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Abstract

The remarkable ascendancy of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States of America in 2008, in the shadows of the financial crisis, was in no small part due to the effective discursive response to the ideological crisis of American neo-liberalism. Obama’s redemptive identity politics and civil society discourse of transformation perfectly embodied the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005) and the claims to transcend capitalism’s worst excesses. Despite what was widely described as the death knell of conservative politics, post-financial crisis America bore witness to a Randian populist rebellion bedeviling the liberal class. The Tea Party represent the return of the political, that is the ontological necessity of antagonism in social signification, while claiming access to the universal as the original “people” of the American revolution. What the Tea Party speak to is the timelessness of the fetishized man of property, which accounts for a left/right indeterminacy in American populism and the overdetermined irrational response to Obama who is seen as threatening the sanctity of their fetish. What is novel in this populist upsurge is its specifically mediatized character with Fox News performing a temporal-spatial bridging of an individuated populist public. The media field has become a critical site for the return of the political as it performs an essential function of biopolitical production by both extending commodification into social life and creating new forms of commonality. In examining the populist threat to the liberal vision of the political, this thesis will analyze a broad spectrum of media texts from 2009-11, covering the Tea Party/Obama political frontier from across the media field and social media, in order to establish whether mediatized politics simply means a populist commercialism or offers a new space of possibilities for a politics of universality.
Articles Published From Thesis


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Introduction

The 2008 election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States was an epochal moment in world politics, signaling a temporary rapprochement between the US and much of the world, and representing an important victory for the politics of identity. Powerful election night images of a tearful Jesse Jackson, the over 240,000 that filled Grant Park in Chicago and demonstrations of spontaneous joy and optimism in America and across the globe signaled a moment of genuine, if ill-defined, hope. With the financial crisis dramatically unfolding in the final months of the Bush administration’s polarizing and ruinous tenure, Obama’s Reaganesque optimism and conciliatory tones seemed the perfect tonic for an anxious polity. His campaign was a remarkable achievement built in large part by small donors and online activism while mobilizing a new generation of volunteers responding to a discourse of community organizing and grass-roots politics. The record turnout, wide margin of victory and the world’s embrace of the result, allowed American liberals to be self-assured in their identity and free from the fears of a creeping fascism under Bush. American left-liberals had been in deep despair over the Bush administration’s imperviousness to their critiques of policies such as torture, domestic spying or the Iraq War, to name a few. Books appearing in the popular press such as Naomi Wolf’s *The End of America* or Chris Hedges’ *American Fascists* were characteristic of this left-liberal malaise. While Obama’s campaign rhetoric of fairness, inclusion and shared prosperity was decidedly not in the vein of traditional social-democratic solidarity, there existed an expectation that Obama would be able to serve as a Keynesian counterweight to the preceding era of financialization. To many critical observers it was not unreasonable to assume that post-financial crisis America might resemble something like the era of the New Deal where popular struggles managed to ameliorate the conditions of most working class people’s lives. It was supposed that President Obama, with a
strong majority in both houses of congress and as a former community organizer, would have his ear to the ground of social movements\(^1\).

Where the Obama presidency really defines the political-historical moment is not simply in representing a generational shift and the emerging political calculus of multiculturalism, it is in embodying the aspirational content of the ‘new spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). The campaign discourse of “authenticity” perfectly epitomized new modes of consumption where an ideal of social relations is inscribed into the commodity itself. This authenticity and aspirational content is central to the new spirit’s commodity fetishism that places basic social and human qualities within the realm of commodity relations. With contemporary mediatized politics resembling consumer lifestyle choices in the marketplace, as opposed to the traditional social ties to political parties or trade unions, the Obama campaign typified the new hegemonic character of production and consumption. The campaign discourse spoke not merely of the fulfillment of a generation but the realization of “You” as the exemplary agent of change. Obama became a figure of affective investment\(^2\) able to stand in for multiple fantasy projections as the realization of a grass-roots authenticity that transcended the particular moment in capitalist crisis. The inclusive liberal politics of Obama disavowed structural antagonism through a depoliticizing moralization of politics and economy. What was critical in this embodiment of a new liberal end of history\(^3\) was Obama’s identity politics of a multicultural background and profile as a community organizer. In this sense Obama sought to characterize

\(^1\) The leftist and civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs while not swept up in Obama-mania praised Obama as having unleashed a new generation of grass-roots activism (Goodman & Boggs 2008).

\(^2\) For a detailed account of the political logic of affect see p. 89.

\(^3\) While Francis Fukuyama has abandoned his original formulation of free-markets and liberal democracy as the evolutionary high-point of human historical development (2012) Obama’s depoliticization of economy fundamentally rests on this premise. It is not the facile free-market fundamentalism of the Washington Consensus but a Third Way neo-liberalism able to draw critical signifiers into his discourse of economy.
himself as a moral agent of ‘Empire’ (Hardt & Negri 2000) drawn from the ranks of the NGO class and personifying the universality of American liberal-democracy. The power of this identity politics and “authenticity” allows him to bring into his discourse certain anti or post capitalist signifiers emblematic of the new spirit, such as environmentalism and humanitarianism. The figure Obama casts is a pitch perfect response to the crisis of American neoliberalism able to call for a moral restoration of global capitalism and American imperial leadership, while overseeing the culmination of actually existing neo-liberalism, that is, the consolidation of financial class power. This new end of history was crucially dependent upon the new aspirational spirit of commodity fetishism, the depoliticization of economy and an unantagonistic liberal notion of the political.

What emerged as a political response to this liberal identity-politics triumphalism, monopolizing the antagonistic terrain of the post-financial crisis era in America, was the right wing populist rebellion known as the Tea Party. Defying expectations of a new liberal consensus, the Tea Party spoke in hostile terms of insurrection and existential threats while explicitly demarcating the economy as the site of the political. Rather than normative expectations of left mobilization in a time of capitalist crisis a protest movement arose on the far-right demanding more “free markets” and more deregulation while clinging to sentimental notions of the virtues of private property. The Tea Party saw in President Obama not simply a political rival but the embodiment of otherness and the enemy. This antagonism, widely characterized as the cultural anxiety of conservative White America⁴, was framed by the Tea Party in terms of political economy. Obama’s identity politics and discourse of the new spirit of capitalism and Empire were seen precisely as evidence of Obama’s socialist threat to the republic. The new spirit’s perfection of commodity fetishism to incorporate innate human qualities, a civil society politics and post if not anti capitalist signifiers, offends⁴

⁴ This critique is expounded by Charles Blow in the New York Times and many other liberals. Former US President Jimmy Carter stoked anger on the right by taking to the media to argue that the vociferous opposition to Obama ‘was based on racism’ (Spillius 2009).
those that are fully reconciled in ‘Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham’ (Marx 1887: 121). Paradoxically it is the free market populists of the Tea Party, described recently by the Australian Treasurer as ‘cranks and crazies’ representing ‘the biggest threat to the world’s biggest economy’ (McGuirk 2012), that are most effectively resisting actually existing neo-liberalism.

The Tea Party in this sense represents the dramatic return of the political in the post-financial crisis era as they embody the ontological necessity of antagonism in social signification. Chantal Mouffe’s distinction between politics and the political is critical here. The political is understood as the ‘dimension of antagonism that is internal to human relations’ (2005b: 101) while politics is the attempt to formalize and manage away this antagonism. Obama’s unantagonistic politics is precisely what necessitates the return of the political as ‘right-wing populist discourse is the very consequence of the “end of politics”’ (Mouffe 2005a: 51). Antagonism is central to any process of hegemonic articulation, in this instance it takes a populist form not as a remnant of history to be managed away, but as the return of history proper. The Tea Party thus has to be seen as correlative to Obama’s disavowal of antagonism and as an excess to liberalism’s notion of the political. In response to Obama’s moralization of politics the Tea Party construct an antagonistic political frontier demarcating an interior and exterior. As a properly populist movement the social bonds of the Tea Party, or chains of equivalence (Laclau 2005: 78) between the movement’s different parts (ie. libertarians, evangelicals, patriot and militia movements), can only be negatively defined in response to the enemy. In constructing a people that are universal the populists provide no positive content but are rather constituted by the spectral threat of the enemy. The fact that populism is a properly discursive phenomenon, corresponding to the logic of a hegemonic articulation, is evidenced in the affective investment in the signifier of the people. This mythic people elicits the fantasy of the impossible fullness of society as the lost objet petit a in which the populist’s jouissance is derived5. Thus the Tea

