere electors.

<sup>13</sup> His political “interventions” are rarely—if ever—to be supported of course.

<sup>14</sup> For a useful schematisation of this, see Michel Foucault (2008), pp. 109–114, but the whole of lecture 8.

<sup>15</sup> See, amongst others, Burgin (2012), pp. 116–19; Dardot and Laval 2013, pp. 49–100; and Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (2009). Note also, neoliberal defences of “freedom” did not always—or rather—rarely, extended to what we may recognize as *political* freedom: “I must confess to preferring non-democratic government under the law than unlimited (and therefore essentially lawless) democratic government”, Hayek 1990a, p. 154. Incidentally, the criticism here is not of “direct democracy” but of representative democracies with sovereign legislatures, because such legislatures he considered to be in hock to special interests.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Biebricher (2015 and 2018), for a useful survey.



modern conditions it cannot escape” (Lippmann 1935, p. 88.). This dramatic situation of conflict and irrationality needed to be urgently remedied.

Some neoliberals—fearful of the emergent mass society (Lippmann 1935, pp. 251ff)—proposed to deploy the new-found instruments of the state to work to “intervene in the capitalist order [...] not to supplant this system but to preserve it” (Lippman 1935, pp. 56, 58): for Lippmann, this involved the executive retaining the “initiative” since it “represents the whole nation” (Lippmann 1935, p. 85), while the role of the legislature—hampered by the “mechanism of representation” that turns the legislator into the “servant of the voters who elect him” (Lippmann 1935, pp. 83–4)—would now be merely to consent/reject executive initiatives (Lippmann 1935, pp. 85–6). Others, such as von Mises, were much less sanguine about the expanded role of the state. Instead, capitalism was celebrated as a “capitalistic democracy of the market” that takes the place of MPR, so the actions of sovereign *consumers* effectively mandate (or revoke the mandate) of entrepreneurs by buying (or not) what they have to sell (von Mises 1972, p. 7, and 1958). In effect, this was to respond to the supposed “capture” of political representation by special interest groups by disassembling the different groups, framing them as aggregates of utility-maximizers. Others again, such as Hayek, proposed a legislature only able to pass general laws unable to aid (or harm) any specific interest groups (Hayek 1990a, pp. 160ff).<sup>17</sup> In all cases, the aim was to remove “conscious” *collective* coordination from which “arbitrary government” resulted, where “narrow interests” struggle for control of the state<sup>18</sup>—moving from collective popular authorisation via MPR to individual choice represented in a monetary transaction. What is broadly proposed (with variations) is a market system grounded in the decisions of independent, self-interested individuals, which *at most* might require the “compensatory” mechanism of public (or semi-public) regulators (Lippmann 1935, pp. 45–60).

Many neoliberals—and public choice theorists who share many of the former’s assumptions and aims<sup>19</sup>—view themselves as working “with the grain of human nature—with human self-interest” (Stedman Jones 2012, p. 130),<sup>20</sup> arguing that this can be advanced by replacing the delusions of MPR with a more “rational”, calculable and hence putatively fair (non-partisan) set of representations by which to order society, state and economy. Those embarking upon the “*pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics* [...] by management” (Davies 2014, pp. 4 and 212)—or “politics without romance” (Buchanan 1999, pp. 45–59)—argued that politics is rarely a conduit for representing a collective, and even becomes dangerous if it enables the formation of collective will or decision-making. Typically, it is driven by representatives of ideologically organized interests looking out for their own, indifferent to any “figment of social justice” (Hayek 1990a, p. 157) and where minorities are crushed by revanchist majorities. Public choice theorists argue that politics often exists solely in the actions of public officials who can be said to act rationally only insofar as their “rational action” is “bounded by perceptions of their own self-interest”, but who are ultimately inefficient as they remain “unhampered by the considerations of profit, loss and efficiency that

<sup>17</sup> For a more extensive account, see part 2, “Freedom and the Law” of Hayek (1990b). See also William E. Scheuerman (1997), pp. 177–84.

