

Draft

From Identity to Event: The Changing Nature of the Public Sphere

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Abstract

It is argued that the public sphere can no longer be defined as a space articulated by 'identity groups' in pursuit of accommodation and that current developments reveal an arena conditioned by the nature of events such that the public sphere is best thought of as constituted by 'significance groups' in 'pursuit' of the expression of significance. The argument has two main parts. The first part of the paper argues: that the logic of accommodation within the public sphere is being stretched to breaking point; that normative political theory no longer has the resources with which to respond to the break-up of the accommodation agenda; that the reason for this lack of resources within normative political theory is to be found in the mistaken view that the political subjects that constitute the public sphere must be identified by way of preconceived 'identity forming contexts'; that new political formations reveal a 'strange multiplicity' within the public sphere that requires a theory of how such formations come into being. The second part of the paper seeks to account for this 'strange multiplicity' of the public sphere by arguing: that political events have a greater role than the claims of identity groups in shaping the public sphere; that, therefore, a general theory of political events is required to account for this; that Badiou and Deleuze offer the two most rigorous, though contrasting, philosophies of the event; that Deleuze's theory of political events is more convincing because it elicits a more politically sensitive account of political events. The implications of a Deleuzean theory of political events for our understanding of the public sphere are drawn out in conclusion: in particular, a) the idea of rethinking identity groups and new political formations as 'significance groups' and, b) the idea that the public sphere is not just conditioned by events at this historical juncture but that it is always fundamentally, we might say metaphysically, conditioned by events. //

Concepts in political theory are intriguingly multidimensional phenomena. It is clear that they have both a *reflective* and an *evaluative* dimension in that they always aim to reflect current political realities and to evaluate how best to respond to those realities. It is also clear that political concepts have both an *effective* and an *affective* dimension to them in that they are both tools to effect change in political life and a means by which the various subjects that constitute political life construe their relationship to the political itself and, ultimately, to deep aspects of their own self-understanding. As this is true generally of political concepts so it is true of the concept of the public sphere. The public sphere is a political concept with clearly reflective and evaluative dimensions, in that it reflects (broadly speaking) an arena where consent and dissent vie for prominence and where a wide variety of interests, norms, values and principles are generated in order to engender the appropriate balance between these two aspects of collective life. It also has clearly articulated effective and affective dimensions as it is a concept that has been and continues to be at the forefront of attempts to change political life and therefore to change the nature of the subjects that constitute the political. Since Habermas's (1989) agenda-setting contribution, the concept of the public sphere has been used by activists and theorists alike who have sought to reinvigorate collective decision making and, crucially, to engender new forms of social subjectivity. All of which points to a concept that is ripe for overlapping multi-, inter- and intra-disciplinary interrogation.

Nonetheless, the very riches of the concept of the public sphere mean that any particular analysis of its nature or its core features must be wary of skimming the surface of the concept or of emphasising one dimension over the others. This is not to say that we should avoid detailed investigations of any one particular aspect of this concept, rather that in doing so we should simply be aware of the deeply interwoven dimensions that constitute the concept of the public sphere and, therefore, of where our analyses fit into the complex picture that emerges from this multidimensionality. It is a difficulty that is especially pertinent, however, to any attempt at grasping the nature of the public sphere *in general*. Given the complex dimensionality that is constitutive of the concept of the public sphere, is it possible to approach this idea in its generality at all? Can we find a way of addressing the nature of the public sphere that preserves the deep complexity of its conceptual existence?

Traditionally within political theory one might approach this question by creating a hierarchy of dimensions constituted by a strict analysis of the hierarchical relationship itself and, therefore, of the boundaries between them.¹ We might be drawn, for instance, towards an analysis that prioritizes the reflective nature of the concept, such that the public realm, first and foremost, describes a certain space of political interaction. Alternatively, we might be drawn to construct the concept in explicitly evaluative terms such that the key task is to address the norms that must be operative within the public sphere if political life is to function in a way that embodies certain values 'we' take to be at least cherished and, perhaps, rationally justifiable. But even at this two-dimensional level we can foresee the problems embedded within these alternative approaches; namely, that to prioritize either the reflective or the evaluative is likely to engender the respective charges of 'normative deficiency' and 'sociological naivety'. The problems become even greater as we consider the difficulties of prioritizing one dimension over others if we add in both the effective and the affective dimensions (where omission would generate, respectively, charges of 'practical disengagement' and 'motivational lack').

If we are to avoid this hierarchical approach to conceptualising the nature of the public sphere then how are we also to avoid the problem of simply conflating and confusing its intrinsically multidimensional nature? Can we grasp the nature of the public sphere *in general* while maintaining its conceptual complexity? This is clearly not a straightforward matter. One plausible solution to this, however, is to interrogate the nature of a concept by inquiring into the dynamic aspects of the concept.² Rather than inquire into the core features of the concept of the public sphere by looking for one element of its construction that conditions all the other elements, this element then being that which forms the foundation of one's hierarchical analysis, it is more revealing of the concept's internal complexity to inquire into the dynamic and mobile features that animate its existence as a concept that operates on, within and between all the dimensions that give it shape. This is not the occasion to delve into debates between philosophies of being and philosophies of becoming, rather the aim is to *show* that one can approach the public sphere from the perspective of what it is becoming and thereby produce an analysis that will preserve its inherent multidimensionality. More prosaically; to know what the public realm is, we must first know what it is becoming.

The Argument

¹ The desire to create strict limits within and between concepts by way of hierarchical conceptual analysis is largely the result of a modern, Enlightenment desire to cut a swathe through the matted morass of concepts bequeathed by scholastic Aristotelianism.

² Whereas the classical Enlightenment project involved strictly differentiating concepts from each other, an important strand of the counter-Enlightenment reinvigorated a pre-Enlightenment tradition of conceptual inquiry that emphasised the ways in which concepts can be analysed so as to 'bring them to life'. Underpinning this distinction is the Enlightenment caution regarding questions of ontology and the pre-, and counter-Enlightenment project of (re)vitalising ontological issues by thinking in terms of becoming rather being.