5 These Lacanian categories will be defined in Chapter Three. For now it is sufficient to say that objet petit a is the signifier in a hegemonic chain that becomes the object
Party divide the social space between the people of private property who preserve morality, freedom and virtue, and the overdetermined enemy of Obama who stands in for a multifarious, contradictory and fetishized evil. What the Tea Party’s particular elevation of economy and private property speaks to is a fundamental fetishism which defies Laclau’s theory of populism and hegemony as purely contingent. The hegemonic articulation of the Tea Party is contingent, in that this particular \textit{objet petit a} has emerged through the construction of difference and equivalence as the singular signifier able to stand in for the whole chain of equivalence. Nevertheless, it speaks to a political frontier that has not been transcended since the revolutionary founding of America. The Tea Party represent a reanimation of a certain indissoluble frontier in American politics. The fetishized man of property, besieged by the enemies of freedom, may be may be threatened by the railway monopolies, financial elites, communists, liberal government, ethnic minorities or welfare recipients - the variations are innumerable within this conflict over private property. The Tea Party in this sense have to be understood as rejecting the transformation of commodity fetishism, or the new spirit of capitalism, where the archetypal man of property has been superseded by a liberal cosmopolitan and post-capitalist aspirational discourse.

What is novel about the particular character of Tea Party populism is its emergence in and through the media field (Bourdieu 1996). With the contemporary Tea Party meme originating in a diatribe from a financial reporter on \textit{CNBC} which went viral, to \textit{Fox News} functioning as the principle agent of centralization and dissemination for the populists, the Tea Party represent a particular mediatized form of populism. While many critical of a radical investment. It is a source of \textit{jouissance} in that the signifier of “the people” or “Tea Party” promises an impossible reconciled social order. In chapter three I will develop the logic of the fetishistic investment in the people which sanctions transgressions and an obscene \textit{jouissance} in dehumanizing the enemy. The fetishistic logic of populism (Žižek 2008) is in contrast to Laclau’s notion of a temporary investment in an \textit{objet petit a} that is entirely contingent and dissoluble. The fetish is a blockage to such a fluid notion of hegemony.
observers have derided the Tea Party as simply the astro-turf foot soldiers of the Koch brothers empire or those indoctrinated by Rupert Murdoch’s propaganda machine *Fox News*, (Street & Dimaggio 2011), the logic of the political defies such functionalist explanations. In order to understand the materialization of the Tea Party and the political in the media field one needs to consider the specific practices and internal notions of autonomy and cultural capital in the field (Bourdieu 1996). In the media field can be observed a split between traditional notions of journalistic practice, grounded in the service of a liberal-democratic polity, and a deference to the popular and “the people” as a guarantor of meaning. The contemporary media field can be defined by the paradox of ‘mediatization’⁶ (Schulz 2004, Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999) whereby it assumes greater importance within the broader field of power while remaining very weakly autonomous. In the era of neo-liberal consensus, and with the diminution of traditional political party membership and organized labour, the media functions as the critical social symbolic space of neo-liberalism. As such the field is critical to neo-liberal political economy in bridging the social space and the field of power and engendering a biopolitical logic of affect. The Tea Party in this sense represent the dialectic of biopolitical production between the colonization of the social and forms of

⁶ The concept of mediatization will be critical to this thesis. Mediatization has generally been understood as the increasing subsumption of politics to a media logic of spectacle, performance and affect (Schulz 2004, Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). My own contribution to the concept pushes past this role of the media field in politics to consider the way in which social life has been fundamentally mediatized. Contemporary social life has become constituted by media, not merely in the private sphere of lifeworld, but in the realm of production. New media technologies are critical for the dissolution of the boundaries between work and play, while in social media the gap between self-realization and audience commodification is breaking down. It is in this sense that the media field can be identified as critical to the increasingly socialization of production or biopolitical production (Hardt & Negri 2009) where new social relations are constituted by capital. Mediatization and biopolitical production are understood as parallel developments with the media field functioning as a principal point of origin for this transformation of social life and production. The role of media in biopolitical production will be developed in Chapter Four.
resistance. They both embody biopolitical production, in performing the free and affective labour that consecrates the populist authenticity of Fox, while paradoxically mobilized precisely against the liberal cosmopolitanism of Empire.

What this thesis sets out to achieve is a rigorous theorization of the antagonistic frontier of contemporary American politics between Barack Obama and the Tea Party, as manifest in the media field. This moment demonstrates the critical impasse of populism and liberal depoliticization. Populism returns as liberalism’s repressed excess of antagonism, enacting a fundamental violence upon liberal notions of democracy, rationalism and universality. It is a violence liberalism both produces and is unable to defend itself from, so long as it disavows the political. The primary act of disavowal in Obama’s liberal discourse is a denial of antagonism at the site of economy. In line with new spirit of capitalism and commodity fetishism, the economy is seen as a neutral technological instrument that can be steered towards emancipatory, post-capitalist outcomes. The Tea Party populists mobilize specifically against these terms of Empire and the Third Way, seeing in this post-capitalist imagery a real “socialist” threat to their fetish of private property, rather than the perfection of commodity fetishism. It is in this way that the populists signal the centrality of economy to the political even if it functions in their ontology in fetishized, inverted terms. The Tea Party embody the new logic of economy and the biopolitical production of social life in their specifically mediatized character. The media field is here a critical site for the return of the political, not merely in facilitating populism as a discursive phenomenon, but as the space which bridges the social and the economic. The point at which passionate Tea Party protest becomes free labour performed in the service of Fox News is indistinguishable. In spite of this, Tea Partiers cannot be reduced as the pawns of Murdoch as they really do believe with full irrational, passionate intensity in their free market fetish. What is critically important in the return of the political in the media space is the challenge to liberal-democratic discourses. Populism, as the product of a lifeless liberalism, does not merely attempt to supplant liberal categories of democracy, universality and rationalism, but rather claims these notions as its
own. Tea Party discourse is replete with what I have termed *populist exceptionalism* which holds that the Tea Party is universal, rational, tolerant and democratic while their liberal enemy is not and thus subject to an explicit dehumanization. And while the Tea Party represents a proto-fascist resistance to depoliticization and Empire, it is essential to identify the openings for a new political articulation of universality in the media field that may seize the antagonistic terrain from a populist fetishism.

*Theoretical Map*

This thesis draws on a breadth of material and theoretical tools in order to bridge a gap between critical theory and political economy approaches to the media. If, as Ernesto Laclau claims, the theorization of populism represents the ‘royal road’ (2005: 67) to understanding the ontological constitution of the political, then this present entanglement should illuminate the importance of the media field as a site of the political. While Hardt & Negri’s (2000, 2004 & 2009) work on biopolitical production is crucial to grasping the contemporary political economy of the media, the specific site of media production remains under-theorized in their work as simply an institution of civil society that has become subsumed by the logic of Empire (Nichols 2011). Political economy approaches to this question of biopolitical production and audience commodification have understood this development as the new capacity for ‘infinite exploitation’ (Fuchs 2012: 636). Political economy adds to the analysis of biopolitical production and Empire in conceptualizing the media as a critical site of production as that which precisely connects the social space and production. In this sense political economy of the media takes on board the analysis of exploitation of social life without Hardt & Negri’s implication that the social and affective nature of contemporary production implies a crisis of control for capital. This thesis will retain the analysis of audience

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7 This notion of populist exceptionalism is a re-articulation of how the universal functions in populist ontology. What this term embodies is not simply the frustration of liberal universality by populism, but how in this case liberal universality is claimed by the Tea Party. The term highlights the major concern of this thesis, that is how a moribund liberalism both engenders the populist excess and is unable to defend itself from this closure of the universal.
commodification without the closed pessimism of political economy (Chomsky & Herman 1988, McChesney 1999) or conversely, sanguine conceptions of audience self-determination and teleological notions of the digital multitude (Kahn & Kellner 2004). Audience labour is understood in a dialectic between the colonization of social relations by capital and a dynamism that may resist its expropriation as audience commodity\(^8\). This allows political economy of the media to take the ‘ontological turn’ (Deuze 2011: 139) freeing it from deterministic readings of texts and audiences, while identifying active audience agency as critical in the socialization of production.