<sup>18</sup> Think of Schmitt’s depiction of Weimer as—in Kennedy’s words—“a weak state, honeycombed by special interests and their parties”—2004, p. 146. For him Weimar was in many ways an example of pluralist democracies tout court.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Chernomas and Ian Hudson (2017, esp. pp. 78–105); Matthew Flinders and Jim Buller (2006). See also Daniel Stedman Jones (2012, pp. 126–33) and Noel Thompson (2008).

<sup>20</sup> James M. Buchanan goes as far as to call this “the wisdom of centuries”—Buchanan (1978, p. 17).

set parameters of other-regarding, rational action in the private sector” (Thompson 2008, p. 361). For James M. Buchanan, for instance, the state and its institutions no longer play the role of dependable, “neutral” arbiters working for the public interest, but are rather subject to capture by rent-seeking “private” bureaucracies that they are supposed to regulate (Chernomas and Hudson 2017, pp. 84–88).<sup>21</sup> Gordon Tullock, argued, moreover, that the idea of the bureaucrat as “economic eunuch”—i.e. un-swayed by individual self-interest—serving the public interest, was untenable, while William A. Niskanen developed a model to demonstrate that bureaucrats would expand their budgets since their salaries and benefits would expand with the size of their departments, unless they could be made to compete, incentives introduced to encourage cost-reductions or their services sub-contracted out to private providers (Niskanen 1968, see esp. pp. 304–5).

The effect of all of this is to shift the state away from being the arena where the people might be brought together, via MPR—where authority depends upon alienated demotic “authorisation”, or where political struggle can be contended between organized, antagonistic parties representing different interests. For neoliberals and public choice theorists, the state should be restructured in accordance with the “economic theory of politics”, using “ordinary economic assumptions about the ‘utility-maximising behaviour of individuals” (Buchanan 1978, pp. 9 and 17), which the state regulates by the spread of markets or market-like mechanisms throughout the social body. Independent central banks, auditing bodies with “key performance indicators” the achievement of which (or not—more often than not, not) forces—or “nudges”—public bodies (schools, hospitals and care provider, universities, etc.) to “up their game” by competing for “customers”; they are impartial, “neutral” arbiters because governed by “objective” measures of efficiency to which all are subject and where success is measured “objectively” through the pervasive power of proliferating ratings, auditing and bench-marking agencies.<sup>22</sup> This process of disenchantment of politics by economics allows for an agreed language and standard of measure to act as a conduit—to “channel the self-serving behaviour of participants” (Buchanan 1978, p. 17)—towards optimal goals for society. This is clearly not a rejection of representation per se: the market *represents* the forces of demand and supply; KPIs or benchmarks *represent* measurable values set to be achieved (metrics do much the same thing in an on-going process). Representation here is the “construction of a global language”—of business and public policy—“a measurement framework” enabling a “blanket economic audit” (Davies 2014, p. 109). But excluded from this process of representation is any—even implicit—expectation or perceived need for assent of a *collective* people (fractured or unified, alienated or otherwise),<sup>23</sup> let alone its active role in setting goals, direction, tactics and strategy. Conflict is not organized, it is simply not-computed for there exists here no rival scale of “values”, of languages, of standpoints that might conflict. There is only quantifiable data distributed across a spreadsheet or scrolling

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the “Neutral State”, the non-interventionist state of classical nineteenth century liberalism, see Schmitt (2007 [1931], pp. 244–7) and, for a useful contextualisation of Schmitt’s thought in this regard, Jean-François Kervégan (2016, pp. 130–4). See also Schmitt (1993).

<sup>22</sup> Davies 1014; David Graeber (2015); and the still useful Michael Power (1997). Equally important is the development of supranational bodies to restrain the popular will, including the EU—see for instance, Jan-Werner Müller (2013 and 2014), specifically pp. 489–91; Wolfgang Streeck 2014, pp. 97–164 and 2016, esp. chapters 4–8; and the late Peter Mair (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Of course, there are individual incentives (and a large raft of penalties) for individuals, but any notion of an active collective is to be dis-incentivized.

down a screen representing the desires of utility-maximizers. In short, it is not representation but *political* representation that is undermined here.