It will be argued that the public sphere can no longer be defined as a space articulated by identity groups in pursuit of accommodation within political life and that current developments reveal an arena conditioned by the nature of political events such that the public sphere is best thought of as constituted by 'significance groups' in 'pursuit' of the expression of significance. The argument has two main parts. The first part of the paper argues: that the logic of accommodation within the public sphere is being stretched to breaking point; that normative political theory no longer has the resources with which to respond to the break-up of the accommodation agenda; that the reason for this lack of resources within normative political theory is to be found in the mistaken view that the political subjects that constitute the public sphere must be identified by way of preconceived 'identity forming contexts'; that new political formations reveal a 'strange multiplicity' (Tully, 1995) within the public sphere that requires a theory of how such formations come into being. The second part of the paper seeks to account for this 'strange multiplicity' of the public realm by arguing: that political events have a more foundational role than 'identity forming contexts' in conditioning the public realm; that, therefore, a general theory of political events is required to account for this; that Badiou and Deleuze offer the two most rigorous, though contrasting, philosophies of the event; that Deleuze's theory of political events is more convincing because it elicits a more politically sensitive account of political events. The implications of a Deleuzian theory of political events for our understanding of the public sphere are drawn out in conclusion: in particular, a) the idea of rethinking identity groups and new political formations as 'significance groups' and, b) the idea that the public sphere is not just conditioned by events at this historical juncture but that it is always fundamentally, we might say metaphysically, conditioned by events.

From Identity...

An anecdote may help to clear a path through this dense forest of issues. It is a requirement for all those employed in UK universities to attend staff development training sessions in equal opportunities. It was at one such meeting that I became aware of an interesting feature of the current equality framework in the UK; namely, that recent legislation is moving, albeit cautiously, beyond the equal opportunities agenda to an agenda where the goal is that of 'promoting diversity'.³ The difference between the two agendas is subtle but fundamental. The history of equal opportunities legislation has been defined by the aim of providing identifiable groups of disadvantaged citizens (women, people of colour, people with disabilities, people of different ethnic and religious background and people of different sexual orientation) with the same opportunity afforded to the dominant groups within society (men, white people, able bodied people, people of British and Christian background and heterosexual men and women). This strategy has relied upon two basic assumptions: a) that there are identifiable groups suffering from significant disadvantage and, b) the way to minimise disadvantage is to measure it against the standard of the relevant dominant group within society. Both of these assumptions, however, are causing the equal opportunities legislation to become stretched, possibly to breaking-point.

Firstly, and as a colleague at the meeting pointed out, there is no legislation that, currently at least, would allow her to take up an equal opportunities case against a university for its lack of provision for vegans. My colleague's eloquently argued case in support of her veganism as a constitutive and deep aspect of her identity opened up a discussion that led to others at the session bringing in aspects of their respective self-identities, felt equally deeply and profoundly, that were also not covered by existing legislation. The point is this: where the logic of equal opportunities rests upon identifying disadvantaged groups there is an inexorable pull towards the exponential increase of groups seeking claims to be accommodated within the public sphere on an equal footing to the perceived dominant group. In the context of a legal system that requires the clear identification of

³ With regard to public sector organisations such as universities this shift can be located within the *Race Relations Amendment Act* (2000), an amendment to the *Race Relations Act* (1976). 'Promoting diversity' legislation relating to disability and gender is also about to come on stream for public sector organisations as of 2006.

groups in terms of their respective 'identity forming contexts' (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc) there is a clear strain within the system when faced with the multiplication of these contexts. This strain manifests itself within the legislation as the shift from an agenda that looks to accommodate diverse groups within the public sphere by providing equal opportunities to an agenda that now focuses on institutions, such as universities, creating an environment where the promotion of diversity is the aim. Crucially, the aim of promoting diversity is not, straightforwardly at least, dependent upon defining in advance the identity forming contexts that can be deemed worthy of accommodation but upon the recognition that 'we are all different', and therefore not easily categorised into groups by way of these identity forming contexts. The response from the staff development team to the multiplication of these contexts, therefore, was to stress that the university was obliged to investigate ways that my vegan colleague and others could have their differences promoted rather than their identities accommodated.

Related to this change of emphasis are the problems raised by the second assumption of equal opportunities legislation; that the standard by which equality of opportunity is measured is the standard of the dominant group. One issue raised by this, as Catherine MacKinnon (1989) has argued, is that in the context of sex-equality legislation, 'man is the measure of all things'. By extension, whites become the measure of people of colour, heterosexuals become the measure of gays, lesbians and transsexuals, and male and female become the measure of transgender identity, and so on. The problems raised by this strategy of measuring disadvantage against what is assumed to be the advantaged norm are well summarized by MacKinnon (in the context of sex-equality legislation): 'Socially, one tells a woman from a man by their difference from each other, but a woman is legally recognised to be discriminated against on the basis of sex only when she can first be said to be the same as a man... Sex equality becomes something of a contradiction in terms, something of an oxymoron' (1989, 216). However, it is a related issue that is particularly relevant when thinking about the stretching of the logic of identity and accommodation within the public sphere; namely, when the dominant group becomes the measure of how to treat the disadvantaged group then the dominant group itself begins to question the 'advantages' won by the disadvantaged groups such that it then seeks to claim these 'advantages' for itself. Herein resides the idea of a 'backlash', against the advances of feminism, the claims of minority cultures and so on. The result is that the logic of accommodation at the heart of equal opportunities legislation is stretched even further such that now the dominant groups themselves increasingly seek to be accommodated within a system that is perceived as undermining their own 'identity forming context'. Breaking point is reached when there is no longer thought to be an identity against which to 'measure' advantage and disadvantage.

Both the key assumptions of the equal opportunities legislation, therefore, have had the effect of stretching the accommodation of different identity groups to the point where the goal of *equal* accommodation looks hopelessly beyond reach. The legal response to this is to shift away from reliance upon defining the public realm as a sphere where identifiable groups can have their diverse claims accommodated to recognition of the idea that diversity will always outstrip the possibility of legal identification and as such it has become diversity itself that must be promoted. Promoting diversity, as the new goal of legislation (in the UK, at least), amounts to the realisation that the equal opportunities agenda, for all its undoubted successes, has a limited life-span. This example is indicative of a public sphere that is changing in recognition of the emergence of new identities that were not foreseen and, crucially, in recognition that there will continue to be new identities that emerge to challenge any straightforward broadening out of equal opportunities legislation.