The populist reconfiguration of discourses within the field, and the specific logics of accumulation in media production, matter not simply as a measure of democratic vitality, but in shaping the nature of economy, politics and social life. As social life is increasingly lived in and through media, with the social relations constructed by media users colonized by capital, media texts themselves are a crucial site of the political. Laclau and Mouffe’s work on the political, and a discursive notion of hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Laclau 2005, Mouffe 2005a), are critical in understanding the media field as a site of rupture for the return of the political. While capital exploits the social relations created by new media technologies, and through the logic of commodification and individuation attempts to stifle social ties outside of commodity relations, the political as foundational to social signification defies such domestication. It is in this way that we can understand the return of the political and the potential for resisting Empire in the media field. This is not simply born of a new common condition that merely requires its identification by the multitude, but through a contingent process of hegemonic articulation where antagonism and the logics of difference and equivalence forge social bonds. Thus my work aims at identifying the political materiality of discourse, within the media field, in order to address the critical question of what is embodied in populism and the return of the political. Populism speaks to the

\(^8\) This point is drawn from Hardt & Negri for whom traditional mechanisms of control in the labour process ‘contradict the productivity of biopolitical labour’ (2004: 144). Although they are not dealing specifically with the audience commodity this characteristic of biopolitical labour applies to the audience commodity.
structural potential for emancipatory politics, yet in this instance antagonism is mobilized specifically to enact a violence upon liberal-democracy and its principle of universality. The Tea Party represents a rupture\(^9\) of the liberal depoliticized consensus of Empire, while specifically embodying its biopolitical form as an audience commodity par excellence. It is in this way that we can understand the potential for a truly political notion of universality\(^10\) to arise from the mediatized social space. The Tea Party speak to the ontological necessity of antagonism that defines the political, yet seeks a final ontological closure or the end of politics once “the people” are restored to their rightful place.

In examining the nature of this particular contradiction I will engage with the works of Laclau, Mouffe, Žižek, Hardt & Negri and Bourdieu in order to precisely identify the importance of the media field as a site for the return of the political. This thesis will attempt to bridge the concerns of the aforementioned theorists, and the academic disciplines of critical theory and political economy of the media, in developing an original approach to the problematics of the political, populism, biopolitical production and universality. Following from Laclau & Mouffe, my work takes the discursive turn in critical and political theory. The political and the struggle for hegemony involves the mechanics of signification, affective investment and the delineation of a people who are universal set against an outside. For Laclau (2005) the political and antagonism are irreducible and contingent

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\(^9\) This rupture is born of the political and antagonism that returns to deinstitutionalize a hegemonic order. I speak of a potential for a political notion of universality as this is entirely contingent upon the process of hegemonic articulation. There are no guarantees of struggle assuming any particular form whether as populists, the multitude or proletarians.

\(^10\) This would be a universality that recognizes its political/antagonistic basis while resisting the elevation of a fetishized, populist cultural identity as the universal. At present, liberal universality claims to expand rights without identifying a substance of equality upon which those rights are based. In the absence of such a political demarcation that identifies who these rights include and exclude, the market and its exclusions functions as the principle of universality.
with any particular link in a chain of equivalence able to stand in for the universal, a universal that is fallacious yet necessary in constructing the frontier. As a matter of praxis Mouffe does not follow her former colleague into his position on populism, which amounts to a theoretical self-refutation as Laclau claims that the populist cannot not hold the empty space of universality even though he is ready to designate “the people” as the universal subject position. Mouffe is critical in identifying the manner in which liberal depoliticization and post-politics engenders the return of the political and populism. However, with the model of agonistic pluralism her notion of political practice is still confined within what she calls ‘the long march through the political institutions’ (2012: 1). Laclau is committed to the political as a force of deinstitutionalization that exceeds the liberal consensus thus he is willing to make a compromise with populism with all of its potential for a fetishistic politics. This is a position, adroitly critiqued by Žižek, as unable to address the properly fetishistic logic of populism in which the fetish promises the impossible fullness of society and the end of politics as such. Both of these resolutions to the question of the political speak to a fundamental impasse in Laclau and Mouffe’s work. In positioning themselves against an analysis of political economy as the site of antagonism Laclau compromises with populist mystification, while Mouffe prioritizes the very political forms that depoliticize economy and provoke the return of the political.

In pushing past this theoretical deadlock I turn to Žižek (2006a & 2008b) to both critique the ultimate fetishistic logic of populism and to conceptualize political economy as the answer to Laclau’s notion of heterogeneity. At the heart of Laclau’s populist compromise is a diminution of political economy as simply one site in a heterogeneous social space in which any particular identity struggle might contingently hold the place of power. Where Žižek speaks to this contradiction in Laclau is in the conceptualization of political economy, which in its very subtraction from the current social constellation structures the new identity politics. The centrality of political economy is precisely what is disavowed in the new spirit of capitalism, while in the case of the Tea Party private property returns as the fetishized centre of their populist
ontology. In the present entanglement political economy is doubly inscribed as a certain indissoluble frontier, or the ontic residue of the revolutionary founding of America, and as a fetish overdetermined with meaning, which constructs the equivalent logic of the Tea Party across the social space. Žižek’s formulation of political economy underscores the critical distinction between he and Laclau. For Laclau the political and universality are fundamentally negative, a position that forces him into his populist stance, while for Žižek the political as an indeterminate rupture might offer an opening to a truly revolutionary notion of universality. It is this concern for the truly revolutionary event that leads Žižek into rehabilitating the notion of the proletariat. This thesis is driven by the desire to break the deadlock of liberal identity politics and populism and consider how a universal subject position might emerge from the mediatized social space. In the present moment Tea Party populism is monopolizing the passionate intensity of the political while a moribund liberalism is unable to articulate a properly political notion of the universal.

What I gain from this exchange between Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe is a conceptualization of political economy consistent with a discourse theory of hegemony. The political and the process of hegemonic articulation are contingent in the sense that there is no inevitability that antagonism at the site of economy will be articulated as such. In augmenting Žižek’s concern for political economy I turn to Hardt & Negri (2000, 2004 & 2009) and their theorization of biopolitical production. The concept is critical in grasping an essential component of contemporary production and the importance of the media field both in broader political economy and as a site for the return of the political. The media field is central to the convergence of the social space and economy as it collapses the distinctions between public and private, connects the social factory and inculcates a performative logic of spectacle, while simultaneously producing new affective social bonds. This is an operation entirely within capital as new media users construct the very social networks that are scrutinized by media corporations for the minutia of personal taste preferences. In this sense there is a certain relinquishing of authority by capital as it seeks to realize and colonize the full creative potential
of the social space. Thus subjects of biopolitical production construct their own social and affective networks around the logics of difference and equivalence creating potential openings to articulate a properly political notion of universality. And while the logic of biopolitical production and mediatization attempt to limit social connectivity to a process of self-commodification there is, in the discourses of mediatization, a certain concession of the constitutive power of user labour. It should be clear in my use of Hardt & Negri in describing this logic of production, one that is hegemonic in the media field, that I do not advance similar teleological arguments about resistance or the multitude. The realization of the multitude, or whatever form the universal subject might assume, will not materialize simply by virtue of the contradiction between forces and relations of production. The political, as it is understood in this thesis, is a moment of rupture\(^{11}\) potentially creating the conditions for an entirely new articulation of the revolutionary subject. This is not a mode of subjectivity already inscribed in capital but what Žižek defines as a properly proletarian mode of identification that seeks the ultimate destruction of its identity, not its fetishistic reification. The political can be contrasted to the politics of the multitude, as a particular group or locus of struggle may realize the universal. There is no necessary humanist moment of realization of a universal condition, rather the potential for a properly political notion of universality is entirely contingent and depends upon a voluntarist forging of social bonds through the logics of difference and equivalence.