Neoliberal restructuring conjures away the postulated—if alienated—collective, as imputed source of legitimacy, by disaggregating it into units that are ultimately more abstract even than the symbolized people of the state or nation. The contemporary instability of liberal democracies might best be understood in terms of the undermining of a core stabilization tool: the evisceration of MPR by NR means there is no longer a need to “bring a people with you”.

## 5 “... self-representation as a solution”

I have argued that neoliberalism responds to the crisis of representation detailed by Schmitt by replacing *political* representation with representation by measures and metrics. These serve to “economize” the political, imposing a totalising—purportedly “objective”—grid over social organization. As a response to the fragmentation of the totalising function of the representative of an indeterminate people, a “universal language”—a *pensée unique*—is rolled out by a proliferation of agencies and models that register or represent the wants, desires and (in)capacities of disaggregated individuals. This situation would result in the end of the political itself as a tool for social organization and transformation, which, while it is true has tended to conjure away, domesticate the demos via the alienating structure of MPR (and its twofold indeterminacy of *constitution* and *agency*, see Section 3), it nevertheless recognizes the need to bring the people along, as it were, to claim popular assent (tacitly or otherwise) to social and political institutions that represent them. Neoliberalism has no such need of popular assent for its operations, since it is driven by an entirely different logic, a—purportedly—undisputable logic of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

We might ask, however, whether there are other approaches to fragmentation that resist this economisation, this heteronomous coordination by market logic. Can *political* representation be saved without rehashing the four-part structure of MPR (Section 2), which we have seen go into crisis (Section 4)? In this closing section, I shall consider some ways this “crisis” has been negotiated that appropriates the unity “alienated” via MPR from below, refusing both the twofold indeterminacy and the singular logic of neoliberalism. Taking up some of the paths not chosen in Weimar—where the crisis of representation was “resolved” via the tragic route of the hypostatisation of the representative (e.g. the *Führerprinzip*), which in turn opened the door to neoliberalism—we will see, how a dialectical reversal makes the represented the representer; how this proceeds by undermining the gap between political and economic that underpins MPR, without accepting the neoliberal reduction evident in NR; and how conflict, rather than being expelled from a unity to be defended (by the representative in MPR or by the metrics and measures of NR), characterizes representative processes by which unity might be composed.

The dialectical reversal is well-outlined in Jonsson’s account of the radical left Weimar “socialism of vision” (Jonsson 2013, p. 186). In the brief “Coda” to his study, he argues that “aesthetics—the act of giving form, voice, and visibility to human experience—remains founded on the very same problem” (Jonsson 2013, p. 253) as that of politics or, more precisely, democracy: to adequately represent the “passions and interests of the people” (Jonsson 2013, p. 254). A politico-aesthetic sensibility enables us to uncover another viewpoint, occluded to Schmitt—as representative of the German Reich. Schmitt’s univocal view from the summit meant that the impact of socio-economic and technological change was

experienced as a challenge and threat to social order (cf. Section 4). In contrast, Jonsson argues that Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Siegfried Kracauer, Erwin Piscator, and others, understood the emancipatory potential of these processes as means of aesthetic *and* political representation. I shall briefly outline Jonsson’s argument and show how it helps to establish political representation on a new footing while drawing out some of the limitations to this solution and how these might be overcome.