On its own, drawing out some tentative implications of this anecdotal evidence proves nothing. Indeed, from the perspective of normative political theory it may well provide support for the idea that the core issues of this strand of political theory (equality, justice, rights etc) are still central to the debates that animate our understanding of the public realm. Moreover, contemporary normative

political theory is awash with different attempts to articulate, negotiate and resolve the issues raised by the shift from equal opportunities to the promotion of diversity and the more general issues raised by this change.⁴ The anecdotal evidence that this legislative shift reflects a more fundamental dynamism within the public sphere must, in the first instance, be accompanied by an account of why it is that normative political theory is ill-equipped within itself to meet the challenges of a changing public sphere. With this in mind, I shall turn to Vincent's (1997) discussion of political theory, in particular the way that he uses Tully's (1995) analysis of 'strange multiplicity' vis-à-vis contemporary constitutionalism to advance an account of how normative political theory itself is being stretched to breaking point.

In his work on constitutionalism, Tully (1995) inquires into whether or not modern constitutions can accommodate the diversity of cultural voices that make up contemporary political life within them. He is wary of attempts at bringing diverse voices within modern constitutions by translating the different 'languages' that are used to articulate their demands into a homogenous language of contemporary liberalism. He argues instead that a truly inclusive modern constitution must express *within itself* the 'strange multiplicity' of voices making demands upon it. Vincent (1997), considering political theory more generally, extends this by way of an analogy. Is not normative political theory itself prone to silencing alternative voices by re-articulating the intrinsically diverse claims that appear within the public sphere through 'the language of constitutionalism, liberalism and justice-theory – in sum, the language of much modern Western political theory' (1997, 21)? Indeed, political theory as a whole, whether normative or not, may well be, Vincent suggests, 'a creature subject to "strange multiplicity"' (ibid.). As Vincent recognises, thinking of political theory, especially its normative dimension, in this way may well rob us of the guiding intuition that such theorising can offer us a single way of articulating 'what we ought to do' at a political level, but it may also open up our eyes to the fact that political theory is eternally sited at a 'tense interstice' between dealing with existing demands and having to recognise the continual creation of profoundly challenging new demands that may not be (at least, easily) translatable into the language of normative political theory including, indeed, demands that have yet to be articulated (i.e. demands that we can not foresee). His own response to the interstitial existence of political theory, as he constructs it in *The Nature of Political Theory*, is to redeploy the language of hermeneutics (Vincent, 2004). It is this language, he argues, that allows for a real dialogue based on understanding others rather than a pseudo-dialogue that is all too often an implicit monologue aimed at alleged rational certainty.

For all that this may provide a timely reminder about the dangers of overly rationalistic discourse in political theory, Vincent's diagnosis of the problem may suggest that his cure is rather premature. In recognising that the desire to accommodate diversity within normative political theory requires a real engagement with and understanding of voices other than the dominant liberal one, he nonetheless repeats the dominant approach that he is critical of by way of under-theorising the conditions of emergence that give rise to the alternative voices he hopes political theory will accommodate through understanding. If we take it that Tully's 'strange multiplicity' is indeed indicative of the persistent arrival on the political theory scene of new and challenging voices then it seems pertinent to argue that we should be looking to grasp how it is that the political world, and in our case the public sphere in particular, continues to create new political forms that provoke theorists into revisiting, often in quite radically new ways, the very terrain of public contestation itself. Vincent, in other words, shares the rationalist supposition that new political formations are in fact political subjects seeking accommodation, albeit that he suggests this is better achieved through understanding rather than rationalist appropriation of the language of these new groups. This supposition implies that the political formations that are emerging have a form that is similar to that

⁴ It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the majority of work under the banner of normative political theory has grappled with these issues for the last 15 years at least; two agenda-setting discussions are Gutmann (1992) and Young (1996).

of those that have in the past sought accommodation through, for example, equal opportunities legislation (women, people of colour, different ethnic, cultural and 'sexuality' groups and so on). It is assumed, that is to say, that the public realm will be marked by the continual arrival of groups seeking accommodation within the dominant political culture and that these groups, therefore, have similar 'identity forming contexts' that can be articulated through hermeneutic understanding but still as part of this process of accommodation. Leaving to one side the rationalist retort that the call for understanding itself must involve the appropriation of other voices within a hermeneutic grasp of norms and values, neither Vincent's call for understanding nor the goal of rational appropriation consider the possibility that new political formations or groupings may not be of the same nature as those that have become the stock-in-trade of contemporary normative theory. Accepting the public sphere as a site in which new political claims will always emerge we should also accept that by 'new' we should include the possibility of 'radically new'; that is, of formations, groups and political subjects that do not fit into the model of identity politics that operates within normative political theory (hermeneutics included). Our thinking about what the public sphere may be becoming should not be hampered by assuming that it will repeat the forms and processes that have made it what it is today. To the extent that normative political theory remains wedded to the idea of the public sphere as a space defined by groups that claim legitimacy by articulating their respective identity forming context and that thereby seek accommodation within the dominant political culture on this basis it is likely to draw upon ever diminishing resources as the public sphere develops in ways that do not fit this model. Maybe the 'strange multiplicity' constitutive of the public sphere is stranger than that assumed by either Tully or Vincent?

Two obvious questions arise: 'do we have any empirical evidence that 'radically new' forms of political grouping are present (or coming to presence) within the public realm?'; and, 'are there any theoretical resources to draw upon to suggest that political identities can emerge that do not simply articulate 'identity forming contexts' in the manner of more traditional political formations?'. Both of these questions raise very complicated issues, issues that can not be fully resolved within the context of this discussion given its broad perspective. That said, we can hint at answers to both questions with a view to linking to existing discourses within political theory and to establishing new areas for further investigation.

The evidence to suggest that the public realm is becoming increasingly defined by the emergence of radically new political groups is scattered throughout a range of literatures, including those on new social movements and developments within international politics. From the perspective of new social movement theory, there is growing agreement that the traditional groups that once formed the core of identity politics are fragmenting into what has been called 'counterpublics' (Asen, 2000; Melluci, 1988; Gardiner, 2004). The 'women's movement' is a pertinent case. As feminists of many different persuasions agree, the insights of second-wave feminism quickly gave way to internal disputes about the nature of women, the usefulness of the category of woman, the overlapping causes of gender/class/race politics and the vexed question of how feminists ought to conceive of female sexuality (for overviews see: Tong, 1998; Bryson 2003). One consequence of these internal disputes has been the shift by some feminists away from identity politics itself (Grosz, 1994; Butler, 1999). It is not necessary to engage in these disputes but merely to register that they are indicative of a more general shift within identity groups towards a rethinking of identity politics, one that no longer prioritizes the goal of accommodation within public life but which looks to alternative ways of operating critically at the margins of the public sphere; it could be said, as a loose association of 'counterpublics' rather than a unified movement seeking recognition of 'woman's identity'.