Lastly in, identifying the importance of the media field as a critical site of biopolitical production and the return of antagonism I turn to the work of Bourdieu. The media field is simultaneously where new mediatized forms of populism emerge but also where liberal depoliticization is challenged. In

\(^{11}\) This notion of rupture and the political is understood by Laclau and Žižek as the return of the Lacanian Real, that is, an excess which defies symbolic representation and ‘as the impossible hard core which we cannot confront directly...[yet] always returns to its place’ (Žižek 2008: 127). This is a critical difference to the teleological argument of the multitude already existing in form and merely needing to free itself from a parasitic capital that is superfluous.
undertaking a close analysis of media texts as the principle terrain of struggle in the liberal/populist frontier I will identify just what is at stake in the populist claim to the universal. The media field is the crystallization of a certain discourse of modernity, professionalism and universality. At its most ideal the liberal media field is defined by the pursuit of unobjectionable universal truths that form the basis of a liberal democratic polity. This manner of liberalism may very well mask the interests of capitalist political economy, yet the discourse of the field maintains the universal horizon of politics. What is occurring in the Tea Party/Fox News convergence is not simply an attack on liberal universality but an attempt to claim the very universality of the media field. And while Hardt & Negri would dispute such a sociological demarcation of particular fields and spheres of political life, on the basis that biopolitical production has entirely collapsed such distinctions, my contention is that the media field and the process of mediatization have to be seen as the primary cause of this collapse. The emerging discursive terms of the new media field are critically important and materially productive, embodied in a new habitus of populist exceptionalism that threatens a final ontological closure of the universal. It is thus imperative to theorize the potential in the media field for a rupture that might allow the construction of a properly political notion of universality.

Thesis Outline
I begin in Chapter One by describing the particular political moment which simultaneously saw the ascent of Obama and the return of the political in the form of Tea Party populism. This has to be understood in the context of the critical juncture of neo-liberal political economy and the financial crisis. The Obama campaign perfectly embodied the logic of authenticity and social affect which defines the new spirit of capitalism. At the heart of this aspirational discourse is a post-capitalist politics that is effectively inscribed in the new commodity fetishism. Obama’s success can be seen as having deployed a liberal moral discourse that disavows antagonism and the political in the realm of the economy while overseeing the consolidation of financial class power. Tea Party discourse however is expressly political, demarcating an antagonistic frontier against Obama, government and liberals while explicitly
placing private property at the centre of their ontology. The Tea Party populists are in fact reacting to the perfection of commodity fetishism or the perceived threat to their fetish of a people morally reconciled in private property.

In Chapter Two I identify how populism and the political manifest a deep contradiction in contemporary neo-liberalism. American liberal-democracy both engenders the populist backlash and provides the conceptual categories necessary for the privileged people to emerge. Central to any crystallization of power of relations is the demarcation of a people against an outside. In the case of the American ‘Republic of Property’ (Hardt & Negri 2009) bourgeois equality of condition, as the substance of equality, and the people of private property are set against its enemies. Central to the timelessness of this people, or man of property, is a republican civic virtue which is based precisely in the institution of bourgeois private property. A liberal universalist discourse which disavows this political foundation and attempts to depoliticize economy is not merely ineffectual but draws the ire of the people of property.

Chapter Three is concerned with the specific ontological constitution of populism as a political logic and act of social signification. Populism is a discursive demarcation of a universal people constructed through the logics of difference and equivalence and the affective investment in the people as the source of jouissance. In contrast to Laclau’s notions of heterogeneity and contingency this chapter establishes the ultimate fetishistic logic of populism. Populism is a properly negative phenomenon that reifies the specter of the overdetermined outsider in the belief that the people, in all their virtue, really exist with privileged access to the universal (Žižek 2008b). The fetishistic logic of disavowal endows the populist with ability to validate contradictory beliefs and actions, engage in acts of transgression and obscene jouissance, while transposing on to the enemy their own inner turmoil. Fully reconciled in their fetish the populist experiences no need to be abandon it even in the face of rational exposition demystifying the fetish. It is this stubborn logic of the fetish that precludes the contingency and rupture of hegemony. Additionally, this chapter proceeds to theorize economy and the ontic residue of the original
demarcation of the Republic of Property as central to the fetish of the man of property that can be tracked across the various incarnations of American populism.

From the theorization of populist ontology and discourse I turn to the specific consideration of the media field in Chapter Four as a site of convergence between the social space and the economic through biopolitical production. The particular mode of accumulation in the media field, that is the hegemony of the audience commodity of immaterial labour, and the discourses of mediatization and user self-realization, are fundamentally transforming notions of the polity. Validation of journalistic practice has less to do with abstract notions of liberal-democracy but rather the popular and the performance of authenticity. In this space previous notions of liberal universality and the field do not simply lurch towards populism but rather user agency is creating equivalential logics across the mediatized public space. The media field is critical in collapsing the distinctions between public and private, social life and affective labour as the very terms of self realization involve the performative embodiment of affect, spectacle and the construction of social networks that function as free labour for capital. This is precisely the biopolitical logic at work in the Tea Party’s relationship to Fox News. The Tea Party is a movement bridged across the social space by Fox who perform the free labour that consecrates Fox’s populist brand authenticity. The Tea Party represent Fox’s attempt to define the field in terms of a populist authenticity that supersedes a faltering liberal universality. It is in this sense that the media field is not simply the space to measure the impact of the liberal/populist entanglement, rather it is the site of this very battle.

In Chapter Five I outline my method leading into my media analysis. I explain both the process of selecting texts and media outlets, and a theoretical justification as to how my sample reflects distinct regions of the media field. Central to Bourdieu’s notion of the field is a bifurcation between forms of capital in the field. These poles of valorization pertain to economic capital, that is the economic power of the media in servicing the broader political economy and field of power, and the cultural capital that is accrued through
exemplifying the field’s notion of autonomy. The three chapters of media analysis define the contours of the contemporary field and where the struggles to redefine the field and liberal universality are taking place. My own theory of mediatization allows me to map the field, from the heights of the field’s symbolic power to the social space, and conduct cross media analysis. The New York Times as a broadsheet is the standard bearer of the high modern liberal cultural capital of the field. In contrast Fox News represents the attempt to collapse the poles of valorization in the field with a populist commercialism and penetration of the mediatized social space. The two social media selected, Tea Party Nation and The Young Turks, symbolize the potential for new political articulations to emerge from the mediatized social space.

In Chapter Six I undertake an analysis of the New York Times’ coverage of the Tea Party across 2009-2011. The Times’ claim to cultural capital in the field is based on defending the ‘high modernist’ (Hallin 1992) paradigm of liberal journalism. As the Tea Party are militantly opposed to just such a liberal cultural institution, the Times’ coverage of the Tea Party is indicative of the response of the American liberal political class in the face of the populist challenge. What my analysis finds is the prevalence of a humanist/pathology narrative dichotomy in the Times’ reporting of the movement, with both frames failing to identify the properly political dynamic of the Tea Party. Symptomatic of an inability to defend liberalism and its notion of the field, the very rhetorical tools of liberal journalism are used to humanize the Tea Party as the embodiment of a grass roots democratic authenticity. This manner of reporting is unable to identify where the Tea Party exceed the normative bounds of political discourse and pose a substantive threat to the liberal democratic consensus. The pathology frame reduces the Tea Party to an epiphenomenon of deep-seated cultural anxieties or economic insecurity that might be rationally managed away by technocratic means. Neither frame is able to conceptualize the Tea Party as a properly political manifestation of the contradictions embedded in American liberal democracy and the Republic of Property. 2011 marks a distinct shift in the liberal narrative as the Tea Party assumed political power in the US House of Representatives and threatened to
plunge the nation into a manufactured debt crisis. At this point the Tea Party are designated beyond the pale and a liberal cultural derision pervades in the *Times*’ coverage. This inability to properly explain the Tea Party phenomenon in political terms is symptomatic of the liberal/populist deadlock. At precisely the point where the Tea Party is politically ascendant, liberals retreat into a cultural superiority, allowing them to disavow the fact that liberalism proper is precisely what is under attack.

Having identified the *New York Times* as the pole of cultural capital in the field Chapter Seven turns to *Fox News* and the Glenn Beck Program as embodying the tendency of mediatization that effectively collapses the distinction between the poles of valorization in the field. *Fox* simultaneously embodies a populist authenticity while perfecting the audience commodity, not merely in terms of consumer information but in securing the free and affective labour of Tea Party protestors for the *Fox News* brand. While the hegemony of the audience commodity of immaterial labour extends across the field and various media formats, with Glenn Beck and the Tea Party this reaches its apogee. The Glenn Beck program was central in bridging the social space and the heights of *Fox’s* symbolic power, as it served as a flagship of authenticity. Beck dispensed with what little pretension *Fox* still maintains to the cultural capital of journalistic field in staging various mediatized forms of populist rebellion. From pseudo-political events, Beck’s populist revision of history, the brutal dehumanization of the people’s enemies and the calls for a moral and spiritual rebirth; the logics of antagonism, difference, equivalence, fetishism and disavowal are in full force. What is critical however is the manner in which *Fox’s* populist commercialism does not simply attempt to supersede the liberal values of the field but claims exclusive access to notions of the truth and universality.