Jonsson’s engrossing study makes representation descend to street, factory, tenement building level, becoming infrastructural, concrete and sensitive to the forces and conflicts to which the people are subject. We have already noted (cf. Section 4) how unification is evidenced in urbanization and the factory-based concentration of the people, who now appear as the “masses”—inserted by the twin forces of Taylorism and Fordism into the machinery of large-scale industry—circulating through city streets alongside an increasing mass of commodities. To some extent, the mass is an effect of these processes, which makes possible “new modes of public and private life, along with corresponding forms of sociation, both individual and collective” (Jonsson 2013, p. 188). But in his reading of Benjamin, Kracauer and Co., Jonsson highlights how they also register the way workers are made inter-changeable, de-skilled by the new technical means of production and consumption of modern capitalism that “brings into being a social class whose sensory apparatus is profoundly shaped” by them (Jonsson 2013, p. 205)—the proletariat. Despite this, the emergence of new media technologies permits an active appropriation of those means by workers who recognize that they are *active, collective agents* in the production of that material world. In these conditions, socially engaged workers, artists, theorists and militants sought to “define spaces for cultural and political representation through which the people could appropriate the productive forces that so far had served to control them” (Jonsson 2013, pp. 187–8). Jonsson illustrates this with two examples by means of which the collective learnt to become “the subject of its own means of representation” (Jonsson 2013, p. 208), potentially becoming “self-conscious producers of history” (Jonsson 2013, p. 210), as an active, representing, “seeing collective” of self-representation (SR) (Jonsson 2013, p. 216). One is the work by *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* magazine, which trained the workers in photography so as to represent themselves and their environment in line with their own sensibility, enabling their self-definition as a group, giving a very different connotation to “knowing one’s place”, as workers become active agents able to understand their condition and develop their own ends and practices (Jonsson 2013, pp. 216–28). The other was Piscator and Walter Gropius’s *Totaltheater*, in which the theatrical space encompasses society itself (Jonsson 2013, p. 228–46). Here, the “conflict between supra-individual forces” (Jonsson 2013, p. 234) is played out on and off stage, in an open exchange between audience and actors, and “giving concrete expression to abstract realities such as class struggle, inflation, economic conjuncture, oil production”, etc. For instance, Jonsson recounts how Piscator’s staging of a 1929 play on women’s reproductive rights—specifically on Section 218 of the constitution that made abortion illegal—called on the audience to intervene in the action on stage by shouting out opinions, making speeches, advancing arguments. The play always ended with a vote on whether or not to rescind Section 218. “In this way, the completion of the play would correspond to a public meeting, or, in other words, a democratic assembly” (Jonsson 2013, p. 240). Aesthetics and politics come together, producing a dialectical reversal of the alienating structure of MPR, such that now the process of representation is co-produced *by* those that are—as we have seen—typically represented, or *stood-in-for* by the political representative. So rather than existing only after the result of representation, as the reflected unity of the Sovereign, as the absent origin of authority, the worker-artist-militants

are the active agents of their representation. It furthermore provides tools for a potential challenge to NR by pluralising representational modes, techniques, languages, forms in ways that may mimic but are irreducible to the techniques of mass production that necessarily seek standardization (e.g. montage as part-assembly, Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* in relation to the commodity fetish, etc.). Finally, economic forces and technological changes no longer lie outside the political purview—as in MPR—but are both objects and tools of politico-aesthetic representation, through which representation-as-process is deployed by those typically represented. Jonsson describes this as an “expanding of the field of vision [which] succeeded in representing those who had been without representation” (Jonsson 2013, p. 228).

The challenge to MPR and NR is radical: for whereas they totalise from without, composing the people from the external, alienated vantage point of the representative (or Sovereign) or via a “neutral” universal language of measure; SR proceeds by representing collective subjects in a socio-economico-technological field of which the processes of representation are a part. We can develop this idea further by thinking of SR forms as totalising: the totality is not condition of their collective unity (as in the alienating structure of MPR), but the process that composes the collective by situating it—categorially, aesthetically, analytically—in relation to the field of forces (economic, technological, social...) in which they operate. Moreover, the totality is not closed—unlike neoliberal metrics. SR forms are plural, conflictual, troubled by experiments with forms, technologies, epistemologies that preclude settling on any one “language” of equivalence or comparison. We should conceive of them, as in the epigraph to this article by Brecht, as forming a totality that can only be achieved “by constructing it, by composing it”; recognizing that the piecemeal gathering up of elements, fragments, forces, materials will remain radically incomplete, open and contested.