Moreover, there is a strongly global dimension to these new political formations. As the public sphere is increasingly becoming a *global* public sphere so it is that the dynamics we witness at the level of the nation-state are also played out on this new arena. Hardt and Negri's (2004)

conceptualisation of 'the multitude' marks one attempt to account for the emergence of a diverse range of new political formations within a changing global political economy. Aligning 'the multitude' with the 'movement of movements' that has emerged since the Seattle protests of 1999 (2004, 217), there is no doubt that Hardt and Negri can be said to provide a theoretical framework through which to chart the rise of new political formations, especially trans-national movements that no longer seek accommodation within the terms set by sovereign states. In itself, however, this global dimension to new political formations is not, I would argue, their defining feature. This is the case because this move to global political struggle simply repeats the form of the national struggles that have been at the forefront of identity politics especially throughout the twentieth century (Chandler, 2005). The globalisation of new political formations is an extrinsic feature of their development and if we are to grasp what is 'new' about such new 'counterpublics' we must look at their intrinsic constitution.

Increasingly, political formations are emerging that have a different *raison d'être* to that of the identity oriented movements; they exist as a challenge to the homogenisation of economic, political, cultural and artistic life without the concomitant expression of a positive emancipatory agenda. The perceived implosion of large scale emancipation movements (the crisis within feminism brought on by second-wave feminism, for example) is now written on the collective bodies of new political formations such that they turn away from traditional forms of political activity and often pursue their activity in deliberately non-, or post-organisational forms. Rather than take the extrinsic nature of globalisation as the defining feature of these movements, therefore, I suggest four indicators of the 'new' in new political formations: 1) the goals of such formations, if defined at all, are typically defined negatively; 2) new political formations eschew narratives of emancipation; 3) they are explicitly hybrid in their constitution; 4) as such, they have a self-consciously temporary existence.⁵ These features mean that such new political formations are not of the sort that could be accommodated within the public sphere, at either national or global level. Moreover, the 'claims' made by such groups (if we can even talk of 'claims' in this context) are qualitatively different from those that spurred on the civil rights movement and subsequent equal opportunities agenda, where groups articulated aspects of identity that were sufficiently permanent to require recognition and accommodation within the public realm with the express aim of emancipating large sections of society. As will be argued in the concluding section below, where one can establish 'claims' made by such groups these are best understood as expressions of a constitutive significance.

My aim is not to valorise these new formations, but neither is it to denigrate them. Rather, I take it to be an interesting feature of the changing public sphere that it is increasingly becoming occupied by groups that do not accept the traditional model of how the public sphere works; that is, they do not seek accommodation within it. We could try to articulate the claims of these groups in ways that would fit the traditional model, or we could simply argue that these groups must exist outside of the public sphere and that we can ignore them on this basis, but in both cases we then risk reducing the 'strange multiplicity' of the public sphere itself to a preconceived unity. Beyond valorisation, denigration, appropriation or exclusion there is the possibility of asking simply what the emergence of these groups may tell us about the changing nature of the public sphere, about what the public sphere is becoming, an analysis which itself requires a deeper appreciation of the internal dynamics of the public sphere itself. In order to shift our critical focus to these internal dynamics, I shall argue, we need to turn to the idea of events, those occurrences that give rise to new political formations, new ways of life and, ultimately, to new ways of thinking about the political itself. This focus on events and the role they play in shaping the public sphere will serve to

⁵ This list of intrinsic features is derived, in part, as a counter-point to traditional definitions of new social movements (Wilson, 1973) and also with a view to marking the emergence of forms of political organisation that supersede the transition from labour movements to new social movements described, for example, by Habermas (1981). It is conjectural in nature and a thorough going study into the nature of new political formations is clearly required to bolster (or not) such a theoretical conjecture.

explain and secure the intuition that it is a sphere of collective interaction that is indeed animated by an ineradicable 'strange multiplicity'.

'...to Event'

At a superficial level there is nothing too surprising in saying that the public sphere is shaped by events, where events are simply thought of as a more or less open-ended series of occurrences. Recently, for example, we have come to accept that the post 9/11 public sphere is rather different to that which preceded it. At its most obvious, the public sphere has become a site where the possibilities of collective interaction are being trumped or at least conditioned by the demand for security and the minimisation of risk. Within the current political climate, therefore, the idea of prioritizing the role of political events in our understanding of the public sphere is relatively uncontested. In this case, however, the lack of disagreement does not signal a well thought through agreement but a poorly thought through conformity. The issue at stake is not how governments respond to political events in the public sphere but how the nature of the public sphere is constituted by events and this latter idea has received little to no attention.⁶ In order to account for the internal workings of the public sphere we have to establish what actually counts as a political event and we must also account for how events constitute the new political formations constitutive of the public sphere itself. The first task is addressed in this section; the second will be discussed in the closing section below.

From the perspective of a theory which seeks to account for political events in general the first point to note is that a 'neutral' theory of events – where events are deemed to be simply anything 'that happens' – is unsatisfactory.⁷ It is unsatisfactory because there is a non-neutral feature of political events that can not be eliminated from our construction of the idea. This feature can be called the *significance* of the event. An example may help illuminate why this is the case. If we treat the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) as a political event⁸ then we can not capture all the elements of this event if we do not also capture the significance of this event for all those, loosely speaking, 'involved' in the event. Moreover, those 'involved in' the GFA are not merely the participants of the discussions but also all those affected by the agreement as well; within Northern Ireland, within the UK, USA and indeed those affected on a global scale (through, say, the effects of this agreement on other peace processes). Equally, the GFA is an event that will affect generations to come and that has affected and will continue to affect how the past is viewed. As such, the scope and magnitude of a political event like the GFA means that the intrinsic significance of this event is not easily grasped. In which case, what exactly is at stake in introducing the idea of significance as a constitutive feature of political events?

In its broadest sense, we can say that an event occurs if and only if something significant has happened. It is this significance that gives the event its sense of being something new that has

⁶ A notable exception is the electronic journal *Theory and Event* which has included a number of articles that address political themes with a sensitivity to the nature of political events. See, for example, the inaugural issue, 1.1, which includes a section titled 'What is an Event?' and, in particular, Wendy Brown's article 'The Time of The Political' and Paul Patton's article, 'The World Seen from Within'. However, there has been little sustained reflection upon the general nature of political events and no work on how political events can be said to constitute the public sphere. This journal can be found at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event.