Lastly in Chapter Eight I will identify social media as a ‘space of possibles’ (Bourdieu: 234) in the field representing an opening to the dynamic logics of the political and the social. The colonization of social and political life in the form of *Fox’s* harnessing of the affective labour of Tea Partiers is ultimately contingent. The political cannot be contained by the imperatives of *Fox News*
or the Republican party, something evidenced by Glenn Beck’s exit from Fox. The social networking site Tea Party Nation is perhaps the purest distillation of this political excess. Functioning as the most “authentic” Tea Party group, uncompromised by the backing of lobbyists or corporate funders, the social media network precisely embodies the political and social dynamics of Tea Party populism as a mediatized phenomenon. This is a space of pure fetishistic jouissance and antagonism in which Tea Party members forge affective bonds through acts of transgression and the unrestrained dehumanization and ridicule of the enemy. Finally in considering the Tea Party as a rupture in the field, or more specifically a proto-fascist resistance to Empire born of biopolitical labour, I will spend some time sketching the possibilities for liberal-left alternatives in the field. While there does not exist on the left the same symmetry of interests between a broadcaster such as Fox and a movement like the Tea Party, The Young Turks network and Occupy Wall Street offer hopeful signs of what a left-liberal reclamation of the field and universality might look like. The Young Turks network operates as a cable news and web-broadcaster where an active mediatized audience and membership, named the TYT Army, are mobilized around concrete ethico-political acts. The Army is consolidated by an antagonistic delineation of the outside (corporations and their political servants) while members affectively invest in a political notion of liberal universality that is supplemented by the ludic aspect of new media cultures. This is an important indication of how new discourses of universality may be constructed in the mediatized social space around an antagonistic frontier against capital. While The Young Turks attempts to recapture principles of public antagonistic struggle as central to a liberal universality, there is no guarantee that such a mediatized community, bridged across space and time, does not devolve into a private economy of jouissance.

The importance of the theoretical engagement framed by this thesis, namely between critical theory and political economy of the media, is the ability to

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My definition of an ethico-political act is based on Mouffe’s (2005b) distinction between a moralization of politics and principles of struggle against a concrete set of institutional practices.
conceptualize the return of the political in the media field. This thesis offers an original contribution to the field of political economy of the media in theorizing the media space as the critical site of biopolitical production and the political. New and social media practices, that are essential in expanding biopolitical production, are not inherently democratic outside of crude notions of populist interactivity. However these practices exceed a totalizing logic of commodification and offer a potential for new political articulations. Political economy approaches have rightly identified biopolitical production in the media field as the expansion of exploitation approaching the real subsumption of labour. While I reject teleological notions of resistance to mediatized exploitation there is a contradiction born of the necessary surrender of control in media production that opens up the space to the return of the political. Whatever critical possibilities exist they must emerge through a contingent process of hegemonic articulation where networked community members identify the outside to be resisted and affectively invest in an antagonistic notion of a people or political subjectivity. The ability to condense communication and bridge users through affect may either unleash a populist jouissance or be put to use in critical media practices. Thus the reclamation of the universality of journalism and the media field must be properly political in delineating between those with access to the universal and those who are excluded on the basis of ethico-political principles, as opposed to fetishized notions of the people and their enemy. In the case of TYT there is an attempt, however imperfect, to define the people on the basis of an objective criteria of political economy, that is citizens against corporations and their servants. This demarcation informs the network’s critical media practices of standing with the exploited, encouraging critical reception and advancing social struggles. It is here where we can map the critical potential of the media field to realize the political as a radical, potentially revolutionary moment where an antagonistic public emerges with a truly political notion of universality.
Chapter One – Obama and the New Spirit of Capitalism

Introduction
The remarkable ascendancy of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States of America, in the shadows of the financial crisis, was in no small part due to the effective discursive response to the ideological crisis of American neo-liberalism. With the disgracing of the once venerable Allan Greenspan and the irreconcilable gap between a strident neo-liberalism and the lived experience of working Americans, Obama’s victory marked a moment of openness in the battle for America’s political trajectory. The Obama campaign presented itself as a moral correction to the worst excesses of capitalism and adventurism under George W. Bush. This success was crucially dependent on formulating aspirational discourses about the redemptive qualities of American power and global leadership as well as the emancipatory and transformative power of a morally restored capitalism. It is in this critical ideological maneuver that Obama can be seen as the Third Way neo-liberal par excellence. In dealing with the harsh realities of neo-liberal financialization facing most Americans, the specific structures of political economy are displaced through an articulation of desired social and ecological outcomes.

What was properly transformative about Obama was the ability of his campaign to embody the commodity logic of the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). The new spirit of capitalism can be defined as the attempt to incorporate an anti-capitalist supplement to neo-liberalism. The ‘theological niceties’ (Marx 1887: 46) of the commodity have been extended to incorporate what Lutz has described as the ‘socialist ideal of autonomy’ (2009: 423). The Third Way’s rejection of market fundamentalism as the structuring principle of the social, in favor of instrumentalizing markets for social democratic outcomes (Giddens 1998), has allowed neo-liberalism to recast itself as a redemptive and emancipatory project. Responding to the desire for “authenticity”, Obama’s identity politics, his work as a community organizer and the organizational form of his campaign, were all used to
capture and project the aspirational potential of a left politics. The expression of a progressive transformation of American civil society, embracing the internationalist causes of human rights and climate change, managed to supersede a left or anti-capitalist discourse of the financial crisis. This universalist and moral, as opposed to political, discourse of the economy belies the Third Way buttressing of financial class power and the ideological perfection of the commodity that is attained through evoking the socialist imaginary. The commodity fetishism of the new spirit thus not only engenders pre and post-capitalist fantasies but a civil society movement logic of political transformation.

The return of the political and antagonism in the space opened by the neoliberal crisis has come in the form of the right wing populist resistance to Obama. It is in the delineation of a virtuous, besieged people against a radical outsider or other that populism speaks to the political, the ontological necessity of antagonism, the fetishistic character of populism and the interspersion of economy among the sites of the political\(^\text{13}\). Obama has been designated the radical “other” of populist ire not just in racial terms\(^\text{14}\) but in a

\(^{13}\) The question of the political and populism will be addressed systematically Chapters Two and Three. For now it is sufficient to indicate that the political is both an ontological category, that is the aspect of antagonism that is constitutive of social relations and signification, and as a certain ontic residue or social sedimentation. In chapter two I explain that central to the American ‘Republic of Property’ (Hardt & Negri 2009) is a certain indissoluble political frontier, between the people of property and their enemies, which all incarnations of American populism have failed to supersede. In Chapter Three I discuss the use of the term “populist” by political commentators to denote a rhetorical style that appeals to some notion of a common people. Beyond this vague characterization populism can be ultimately defined as a fetishistic politics, one which believes in the impossible fullness of society once “the people” defeat their enemies and are restored to the seat of power.

\(^{14}\) The predominant narrative of the Tea Party offered by liberals and leftists has been that of conservative white angst in the face of the inevitable triumph of multiculturalism. While the presence of Obama “witch doctor” signs at Tea Party rallies certainly bare this out it is important to recognize a recalibration of racial politics in Tea Party ontology. Specifically the civil rights struggles are appropriated
battle internal to capital over the spirit or ideological content of capitalism. In response to the Third Way's discourse of a moral intervention to capitalist excess the Tea Party take the bait of what Žižek calls 'liberal communism' (2006b) imagining Obama as a real communist. In reaction to this threat of the outsider, that in fact embodies neo-liberal universality, the populists retreat into a fetishized notion of the people, capitalism and the American revolution. The key metaphor for the people of the revolution is Thomas Jefferson’s yeoman laboring within a classical liberal, productivist and frontier notion of private property (see Chapter Two). The Tea Party’s fetish of a capitalism that is a self-sustaining and moral system, allows it to displace any internal contradiction on to the outsider, who in this case is made alien simply by identifying capitalism’s moral failing. In this way the Tea Party typify populism as a political discourse in which antagonism is constitutive of political identity while placing economy, not as one site among others, but centrally within the realm of the political. What is properly fetishistic, de-politicizing and reactionary about populist identity is the ultimate vision of political closure in which the ontological is forever reconciled with an ontic form, in this case the fetish of frontier private property.