But we might ask whether this is adequate, whether anything is missed or lost in this aestheticization of politics? Would not many a champion of MPR claim precisely that it exists to represent the unrepresented to the state (Saward 2008, p. 283)? While the staging of conflict might have a critical role in raising “class consciousness”, in appropriating in thought or in images the socio-economic and political conflicts to which a group is subjected, what is its immediate political import? Yes, it may strengthen, sharpen political conflicts by the light it sheds on these forces and so potentially cementing a group around certain values, but is that enough to classify the process of representation as a political action/representation other than in the broadest senses? MPR is a means by which political action takes place, is legitimated and from which it claims assent and authorisation to act. Does politico-aesthetic representation do anything other than authorize its own image, as does a work of art? To take Jonsson’s example, the staging of the vote coincided with a widespread movement for women’s reproductive rights in which the German Communist Party and Social Democrats played an active role (Usborne 1992), but it is hard to see aesthetic-politics as more than agitprop whereas the politics proper was done by those parties and women’s movements. It may be said to display a supplemental logic—in the sense of an “*addition* [that] comes to make up for a *deficiency*” (Derrida 1973, p. 87), which brings something to the fore that previously was hidden, unobserved or inactive, thus playing an important political function of *Ideologiekritik*. But it cannot thereby *replace* politics. This is not an objection to it per se. But it is to shed doubt on whether agitprop or documentary photography, reconceived as SR, is sufficient to assume the mantle of political representation.

The objection perhaps becomes clearer if we contrast this interweaving of political, economic and technico-aesthetic representation with a more discernibly political interweaving. In 1903, Lenin also spoke of the factory system as “factory ‘schooling’” for collective

organizing, where workers subordinated to the machine system, unknown to one another, learn to work for a common end developing a uniquely disciplined sensibility (Lenin 1965, pp. 391–2 and Lars Lih 2008, pp. 522–24). He also noted the import of new media technology, in particular how new light-weight printing presses supported the “unifying role of party newspapers in the underground” (Lih 2008, p. 456). This proved to be more than an excellent propaganda tool. What it did was enable workers, intellectuals, professional revolutionaries to develop a network for collective labour in the conditions of Tsarist autocracy by generating trust alongside common aims and working practices from individuals and groups drawn from but not determined by the existing division of labour and of class structuring within pre-Revolutionary Russia. In contrast to Jonsson’s account, here the appropriation of mass media technology is fused with political organizing in a virtuous circle. Political aesthetics provides a degree of normative, analytical and representational autonomy and non-alienated agentic capacity *to represent* (rather than being represented), but it does not yet embody a *capacity to act* beyond the production of images, documents, performances themselves. While we might read *Totaltheatre* in terms of the stage standing-in-for society and its conflicts, it is not clear that it delineates a popular *organizational form* for political action. It cannot escape the fact that resolving those conflicts on stage (even when the stage expands to include the “audience”), is not the same as resolving them outside the doors of the theatre. Worse, it may mimic MPR’s isolation of conflict to the political terrain, allowing it to persist on the socio-economic, by resolving conflict on “stage” while it persists outside the auditorium.

As we have seen, SR provides a way for the mass to collectively register economic, technological, social processes in which it is caught; a registering that takes place through experimental—and so contestable—representational forms. This is to be contrasted to those forms that are alienated in a representative (MPR) or a “global language” (NR). These representative forms are not pre-consigned to a specific locale beyond which they cannot intervene, that are ringfenced from its operations (such as a “public realm” hived off from a “private” or “economic” one), since the masses are impacted by the full range of these processes. Thus, SR extends the range of legitimate political action to the social totality (the economy, property relations, etc.) unlike MPR (which delimits it to the public realm) and without the economizing reduction to a single language of NR. This contrasts with much of contemporary work on representation (such as that of Saward and Urbinati) that continues to isolate *political* representation from the socio-economic and institutional settings that delimit it. Since SR emerges from the erosion of such delimitations, it is much more potentially transformative. Nevertheless, due to the limitations outlined above, we need to look beyond the political aesthetics of Weimar.

I propose we turn to the practice of *conricerca* (co-research) and the idea of “class composition”, which is a means to represent the impact of the social totality on and by the workers themselves. Faced with the dramatic changes of the Italian “economic miracle” (1950–’60s), a group of militant intellectuals and workers developed a “method [...] of discussion and co-research with the workers themselves” (Alquati 1975, p. 88). This “method” was not only a sociological tool to represent the workers’ conditions, conflicts and dynamics within the factory, but served to form and organize a revolutionary collective. In contrast to both MPR and NR, it sets out to fill-out not conjure away the “people” through studying, thinking, and reading with/as workers—seeking to help them represent their place within the factory and the factory as a moment within the broader organization of society (Panzieri 1977, pp. 278–9), testing theoretical hypotheses against the concrete reality of work-lives. In contrast to politico-aesthetics, workers’ enquiry does not remain at the representational level but

elaborates a representation of material “class composition”, as “the only material basis from which one can speak of the subject” (Negri 1979, p. 60). Inevitably such a subject is always collective and anchored in an economic, technological and institutional context.