⁷ The treatment of events as occurrences, linked to semantics and action theory, is found in the analytical philosophical tradition that draws its inspiration from Donald Davidson's work in this area (Davidson, 1980). The reference to a 'neutral' theory of events within this tradition comes from Paul Ricoeur's (1992) critique of Davidson.

⁸ The Good Friday Agreement is that reached between the British and Irish governments on Friday April 10th 1998 which sets out a plan for the devolved government of Northern Ireland. Hereafter, it is referred to as the GFA. Details of the agreement can be found at <http://www.nio.gov.uk/the-agreement>. While using another large scale, apparently 'obvious' political event by way of example (as with the attacks of 9/11 above) I do not want to commit myself to saying that these are paradigmatic political events. Rather, they should be thought of as heuristic devices to aid the flow of the argument. Their status as political events, indeed, will be called into question below.

happened rather than being simply a change that leaves things as they were. But the significance that is a constitutive feature of political events is not a simple matter as according change significance is not something that is the same for all who participate in the event. As the GFA example makes clear, the plurality of different subjects affected by the event do not afford it the same significance. Moreover, it may well be the case that some of those involved do not even view what happened as significant at all; they may not see it, in other words, as a political event by virtue of it having no real significance (as indeed is the case among some sections of the loyalist community). If, therefore, a political event can be differentiated from 'mere occurrences' in the political world (from political non-events, we could say) in terms of significance but the manner in which political events generate significances seems to be so complicated as to allow for a political event to be both significant and not significant to those affected by it then it seems obvious that clarification is required. This clarification is to be sought in the works of two contemporary philosophers of the event, Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze; philosophers who have sought to shed light and consistency upon the idea that (political) events must be understood as *significant* occurrences.

In Badiou's (1988) innovative understanding of the relationship between events and the world, the feature of a political event that constitutes its 'eventness' is whether or not the individuals involved *in* an occurrence claim it *as* an event. Using one of his examples, the French Revolution, we can see what is at stake for Badiou. He argues that the French Revolution was not merely 'something that happened' rather it was a rupture or a break with what was (prior to the revolution) deemed to be known, and accepted as true, about political life: namely, the necessity of divine right and the impossibility of republican ideals of sovereignty. In this way, moreover, what constitutes the event as an event is less the actual occurrence of revolutionary activity, but the subjective moment when the consciousness of revolution becomes the defining feature of the revolution itself. When the revolutionary forces (that make up the revolutionary 'situation' in Badiou's terminology) become aware of the revolutionary nature of their activity then we no longer say that something merely happened but that a political event occurred. Wholly in tune with a militant attitude of 'permanent revolution', Badiou's account of the French Revolution as an event prioritizes the *continuing* 'fidelity' of the subjects of the revolution to the ideals of the revolution itself. In the terms used above, therefore, Badiou accounts for the French Revolution as a political event because those 'involved' in the revolutionary 'situation' (where 'involved' has all the generality invoked in the GFA example) deem it to be a significant occurrence. However, it is the manner in which Badiou construes this general feature of significance that marks his approach to political events as worthy of engagement. For the sake of this argument, we can unpack Badiou's understanding of political events as significant occurrences in this way: as the creation of new forms of collective life whose significance is to be grasped in terms of a subject's fidelity to the *universalizable* nature of that which has been created.

It is only if an event inspires subjects to 'wager on its existence', to say that it has happened, that one can say with Badiou that an event has occurred. However, it would be misleading to leave the matter at that as Badiou sees the subject as constituted through this wager on the event. Strictly speaking an individual member of a political situation becomes a political subject in the process of naming the event: one becomes a republican revolutionary by claiming 'fidelity' to the event of the French Revolution, for example. This construction of the event would appear, however, to be open to a major criticism; namely, that it is too strictly and rigorously subjective. It is an argument that has been mounted most effectively by Critchley (2000). Critchley argues: '[i]f the event is the consequence of a decision, namely the decision to define one's subjectivity in terms of a fidelity to the event, then this event is true only in the sense that it is true for a subject that has taken this decision (true = true for a subject). Now, if that argument is valid, then how and in virtue of what is one to distinguish a true event from a false event' (2000, 23). Hallward (2000), one of Badiou's key expositors in English, responds by stressing the collective nature of the subjectivity created

through fidelity to the event: 'an individual only becomes a subject in Badiou's sense through commitment to a truth [the ideal consciousness of the event] that is universal or disinterested by definition' (2000, 28). He argues that for Badiou it is only where fidelity to an event can be genuinely universalised that one can talk of a true event. Importantly, therefore, a subject, for Badiou, is always a collective 'we-subject'. We can infer from this that the criterion for demarcating political events from political non-events comes to rest not just upon significance but upon the nature of significance construed as a fidelity to the event that is in principle *universalizable*. This explains the importance of revolutionary events as paradigmatic political events for Badiou.

The strength of Badiou's approach is its appreciation of the intimate and constitutive relationship between political events and political subjects, a relationship defined by the idea of 'fidelity'. This is an advance upon the core idea of normative political theory – that there are identity forming contexts embedded within social and political life that are *revealed* by identity groups within the public sphere – because it allows us to conceive of the *emergence* of political formations within the public sphere without presupposing that these represent some prior presence within society. In other words, Badiou's emphasis upon the constitutive nature of political events vis-à-vis political subjects may provide one way of theorising the 'strange multiplicity' that, I have argued above, defines the public sphere. In particular, Badiou brings clarity to the problem of how we treat political events as significant occurrences and yet maintain some ability to differentiate what actually counts as a political event. Returning to an earlier example, and extrapolating from Badiou's theory of political events, it is unlikely that he would see the GFA as a political event at all on the grounds that it is not possible to claim 'fidelity' to the ideals of the agreement in a way that is truly universalizable (on the grounds that the GFA is a compromised amalgam of different forces within the political 'situation' of Northern Ireland rather than a principled expression of ideals that could apply to *all*).⁹ As this example, might suggest, however, while Badiou brings clarity to the definition of political events as significant occurrences he may sacrifice plausibility in the process.