The Bush Malaise and America’s Moral Crisis
The principle discursive response, formulated by the Obama campaign, to the neo-liberal crisis was that of a general condition of American complacency and moral degradation synonymous with the Bush malaise. While Obama evoked powerful images of American decline this discourse was limited strictly to politics on a ‘moral register’ (Mouffe 2005b: 75) in which problems are not about political choices and antagonisms but questions of morality. Obama’s frontier or notion of a people was strictly moral as opposed to as part of the lineage of the Tea Party in spite of the fact that the Tea Party are predominately the same forces that opposed civil rights legislation. The racism of the Tea Party is best described as a neo-liberal racism that is not demarcated specifically by race but by the fantasmatic network of big government liberals, academics, the urban poor and welfare recipients leeching the productive people of the Tea Party. This notion of productivism will be elaborated upon in Chapters Two & Three, while neo-liberal racism, civil rights and the Tea Party in Chapters Six & Seven.
political in the sense that an all-inclusive universal morality would restore American exceptionalism. This has to be contrasted to the Tea Party’s demarcation of not just a specific antagonistic frontier and people but concrete practices and contexts of struggle and protest against government. To the extent that Obama did draw a frontier between the people and an outside, the toxic figure of Bush was most expedient to crucially spare the substance of neo-liberalism. Upon Obama’s election this frontier dissolved with the administration’s mantra of ‘looking forward not backward’ (Krugman 2009c) and fatefuly taking ownership of the US economy with the words; ‘give it to me’ (Kuhnhenn 2009).

In campaigning Obama spoke in touching detail of the plight of American workers in the face of home foreclosures, de-industrialization, shameless corporations and a complacent political elite. In one of his many vignettes Obama spoke of ‘a man in Indiana’ who ‘has to pack up the equipment he’s worked on for twenty years and watch it shipped off to China, and then chokes up as he explains how he felt like a failure when he went home to tell his family the news’ (2008d). In positioning himself alongside the victims of neo-liberalization Obama articulates a vision of American reconciliation without cutting the financial and managerial classes adrift, imploring the need to restore prosperity ‘not just to the CEO but the secretary and the janitor; not just the factory owner but the men and women who work the factory floor’ (2008e). Obama rejects the populist dichotomy of Main Street and Wall Street stating; ‘if this financial crisis taught us anything, it’s that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street while Main Street suffers – in this country, we rise or fall as one nation; as one people’ (Obama 2008f). Wall Street firms as leading backers of his campaign (Centre For Responsive Politics 2008) escape sustained criticism, rather the crisis is discursively constructed as born of a moral waywardness. This evidenced in the ‘failure of responsibility – from Wall Street to Washington’ to understand ‘that behind every dollar traded or leveraged, there is a family looking to buy a house, pay for an education, open a business, or save for retirement’ (Obama 2010). In essence the American dream has been put at risk by suspect moral behavior which threatens the very substance of American exceptionalism.
Reclaiming American Exceptionalism
What is necessary to disavow the structural antagonism of neo-liberalism between the secretary and the CEO is a potent discourse of universality which is crucially tied to the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). This will be developed further in the coming section suffice to say for now this pertains to inscribing in capitalism and the commodity new emancipatory potential. In framing the financial crisis as born of the complacency, arrogance and the moral decline of America under Bush, Obama claims privileged access to the values of American exceptionalism. Obama’s personal story and rise to prominence are held as evidence of the revolutionary universality of America as not merely a nation state but the embodiment of liberal democratic ideals. In 2004 Obama was propelled into the national spotlight, at the Democratic Convention, where he spoke of his father’s humble origins ‘herding goats’ in Kenya, and states that ‘I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story...and that in no other country on earth is my story even possible’ (Obama 2004). The articulation of the “authentic” and personal account of the global reach of American values allows Obama to stand in as the transcendent figure of American exceptionalism, as ‘the global affirms nation rather than contradicting it’ (Toal 2009: 382). It is his very multicultural background, global upbringing and improbable story that validates the universality of American liberal-democracy. For Obama, the ability to transcend domestic and international divisions rests in America’s unique leadership potential in embodying universal principles; ‘our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope’ (Obama 2008f). In addressing post 9/11 American foreign military engagement he echoes Lincoln stating that ‘The America I know is the last best hope for that child looking up at a helicopter...We can be what that child needs us to be: the relentless opponent of terror and tyranny, and the light of hope to the world’ (2007a). What is poignant here is through his own improbable story as a global citizen we are led to feel as though that child could be him and he is therefore equipped to renew American power in global affairs even after the disasters of neo-conservatism (2007b). This confident re-articulation of American exceptionalism is crucial to maintain America’s
global economic leadership ensuring the dollar’s status as reserve currency, the role of Wall Street in recycling petro-dollars and US hegemony in supranational financial institutions.

It is the confluence of both restoring America’s global leadership from the strident imperialism of Bush and disavowing antagonism through a discourse of universality that Obama embodies the logic of Empire (Hardt & Negri 2000) and Third Way neo-liberalism. Empire constitutes a three-tiered structure of power descending from the supranational institutions of neo-liberalism (under the auspices of the US), transnational corporations and finance capital, and lastly a semblance of global civil society (ibid: 309-11). NGOs, human rights and civil society groups are integrated into this new order playing the crucial ideological role of acting as the ‘moral’ agents (ibid: 37) of global capitalism. The Third Way and Empire share discourses of a liberal-democratic end of history, cosmopolitanism, ‘global civil society’ and a ‘new transnational democracy’ (ibid: 7). Obama has positioned himself as a leader drawn from the ranks of those moral agents, as a community organizer, who is able to re-instill in global capitalism redemptive and emancipatory potential, while securing the ultimate interests of finance capital. It is this ideological work and the incorporation of critical signifiers that has allowed Empire to colonize the social imaginary as biopolitical labour. Obama has sought to characterize his project as building ‘bottom-up prosperity’ (2008b)

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15 Obama has been blasted by the populist right for seeking a more humble leadership role for the US in global coalitions. One of the most egregious offences of his 2009 “global apology tour” was the relativizing of American exceptionalism: ‘I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism’ (Kirchick 2009).

16 Cosmopolitanism has a very specific meaning here despite Empire’s discourse of universality. This Cosmopolitan class represent the convergence in Empire between finance capital and humanitarianism. The most emblematic figure here is George Soros the hedge fund manager and financier who made his billions in the floating of the British pound. Soros exemplifies the philanthropic concerns of Empire in funding various liberal civil society NGOs throughout the world. Soros’ class can be said to be cosmopolitan while the victims of finance capital do not enjoy this universality.
while also being capable of restoring a global sense of purpose in ‘come(ing) together to save this planet’ (2008c) and in addressing global humanitarian concerns 17.

What is crucial in this ideological re-calibration or moral restoration of neo-liberal capitalism is the precise manner in which a cosmopolitan politics of heterogeneity is coupled to the subtraction of economy from the political. Taking Harvey’s (2005) definition of neo-liberalism as the restoration of financial class power, as opposed to a principled theoretical practice, one can see the Third Way as the ‘culmination’ (Harvey 2009) of the neo-liberal project. While the financial crisis has forced state interventions that have been dubbed neo-Keynesian (Giles 2008), including Obama’s modest stimulus 19, the power of central bankers has been dramatically expanded. Little has been done to effect a substantive class compromise or to re-finance the state through progressive taxation, effectively ushering in the second round of the crisis in the sovereign debt panic from late 2009. Obama’s economic team of Geithner, Summers, Rubin, Volcker and Goolsbee have hardly recanted their ideology, affirming a consolidated Third Way neo-liberalism. Obama thus has to be seen as the embodiment of Empire’s neo-liberal universalism in sustaining the vital interests of finance capital through a discourse which disavows antagonism in the economic and places aspirational potential within global capitalism. The revulsion against precisely the ideological tenets of Empire and actually existing neo-liberalism is what allows us to observe in the

17 On the night of his election Obama addressed those “huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of our world – our stories are singular, but our destiny is shared” (2008f). During his inauguration speech he spoke of the intent to “work alongside” poor nations “to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to the suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world’s resources without regard to effect” (2009).