Let us unpack this concept that allows us to think how the *collective subject composes itself as it represents itself* and represents itself through a detailed analysis of its class composition. This notion represents capital/labour relations that structure the social totality, or “total social capital” (Marx 1978, p. 177), and is put to work in the service of projected political re-composition (Alquati 1978, pp. 79–81), which takes up the represented elements deploying them for collective organizing for political change. Providing a little more analytical detail of this concept, that is divided into a “technical” and “political” aspect: *technical composition* is best understood in relation to the organic composition of capital (Marx 1981, pp. 762ff), broadly, in terms of the differing distributions of capital into means of production employed and mass of workers necessary for their employment. In addition, it includes social and political institutional class frameworks, or its *political composition*: labour relations, welfare structures, levels of urbanization, contract law, more or less “organic links” with political parties, etc. It is important to stress that it makes no sense here to see political and economic structures as “outside” one another (as in MPR), for the representation of the social totality through a figuration of the class composition of the working class, developed via co-research, represents the workers’ position within the circuit of production and reproduction in not merely “objective” but also “subjective” form. Think of how “objective” informal or precarious employment contracts affect “subjective” life (in terms of increased anxiety, uncertainty and stress), or even intra- and inter-class relations (attitudes towards “migrants”, welfare recipients and the like). Interwoven subjective/objective elements are taken up in a *political re-composition* by registering the way those processes generate needs, anxieties, desires, fears, affective relations drawn from the representations of political and technical composition; and from which proceed attempts to appropriate them so as to engender *collective ends* and *institutional forms*: e.g. turning fears of “economic migrants” into antagonism towards employers who try to divide workers; using the anxiety of precarious workers to generate intra-worker support networks, etc. Co-research aims to represent, to map the effects of “objective” economic-technologico-social processes upon the worker subject-objects of investigation (in the two senses of the genitive case), to provide material for a “subjective” appropriation that becomes a collective *form-giving* in a “political organisation of the factory workers” (Alquati 1975, p. 93). Understanding class composition as a form of SR allows us to understand how collective subjects can appropriate the material conditions within which their collective existence is composed and rearticulates itself through a figuration, a representation, thus achieving collective unity through this “analysis of the system, of its contradictions” (Alquati 1975, p. 92). As Schmitt noted, in the opening of Section 3, representation plays a decisive role in the establishment of form; the complex structure of SR permits the collective to give itself form through a mapping that is at once an organizing.

Briefly developing a historical example: the analysis of the technical and political class composition of early industrial manufacturing represents a working class collective in the shape of a highly skilled craft worker conscious of the productive process as a whole accompanied by a large number of “unconscious” unskilled workers under the supervision of the former. Taking up this SR in a political re-composition—a formal and material separation of a conscious core from an unconscious mass—allows for the collective to represent and recompose itself in terms of leader-vanguard/mass-follower formation so central to many twentieth century revolutionary movements (see Sergio Bologna 1972; Negri 1988,

1994 and 1996). This *SR*, read through the lens of class composition—and vice versa—allows for collective subjects to shape themselves from the ground up, appropriating their material conditions of formation via representation and turning them to their own collective ends. The process of representation no longer lies outside the subjects of representation; now co-research, in the process of representing each member of a collective to another through the development of epistemic tools and contested languages and forms, it in turn constructs group solidarity, organization and the capacity to act.<sup>24</sup>