This can be seen in a number of different but related ways. Firstly, while Badiou is correct to emphasise the ways in which individuals become political subjects through the occurrence of something significant, a political event, by then claiming that a political subject is only truly created if that subjectivity rests upon a universalizable 'fidelity' to the event Badiou robs political subjectivity of all but the most revolutionary content. In other words, there are *only* revolutionary political subjects for Badiou and the vast array of other possible political 'subjects' – we could think of the groups that make up 'identity politics' (women's groups, disability groups etc) – are simply elements within a political situation rather than agents of change, or of a truly political event. Indeed, Badiou's argument amounts to the idea that a certain kind of political militancy is the nature of political subjectivity. The militancy that he envisages is that which adheres to the 'primacy of revolt' (Badiou, 1975), an idea that has been more or less consistent in Badiou's work since his early Maoist political writings. This evacuates the politics from contemporary political life because on Badiou's criteria the political subject (the truly collective embodiment of the universal fidelity to a political event) is yet to come. Second, a similar problem emerges when we consider Badiou's work from the perspective of the event. The political event and the political non-event can be distinguished, according to Badiou, solely in terms of the universalizability or not of the subjective fidelity that a situation engenders. This imposes an uncompromising burden on our understanding of political events. Either they are revolutionary and universal or they are merely another 'happening' that actually changes nothing fundamental within 'the political'. The problem for Badiou is that his tough stance on what counts as an event relegates all but the exceptional, epochal, revolutionary occurrence to the category of 'the situation'. Badiou is aware of this: 'What I call

⁹This extrapolation is drawn from Badiou's remarks regarding the attacks of September 11th, 2001; Badiou (2003).

political is something that can be discerned only in a few, fairly brief, sequences, often quickly overturned, crushed, or diluted by the return of business as usual' (1993, 2).¹⁰ As such, and thirdly, Badiou's understanding of the political event implies a conception of the political that is verging perilously close to being an empty formalism. Bensaid captures this well when he says that Badiou's theory of political events 'reduces politics to a grand refusal and prevents it from producing lasting effects' (2004, 101). This amounts to an overly formal conception of politics by virtue of replacing the contestation, dissensus and consensus that are so central to it with a stark binary of refusal and revolution. One implication of this is that Badiou's understanding of political events ultimately can not be used to guide our intuition that events condition and constitute the public sphere on the grounds that he robs *the political in general* of a sense of 'strange multiplicity'. More pertinently perhaps, Badiou's conception of politics as either refusal or revolution means that the very idea of the public sphere is redundant by virtue of being completely absorbed within the 'political situation'. In short, Badiou has no place for the idea of the public sphere within his understanding of the political.

Is it possible to bring consistency and clarity to the idea of political events as significant occurrences without creating an implausible conception of the political, in general, and without evacuating the idea of public sphere, in particular? I will now turn to presenting Deleuze's philosophy of events on the grounds that it provides such an account, although his core ideas will require extrapolation in order adequately to meet the challenges presented by the ideas of political events and the public sphere.¹¹ Whereas Badiou treats the event as an occurrence that can embody universal significance through the construction of a universal subject of the political, Deleuze proposes a pre-subjective account of the emergence of events that conceives of their significance as an incorporeal *effect* of certain combinations of occurrences. In order to introduce this account we can position Deleuze's theory between the neutral theory of events that drives analytical work in this area and Badiou's subjective-universal account. According to Davidson's (1980) analytical treatment, events are occurrences that are non-reducible to things but of equivalent ontological status. This approach is fruitful only to a degree because it leaves the question of significant occurrences untouched; in effect, all happenings are treated as essentially similar events. Badiou, as has been shown, turns this around completely such that only very rare occurrences actually count as events. The pay-off for Badiou is a rigorous demarcation of events and non-events (situations) but the cost is an implausible account of politics, as argued above. Deleuze's (1990, 1994) theory marks an advance on Davidson's work as it treats events as *significant* occurrences rather than simple 'happenings'. It is also an advance on Badiou's approach because Deleuze does not need to invoke a (universal) subject to account for the *intrinsic* significance of events. How is this possible?

In short, the answer is to be found in the way that Deleuze thinks of events as the incorporeal effects of corporeal relations between things. This means that events are related to the world of things but things and events are not of the same ontological status (one being corporeal, the other incorporeal). The philosophical lineage he draws upon here is the Stoic distinction between corporeal 'things', 'bodies' or 'states of affairs'¹² and incorporeal entities which do not 'exist' in the same way 'things' do, but rather 'subsist' or 'inhere' within these 'things' (1990, 4-11). These incorporeal entities are events and they emerge when bodies/things/states of affairs come into contact with each other (in a specific way, to be discussed shortly). A simple example may illuminate what is at stake in these claims. We often feel that a certain birthday is a significant event. The analytical treatment of one's birthday would presuppose that whatever happens is essentially, metaphysically, the same as

¹⁰ The translation is from Hallward (2003, 45).

¹¹ Deleuze (1990, 1994) are the key primary sources for his philosophy of the event. The event also features throughout his collaborative work with Guattari, especially Deleuze and Guattari (1994), but the main outlines of his philosophy of the event were established in the earlier, in French, sole-authored texts.

¹² For the purposes of this discussion, these terms are used synonymously.

any other event, the significance of which is not related to its happening but overlaid on the event itself (in most analytical philosophy, by the intention of the individual whose birthday it is). Badiou, in contrast, would presumably deny that birthdays could constitute events because they do not provide the basis for the constitution of a universal subjectivity. From a Deleuzian perspective, there is a confluence of bodies/things/states of affairs – our ageing bodies, our growing children, the social construction of certain special birthdays (18th, 21st, 40th etc), the buying of a sports car, and so on – that *may* produce a significant effect, such that if significance is produced we can talk of our birthday as an event.

The qualification 'may' is important. Not every combination of states of affairs etc., constitutes an event; for Deleuze, in fact, most would fall under the category of mere occurrences (mostly, our birthdays are 'just another day'). For an incorporeal event-effect to be produced, the combination of things etc. must constitute a *turning point* in the *material constitution* of those things. This implies a view of actual occurrences as operating in a linear and serial way; lines of causation among bodies that are constitutive of the 'things' themselves.¹³ An event occurs, then, when such series come into contact with each other to produce a turning point in one, some or all of the series (when the series of days comes into contact with the greying of hair and the recognition of a paunch and the desire for 'days gone by' and so on, we have a turning point that may make a certain birthday significant, an event in one's life). In this way, the event is a product of this serial materiality but it is the production of something significant rather than merely something (substantially nothing has really changed but in the combination of occurrences significance is produced). Significance, therefore, is incorporeal: it has a 'minimum of being which is appropriate to that which is not a thing, a non-existing entity' (Deleuze 1990, 5).

