

Call for Papers

by Dr. Andreas Beer, University of Constance, Germany

**Workshop: Symbolic Politics of Non-Representation in Contemporary Cultures of Dissent**

Deadline for Proposals: 07 September 2015

Date: 20–21 November 2015

Venue: University of Constance (Germany), Graduate School *The Problem of the Real in the Cultures of Modernity*

With the so-called Arab Spring and Occupy, but also with the US Tea Party and the German PEGIDA, a seemingly new transnational wave of dissent movements has arisen. What we consider new in these movements is their constitution as a heterogeneous multitude based on physical presence, temporarily gathering an otherwise highly diverse population. As much as these groups appear united concerning their shared enemy – namely political and economic elites – as well as with regard to the name in which they act (“the people”), they remain of inner dissent insofar as they put the possibility of an overarching identity of the movement into question. What we witness, hence, is the dissolution of the belief in traditional emancipatory movements united by class, gender or ethnicity standing up against a hegemonic regime and its substitution by the hope for the subversive and revolutionary potential of a post-identitarian counter-public performing their being-in-difference. Yet, their ability of representing “the people” seems to disappear in spite of the proposed inclusiveness and multivocality, as their radical dissent leads to non-representation: They refuse to traditionally represent “the people” by making claims or engaging in formulating positions.

At the same time, these protest movements certainly stand and fall with the production of symbolic politics likely to be disseminated via social media sites, newspapers and TV or radio broadcasts. Pierre Bourdieu had already noted that the success of mobilisations depended on the existence of a “symbolic apparatus” for the production of epistemological claims about the world – a *fait social* that becomes even more decisive regarding the organisational ephemerality of current movements. Taking this changing notion of political movements with their underlying anti-hierarchical, non-representational, fragile and network-based logic as a starting point, the workshop aims at critically investigating current formulations of dissent by specifically broaching the issue of the (im)possibility of representing the unrepresentable. By doing so we evidently focus on the so-called

crisis of representation but aim at enlarging this debate to those intentionally organising to “disrepresent” representation.

Engaging this problem, we propose the following questions as starting points:

How is non-representation performed on the streets, for the mass media or in more intimate settings?

Which symbol practices are employed and to what extent are they grounded in narratives of earlier protests or resistances (e.g. the altermondialist movements of the 1990s, the uprisings in French banlieues in 2005-2007, or the riots in the UK in 2011)?

How do these practices connect to current discussions of direct democracy (e.g. David Graeber’s thoughts on anarchist anthropology in the wake of *Occupy*)?

Can we discern national, social, cultural or gendered lineages that restrict these narrative and aesthetic forms?

The workshop shall not be limited to these questions; we encourage to critically engage with them and our own theoretical concepts. We invite proposals from all fields of research in the Humanities and social sciences, but are aiming at contributions that do not shy away from comparative and transdisciplinary approaches.

Proposals may be submitted in English or German.

Travel expenses and accommodation costs will be covered.

Please send your proposals of max. 700 words to both of the organisers. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact either of us.

Organisers:

Dr. Andreas Beer, American Studies (Graduate School *The Problem of the Real in the Cultures of Modernities*)

Francis LeMaitre, M.A., Sociology (Graduate School *The Problem of the Real in the Cultures of Modernities*)

Contact for Proposals and Questions:

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