This approach enables us to reconfigure important aspects of political representation. For instance, whereas MPR expels conflict by subordinating it to a primordial political unification (as in the Hobbesian contract) in an alienated representative or consigns it to a “public sphere” of permissible disputation, and NR makes it evaporate or at least fails to register it; *SR* carried out by the subjects themselves as they articulate, map their location within their department, their factory, their sector, their institutional frameworks, their cities or suburbs, and in relation to the dynamics of national and international competition, regulation, and coordination necessarily brings conflict within. It shapes the subjects and their representative forms as they struggle over diverse ways, techniques and languages to represent themselves and their conditions, serving to articulate conflicting representations by which to re-orientate collective action. Conflict cannot be consigned to a pre-agreed space of resolution (e.g. parliamentary disputes, elections, referenda ...) and others from where it is considered illegitimate (most notably, the workplace). It underpins the way differing representational forms and languages construct collectivities themselves.

Some might worry that that the self-defining of socio-political groups by those self-same groups risks being identitarian, isolating, regressive, potentially dangerous. I contend that alliance becomes at least as important to group formation as inter-group antagonism. If subject-formation takes the form of a struggle over diverse ways to represent and situate oneself within a socio-economic-political system, then in actively appropriating those conditions—via the processes of *SR*—the collective subject defines itself as part of a broader context and in relation to other groups. This thereby raises the pivotal political question of ways of *co-existing* and so a recognition that the material conditions, alongside the laws and regulations that sustain them, are themselves political stakes.

This approach also challenges NR for it rests on a proliferation of *contested* representational forms, whereas forms of NR are not “up for grabs” but “objective” aggregators of individual choices, benchmarking and measuring as if by a neutral set of standards. While forms of NR are exterior to what is measured, *SR* involves non-coincidence—without exteriority—of representation and represented: the two are up for grabs and inter-define one another in an ongoing experimental process. In contrast to MPR, representer and represented are one and the same. This is not, as Urbinati warns in relation to direct democracy (Urbinati 2014, p. 26), a case of a collapse of “diarchy”, of will and opinion formation resulting in the impossibility of contestation within the group with all the authoritarian risks that follow, for representation never coincides with the self-representing subjects, for the good reason that between the forces that compose them and the knowledges, disciplines, aesthetic forms, languages by which those forces are

<sup>24</sup> There is no reason why any number of different forms of composition (beyond that of class) representing collective subjects could not be multiplied and serve to shape differing political struggles, although this would require different analytical tools, different formal, representational, figurative devices and languages drawing on different elements into the composition—the form-giving—of the collective.



represented, there can be no *co*-incidence—they operate on different, intersecting planes (as evidenced in the two-part structure of class composition) where the forms of representation are contested and the represented no longer absented in the representation from which they were excluded under MPR. The collective represents itself. The working class becomes its own representative. With SR, political representation shifts from being a structure of norms, legitimation and rule—postulated on the basis of structural conditions (public/private, state/civil society, politics/economy)—to being an experimental practice sensitive to the erosion of such rigidities. SR foregrounds the way that collectives are always already shaped by the productive forces of modern capitalism, although this relation is not deterministic, for SR is an (experimental) practice of collective *composition* that appropriates the forces conditioning the existence of the collective through a figuration at once socio-economic, aesthetic, epistemic and political.

Finally, the notion of SR asks us to radically rethink the political. I have spoken of the four-part structure of MPR, in which the representative acts as a totalising element giving rise to the people as a whole, whose (tacit) assent is ultimately posited. I have indicated how NR imposes a totalising, “universal”, global language of benchmarks and metrics, requiring neither consent nor assent. SR denies this easy access to the totality, access to which requires a more *political* route, one that sees the collective totality as something that is *constructed collectively* in the process of representing system and subjects. This encourages tactical alliances, the setting of strategic goals, adopting emerging technologies and representational forms and practices to “map” and organize the composition of the collective that troubles boundaries and borders. Recognizing that collectives are not (only) united in specific factories, urban slums, nations, regional areas, linguistic, cultural or ethnic groups; that they are distributed across a system so wide that the struggle for collective SR—which rests on being able to situate that collective within a globality to which it is subject—proceeds through experiments with representational forms and languages that are never neutral. Here, one is not making a representative claim (Saward 2008), nor seeking retrospective authorisation from an indeterminate people (Vieira 20015). SR is its own authorisation.

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