As mentioned above, however, Deleuze's rendering of the event depends not just upon the idea that events are turning points in the seriality of the material world, but that these turning points 'subsist' or 'inhere' within that seriality itself. In other words, it is not simply that events are the products of combinations of states of affairs but that these actual states of affairs already *virtually* embody significance. This two-fold construction of the real, as both actual and virtual (corporeal and incorporeal/ serial materiality and events), is the metaphysical prop which supports his account of events.¹⁴

A political example may help clarify matters. The attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center on September 11th 2001 may seem to be unquestionably a *political* event. However, the matter is not as straightforward as it may at first appear. An analytical treatment of events, one which neutralises events by conceiving of them as equivalent to occurrences, is not equipped to conceive of this event as a *political* event because it does not treat significance, in this case political significance, as part of the intrinsic structure of events in general.¹⁵ If we follow Badiou (2003) in thinking of how we can salvage the idea of the event as a significant occurrence we fair little better because the 9/11 attacks could not be the creative impetus of a subjective universalization of their significance (as they are mere fluctuations in the already existing political situation, rather than a truly revolutionary rethinking of the political itself on genuinely egalitarian terms). Interestingly, the *actual* 9/11 attacks do not constitute a political event in Deleuzian terms either, but they do carry *within them* the traces of an event or events that made them possible. The Deleuzian question is not 'was 9/11 a political event?' but rather, 'what virtual event(s) made the

¹³ See Deleuze (1994) for his argument regarding the passive synthesis of repetitions as the constitutive dynamic of individuals and species.

¹⁴ The relationship between virtual and actual in Deleuze can be traced through most of his sole and collaborative work. It is a distinction that comes from Bergson; Deleuze's interpretation of Bergson can be found in Deleuze (1990b). Williams (2003) provides a very clear account of the virtual-actual distinction, pp. 7-11.

¹⁵ In fact, it is not just that analytical philosophy has trouble with the political nature of this event it is also the case that the tools within this tradition do not neatly resolve the issue of whether or not the attacks were one event or two; see the fascinating discussion by Moore (2004).

actual occurrence of 9/11 possible?'¹⁶ Surmising, we might say that one virtual event that subsists within the actual occurrence of 9/11 is the moment when a U.S. intelligence official may have passed over the possibility of an Al-Qaeda attack using hijacked civilian airplanes.¹⁷ This moment, apparently *insignificant* as it actually occurred, is a turning point in a series of occurrences that we may say *virtually* created the possibility that 9/11 could actually occur. From a Deleuzian perspective, the event of passing over the piece of intelligence did not *actually* cause the attacks of 9/11 (causality in this sense remains a feature of the material world of bodies, things and states of affairs) but it was the moment when the significance of the actual 9/11 attacks was created. In other words, it was the moment when the material interaction of people, planes and buildings was imbued with significance such that 9/11 became a 'horrificing' or a 'glorious' etc, interaction of people, planes and buildings.

Importantly, while events as incorporeal significances do not cause actual things to happen they are in a relation of quasi-causality vis-à-vis other events.¹⁸ Continuing our example, it may be said that the passing over of the intelligence caused the further conjunction of significances known as the 'war against terror'. To invoke the idea of a 'quasi-causality' between events is to give the virtuality of events a 'territory' which they inhabit. In Deleuzian terminology, events occupy a 'plane of immanence' but it is entirely consistent with his philosophy of the event if we simplify this idea for the purposes of this discussion by labelling it a 'plane of significance'.¹⁹ Keeping our focus on political events, we can say that all political things – institutions, states, movements, parties, revolutions, elections, and so on – express to some degree, the plane of significance that subsists within them. This plane of significance is the virtual-real of political events that subsists within the actual-real of political life.²⁰ Continuing the comparison with Badiou is illuminating of this idea. While Badiou emphasises the 'void' between 'being' and 'event' by conceiving of the event as separated from being by the decision of an individual to wager on its existence, Deleuze locates the 'event' within 'being' as the virtual plane of significance that traverses all actual occurrences in the world. To say that the event is located within being, however, is to move decisively beyond philosophies of being toward philosophies of becoming. The shift has important consequences for a Deleuzian approach to the constitution of political subjectivity and the political.²¹

Once again, it is useful to maintain the comparison with Badiou. Badiou argues that the militant is *the* political subject formed out of a universalizable fidelity to the existence of an event. Deleuze would agree with Badiou that most individuals that occupy the political world are not political subjects in the strict sense; that is, most people are conditioned into habitual political responses by processes that could usefully be explained, for example, with reference to Foucault's (1991) genealogy of disciplinary society and, perhaps, augmented with Deleuze's (1995) elaboration upon

¹⁶ This rephrasing of the question is an important part of the move away from philosophies of being to those of becoming, discussed above in the introductory remarks.

¹⁷ The point here is not whether or not this 'passing over' actually happened but that a Deleuzian theory of events enables the kind of genealogical inquiries that would seek to discover the series of events that underpin the serial occurrences. Lecercle (1999) draws out an important contrast between Badiou and Deleuze on just this point, in that he argues that a Badiouian conception of the event makes the historical recovery of events impossible.

¹⁸ Quasi-causality because virtual significances cause other significances to emerge only through their actualisation as occurrences; Deleuze (1990).

¹⁹ I am grateful to Anna Cutler for this formulation.

²⁰ In effect, this is a rendering of the idea of 'machinic assemblage' found in Deleuze and Guattari (1987), one that aims to connect this idea to the discussion of events as significant occurrences. It is also an idea that has much in common with Foucault's (1991) elaboration of the 'diagram', as in the diagram of forces that subsist within the disciplinary network of actual personal, economic, social and political life.