19 Nobel Laureate Paul Krugman (2009a) was an outspoken critic of the scale of the stimulus and the fact that 40% of the stimulus was in the form of tax cuts, which, while having a dubious effect on spending, fits the neo-liberal rubric of low taxation.
Tea Party the return of the political, in relation to the site of economy, even if this is in inverted and fetishized terms.

_The New Spirit of Capitalism_

Obama’s moral discourse of the economy can be understood not merely in its disavowal of antagonism but in its correspondence to the new spirit of capitalism. Boltanski & Chiapello’s (2005) remarkable sociological study of the field of management and the reorganization of work in the face of the struggles by new social movements delineates a critical historical rupture and a distinct ideological turn in capitalism. Beginning with the struggles of ‘68 they identify two salient critiques of capitalism: the “artistic critique” of students and new social movements, and the “social critique” of trade unions. What was crucial for capital in finding new ‘moral supports’ and ‘mechanisms for justice’ (27) was the harnessing of new energies through the partial embrace of the artistic critique. In response to centralized industrial planning of the Ford/Taylorist economy, the artistic critique denounced ‘alienation’, ‘in-authenticity’, ‘hierarchical power’, ‘the absence of creativity’ and the ‘poverty of everyday life’ (170). In contrast the social critique associated with unions, social democrats or communist parties could not transcend the model of state paternalism, increasingly attacked as authoritarian. Thus, the new spirit, or ideological configuration of neo-liberalism, has allowed capital to reinvent itself as a moral and social project, creating a ‘libertarian way of making profit... transcending capitalism, thereby transcending anti-capitalism as well’ (201).

What is essential for the purposes of this thesis is an understanding of this rupture and ideological recalibration as inscribed and materialized in the new commodity fetishism. For Boltanski & Chiapello, the ideological force of the new spirit lies in the promise of the common good that coincides ‘with people’s moral experience of daily life’ (14) and secures a rational consent to an ‘economic humanism’ (Chiapello & Berland 2003: 143). One gets the sense from this argument that this rational consent might be revoked if the lived experiences of people’s lives fail to conform to the aspirational ideals of the new spirit. The logic of affective investment and fetishism (see Chapter Three)
however defy such teleological formulations about the ultimate humanist content of the aspirations of ‘68\textsuperscript{20}. What this reading of the new spirit as a humanist project frustrated or co-opted fails to grasp is that the displacement between the aspirations and instrumentalization of such struggles is ‘original and constitutive’ (Žižek 1999a). The demands of ‘68 themselves are not reducible to an essential content, humanist or otherwise, but are as Laclau would put it ‘catachrestical’ (2005: 72). Any demand or signification of notions such as justice or equality are incomplete and are only accorded meaning in relation to a political frontier. Thus the demands of ‘68 may be thought of as either anti-capitalist or embodying the new spirit depending on the particular articulation of economy.

What is offered in the new commodity and what makes it properly fetishistic is the realization of these demands for authenticity, self-fulfillment and the common good in the commodity itself. Boltanski & Chiapello have identified in the new commodity the ability to invoke a sense of authenticity and higher purpose through imbuing ‘hidden meanings and qualities’ (446), a certain uncoded openness in its determinations and suggestion of pre-market relations. Žižek’s well known examples of organic food and Starbucks are illustrative of the new consumer who is implored to buy a product as the ‘authentic fulfillment of my true Self’ (2009b: 53). The new commodity at this point while placing ‘the most specific qualities of human beings...directly in the pursuit of profit’ (Boltanski & Chiapello: 465), elicits the subject’s desire for ‘socialist autonomy’ (Lutz 2009: 422). Lutz writes that as capital expands the range of consumption it develops the ‘aesthetic sensibilities’ of the subject approaching the ‘many sided relationship to the world’ (2009: 423) of socialist autonomy. In channeling the aesthetic concerns of the artistic critique the socialist imaginary is inscribed in the fetishistic promise of the new

\textsuperscript{20} Later in this thesis when it comes to the question of biopolitical production and the multitude I make a similar distinction between humanism and the logic of hegemonic articulation. The very being in common of new forms of social labour is not enough to realize any humanist or emancipatory potential. The political moment requires a forging of equivalences, the identification of a political frontier and the affective investment in a truly universal subject position.
commodity. This ideological maneuver is squarely opposed to the in-authentic bourgeois notion of autonomy of ‘show[ing] others who you are by consuming’ (Resnick & Wolf 2010: 176) and the crass commodity fetishism that presents capital as ‘the very fount of human freedom’ (Lutz 2009: 421). Thus the efficacy of the new commodity fetishism lies in the appearance of transcending of capital.

It is worth emphasizing here that the commodity does not merely reify displaced humanist aspirations but at the height of fetishism practices a demystification of the commodity. As Žižek writes the ‘secret’ of commodity fetishism is not the ‘hidden kernel’ the form belies but the persistence of the form itself (1989: 4). The rational bourgeois subject knows very well that ‘the commodity-money is nothing but a reified form of the appearance of social relations’ (1999) but nevertheless treats the commodity as its own special entity of ‘sublime materiality’ (1989: 12). The fetishistic disavowal of the new spirit lies in a certain critique of commodity relations that knows very well of the inauthenticity, environmental degradation and deprivation born of commodification, but nevertheless imagines the new commodity as building global solidarities and a better world. The new commodity fetishism not only elicits the socialist imaginary but feigns a self-reflexive critique of commodification. The co-option of critique and its culmination in the new commodity form is not thought of here as an unproblematic even development within capital. However any genuine reclamation of the demands of ‘68 will have to deal with the stubborn persistence of the fetishized commodity form and construct an antagonistic frontier that traverses the site of economy.

Obama and the new Commodity Fetishism
The campaign of Barack Obama showed a keen sensitivity to the new commodity logic in presenting his candidacy in the terms of redemptive authenticity and self-fulfillment. ‘Brand Obama’ has been described by business magazine Fast Company as open to ‘the way consumers communicate with one another’ while recognizing ‘their desire for “authentic” products’ (McGirt 2008). Obama is described as an ‘Open Brand’ that is
‘personal’, ‘engaging’ and networked so that consumers ‘get constant feed back from the campaign and each other’ (ibid). Literary critique David Pease (2009) has similarly identified in Obama an openness that functions as a depository of aspirations and desires:

Barack Obama is a man of dreams, a figure who solicits fantasy work. He knows how to transpose waking dream work into a recognizable representation of a goal...he condensed all of those dream objects into a person whereby he did not have to do anything except address the audience as you. “You.” However you project me, I will be that projection, that fantasy projection, for you.

It is no wonder then that the Obama campaign and its floating signifier candidate claimed two top prizes at the world’s largest advertising awards (Sweney 2009). The authenticity and redemptive power of the Obama brand stems from his remarkable personal story, his experience as a community organizer and the articulation of a grass-roots movement logic, particularly in the online realm. The phenomenal online apparatus developed around his campaign, which facilitated an unprecedented amount of small donations and enlisted the services of thousands, was described as the creation of a new grass-roots community, online and beyond. In facilitating the active participation and creative engagement of supporters through MyBarackObama.com \(^{21}\) and other social networking sites, the campaign positioned itself as part of the ‘free and open-source software movement’ with Obama, ‘the first real “wiki-candidate”’, serving as a ‘conduit for decentralized collaboration’ (Cohen 2008). In merging the innovative organizational form of his campaign with his personal story, Obama is able to explain his candidacy as the fulfillment of a generation. The campaign’s slogan “Yes We Can” perfectly embodied the logic of self fulfillment as Obama represents the best of ourselves. Throughout the campaign’s victories Obama constantly reiterates an inspiring movement logic that marks it as a transcendent and authentic

\(^{21}\) Since the end of the campaign the site has been renamed ‘Organizing for America’, while the header reads; “Because it’s About YOU”.
political moment. At the Democratic National Committee (DNC) he reinforces a sense personal agency, ‘this election has never been about me. It’s about you’ (2008d), while on election night we are told that ‘this is your victory’ (2008e). Perhaps the most evocative statement of Obama’s politics of personal redemption is the Native American Hopi maxim, ‘we are the ones we’ve been waiting for’ (2008a). Here we receive the message that emancipation is ours to be had, through our own ambitions that are reflected in the vehicle of his candidacy. In embodying the commodity logic of the new spirit, Obama invokes all of the aspirational qualities of America, offers a privatized, civil society and voluntarist mode of political action and mobilization that is palpable and instills in the consumer/individual the message that ‘we (You) are the change we seek’ (2008a).