²¹ Deleuze's work in general makes very little mention of 'political subjectivity', 'politics' or 'the political' – even the part entitled 'Politics' in Deleuze (1995) does not make use of terms or concepts that would be particularly familiar to students of politics – but this does not mean that a Deleuzian approach to these notions can not be constructed, as I shall attempt below.

that analysis in his work on 'control societies'. That said, Deleuze argues against restricting the category of (political) subjectivity to any one subjective form, such as the militant. This is the case because of the different ways in which Badiou and Deleuze construe the significance that defines events (as political). Whereas Badiou treats significance as *given by* individuals becoming universal subjects, Deleuze views virtual relations of significance as *actualised through* individuals 'becoming subjects'. However, we must treat this notion of 'becoming subject' with some caution because it should not be taken to imply that one can reach a full and complete 'subjectivity'. For example, in becoming 'politically-aware', we might say, individuals express what is significant to them as an actual feature of the political world. By claiming that something is politically significant, an individual becomes a political subject, though this process already implies that the subject always already expresses the plane of significance that traverses the political. There is, therefore, an impersonal dimension to all political subjectivities that both constitutes their sense of significance but which also destroys all claims to identity, in the strict sense. *Political subjects are constituted by the events that they express rather than the identity forming contexts they represent.* For Deleuze, therefore, political subjects emerge within the public sphere as expressions of events that subsist within it, events which are unique turning points in the course of occurrences. The conclusion is that there is no universal political subject. Indeed, there is no universal subject of any sort; rather, there are 'dynamic individuations without subjects, which constitute collective assemblages' (2002, 93); or, 'a subject is defined by the movement through which it is developed' (1991, 85). The metaphysical underpinning of this claim is to be found in Deleuze's (1990, 1994) arguments in support of the irreducibly individuated nature of events and the disjunctive syntheses that condition the relationship between actual and virtual dimensions of the real.

From a Deleuzian perspective, we also have a more subtle grasp of how we may distinguish political events from political non-events. The subtlety resides in the fact that a Deleuzian understanding of political events allows for the complexity of occurrences that can be both events and non-events, not just *for* different political subjects but *in the constitution of* different political subjects. Or more accurately, it is not that one occurrence can *be* both an event and a non-event but that any single occurrence may have a turning point (virtually) embedded within it that is significant in creating new political subjectivities while remaining actually insignificant in the life of other political subjects. This metaphysical account of the on-going creation of political subjects gives substance to the idea that political life, with its contestation, dissent and consensus is intrinsically complex and open-ended by virtue of it being constituted by the 'becoming-subjective' expression of an impersonal plane of significance. What are the implications of this for our understanding of the public sphere?

Conclusion: Rethinking the Public Sphere

The idea of the event was introduced to account for how it is that the strange multiplicity of the public sphere will remain forever strange; that is, to account for the on-going creation of new political formations within the public sphere in terms of a model that does not ultimately preclude the continual emergence of these new forms. The shift of perspective this approach engenders can be expressed in a number of different ways.

As a claim regarding how we think about the public sphere. Recent reflection upon the public sphere has tended to assume that the 'old social movements' that once gave substance to public life have been replaced by 'new social movements' defined by identity. In the discussion above, I have claimed that these new social movements are now being replaced by new forms of political organisation (or 'counterpublics' to use Bakhtin's term) that do not fit within the model of identity oriented movements. This empirical claim rests upon the broader theoretical claim that the public sphere is such that the groups and movements that give it substance do change over time and that they will continue to do so. Using Tully's informative notion, we can say that the public sphere is

constituted by a strange multiplicity. If this is the case, however, we need to account for the emergence of these different movements and groups within the public sphere in a way that does not presume what kinds of political formations are emerging now and will emerge in the future. To account for emergence we need to consider how it is that things happen, in general. This requires a theory of the event; in this case, of the political event. The argument of this discussion has been that prioritizing political events in the constitution of the public sphere can secure the idea of its constitutive strange multiplicity *if* we take the Deleuzian theory of the (political) event as our guide.

As a claim about the 'make-up' of the public sphere. Rather than assume that the public realm is a space occupied by political groups that reflect identity forming contexts, we can view the public realm as *conditioned by events that create significance-groups*. The idea of a 'significance group' expresses the mode of its constitution rather than hiding this under a banner of identity or class or some other model. In other words, we can give an account of the emergence of a variety of new political formations within the public realm, one that does not rely upon the traditional model of excavating or revealing already existing, if obscure, 'natural or intrinsic' aspects of human identity. To be clear, this does not mean that issues of identity should be ignored, rather that we presuppose in our analysis of the public sphere that significance-groups will only ever *appear* to be homogenous and stable identity-groups under hegemonic conditions. This links the metaphysical discussion of events and significance with a myriad array of work on the constructed nature of identity in contemporary social and political life. One useful aspect of this linkage is that it brings theoretical insight to bear upon the ways in which the traditional emancipatory movements (the 'women's movement', for example) have mutated (and continue to mutate) into a plurality of fragmentary and transient new political formations. Moreover, while there will always be a role for normative political theory and its concern with the values upon which broad and deep accommodation can be best achieved, by thinking about the public sphere in terms of events that create significance-groups we can clearly delimit this role and thereby stifle the tendency of normative theory to normalise all aspects of the public realm under one model oriented towards the ideal of accommodation. Shifting from identity based to event based assumptions about the public sphere constitutes a move away from the 'ideal' nature of the ideal of accommodation toward an emphasis upon the nature of 'real' accommodations within the public sphere; that is, towards a view of politics that is not distorted by presupposing that there are ideal modes of interaction in the public sphere. //

As a claim about the concept of the public sphere. At the level of the concept, this shift of theoretical perspective allows for a multidimensional approach that keeps the different reflective, evaluative, effective and affective dimensions in tension without creating hierarchies amongst these dimensions. This implies multi-, intra- and inter-disciplinary studies into the public sphere that keep the different disciplinary agendas on an equal footing. It also implies that the concept of the public sphere is best grasped by analysing its dynamic features, its 'becoming', rather than by trying to hypostatise it as a simple representative of a political world that we think we know in advance of our apprehension of it. // In broad terms, therefore, shifting away from identity-oriented assumptions to a metaphysic of the constitutive nature of events foregrounds a question that has, I would argue, been under-theorised in political studies; namely, how do we account for the emergence of the new in political life? Another consequence of maintaining a dynamic and multi-dimensional approach to conceptual analysis is that it creates the possibility of bringing a further dimension of concepts in general into relief; namely, the critical dimension (MacKenzie 2005). With regard to the public sphere, this dimension is not just to be understood as the way in which an event based theory of the public sphere serves as a critical riposte to identity based models, but as the way in which an event based approach creates an understanding of critique within itself. That understanding is located within the notion of the event itself: that is, critical interventions in public life can become a genuine critique of the public sphere, and 'the political', to the extent that they express an event (MacKenzie, 2004). The plane of significance traverses the 'world' of political studies as surely as

it traverses the political world itself. As such, political studies can become a critique of 'the political' by expressing itself as an event in the political world.

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