One cannot grasp precisely how this typifies the new spirit of commodity fetishism without reference to biopolitical and affective labour (Hardt & Negri 2009: 144). Biopolitical labour is that which places intimate social relations and affective relationships directly in the sphere of production. In the media field the very experience of social life through social networks such as Facebook is used to compile sophisticated consumer profiles in the service of capital. What is clear in the Obama campaign’s ability to embody authenticity and aspirational potential is the harnessing of free labour from supporters. At first this appears as an obvious point for surely every successful political campaign is built on volunteers sacrificing their time, but as I will argue in Chapter Four, Obama’s success was built on a specifically mediatized form of labour (Schulz 2004, Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). The media field has emerged as the critical social space of neo-liberalism, able to mediate virtual publics and perform aspects of civic life once carried out in the public city space. The Obama campaign channeled new forms of virtual civic activism, social networks, wiki and mash-up culture in driving its campaign. What allowed the campaign to embody authenticity and speak to the fetishistic projections of media users was a certain relinquishing of control and empowerment of users. This is not dissimilar to the new spirit of capitalism’s flattening of management hierarchies and discourses of worker autonomy which have allowed for new forms of exploitation and the extension of production into the
biopolitical realm. What is critical here is the centrality of the media field to biopolitical production. The hegemony of authenticity in consumption and the collapse of distinctions between consumption and production is born specifically of mediatized social life. It is clearly demonstrable that notions of cosmopolitanism, or grass-roots civil society politics and the being in common of social media are not enough to materialize a genuine substantive politics of the multitude. What is missing is the political.

The Populists Shrugged
The extent to which Obama’s candidacy can be read as the embodiment of the new spirit of capitalism is discernible by the populist backlash which explicitly rejects the ideological contortions necessary to sustain neo-liberalism. It is here that we encounter the limits of the new spirit’s emancipatory gesturing and the problem of the political. The populists are principally opposed to Obama’s moral discourse of the crisis of capitalism and all inclusive notion of reconciliation, preferring instead a fiercely antagonistic political discourse. Despite the ultimate mystification of the political in the Tea Party’s fetishistic attachment to a frontier notion of property, they speak to ‘the ontological need to express social division’ (Laclau 2005: 88). This has to be contrasted to the abstract universalism and morality of the Third Way. The populists delineate a specific people who are engaged in antagonistic struggle with economy central to its ontology. While the Tea Party discourse is political in opposing the post-politics of the Third Way, it is populist in the strict sense of the fetishist inversion of the site of economy. The populist backlash opposes actually existing neo-liberalism only in the sense that it threatens their fetish of a people reconciled in a frontier notion of private property. It is in this way that we can understand the Obama/populist frontier as a battle for the ideological content of capitalism as the Tea Party reject the ideological perfection of the commodity which imperils the sanctity of their fetish. The Tea Party are those who are invested in ‘Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham’ (Marx: 121) as a fully reconciled moral and political system. The Third Way/new spirit’s disavowal of the vulgar bourgeois notion of autonomy which is embodied in the commodity fetishism of ‘unlimited consumption and material enrichment’ (Lutz 2009: 421), is precisely what provokes the fetishist to denounce the
Third Way as outsider and socialist. While the populist othering of Obama as socialist clearly encapsulates a certain cultural anxiety in conservative America, it has to be seen within the symptomal logic of reifying the parasitic agent that threatens the fetish. Thus the fetishist inversion of the Tea Party designates the political crisis at the heart of capitalism as the perceived socialist conspiracy of neo-liberal Empire.

The crystallization of the populist opposition to Obama as a convergence of social conservatism and bourgeois autonomy emerged out of the Wall Street bail-out and the nomination of Sarah Palin as the Republican vice presidential candidate. In 2008 Palin’s populist appeal lay in her frontierswoman image, later explicitly rendered in the reality TV show “Sarah Palin’s Alaska” where the traditional patriarchal family, the second amendment and the promise of the frontier (particularly oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) are celebrated as quintessential Americanism. Palin was thus instrumental in the cultural othering of Obama and expanding this overdetermined culture war to embody the defense of free market capitalism and the republic. The particular productivist ideal of the yeoman and property even allowed Palin to appropriate a working class discourse, understood here strictly as a

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22 The co-dependence of the people and the perpetual spectral presence of the outsider will be expounded in Chapter Three.

23 Overdetermination is used in this thesis following from Laclau & Mouffe’s (1985) appropriation of Althusser’s concept of discourse. Discourse and signification is not thought of as singular in its determinations but is constituted by an irreducible plurality of meanings and multi-causality. It is the constitutive lack in discourse that the process of hegemony attempts to fill-in. Thus, the enemy, who is fetishistically invested in by the populist, does not denote a fixed entity but one that may assume a plurality of forms as it is overdetermined by the very investment in it.

25 In assessing the effects of the financial crisis Palin states that its ‘Main Streeters like me’ (Biden & Palin 2008) who are hurt the most and that, ‘Todd and I, heck, we’re going through that right now even as we speak’ (Lewison 2008). She describes her candidacy as representing ‘everyday working class Americans saying, “you know, government, just get out of my way”’ (Biden & Palin 2008) and that is why ‘those Washington elite...don’t like the idea of just an everyday working class American running for such an office’ (Lewison 2008). In addition to Palin’s supposed blue-
privileged cultural content, in the fight against Obama’s socialism. The red state/blue state dichotomy which Obama famously aspired to transcend at the 2004 DNC, was turned into a question of who is ‘pro-America’ or from the ‘Real America’26 (Stein 2008). Further slander of Obama ranged from a lack of patriotism, being a terrorist sympathizer and John McCain’s rhetorical question that laid the groundwork for the birther movement: ‘who is the real Barack Obama?’ (Cooper 2008). That this campaign of delegitimization represented an unprecedented extreme in modern American politics was evidenced in the various crowd outbursts of ‘terrorist’, ‘liar’ (Cooper 2008), ‘treason’ (Weiner 2008) and ‘kill him’ (Millbank 2008). While on election night McCain performed the ritual concession speech aimed at cooling passions, his audience loudly booed the mention of President Obama (Gardner 2008). It was clear from this point that civility would not be restored in American politics27 with the construction of a populist political frontier of an embattled people defending free market capitalism and the republic.

What marked the expansion of the traditional culture war tactics of the Republican party towards something approaching the political in inverse terms, that is antagonism at the site of the economic, is the manner in which Obama’s identity and civil society politics as a moral agent of Empire are held as proof positive of a socialist plot. Obama’s work as a community organizer and the anti-poverty group ACORN soon came to symbolize the fundamental corruption of the republic and capitalism. Following the Karl Rove political playbook of trumping up charges of voter fraud McCain in the last presidential debate brazenly attempted to link Obama to ACORN and claimed the group collar credibility the figure of “Joe the Plumber” was constantly trotted out by the campaign as a working class emblem of the fight against Obama’s socialism.

26 The traditional populist language of productivism is evidenced in Palin’s description of Real Americans as “those who are running our factories and teaching our kids and growing our food and are fighting our wars for us” (Stein 2008).

27 One of the most striking breaches of political conduct came during Obama’s state of the union address in September 2009 where Republicans were waving papers in defiance of his health care plan and representative Joe Wilson heckled him with the outburst “You lie!”.
was ‘on the verge of...destroying the fabric of democracy’ (Obama & McCain 2008). For the populists the conspiracy to throw the election to Obama was part of an overall plan to use the state to destroy American capitalism. In delineating this conspiracy the populists return to the new left community organizers Saul Alinsky, Richard Cloward and Francis Fox Piven who spoke of organizing the poor to make demands of the state. The ‘original sin’ (O’Hara 2010) of the so-called “Cloward-Piven” strategy is identified as the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, which was created to provide poor and minority communities with better access to home loans and was underwritten by the Federal Reserve, itself an invention of this same liberal progressivism (Beck 2010a). From this, nefarious civil society groups such as ACORN, funded by George Soros, were able to force state sponsored mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to lend to poor minorities, or people who shouldn’t buy homes. While much of this has been fomented at the margins of American political discourse, the McCain-Palin campaign did much of the early legwork. The early presence of such theories in the presidential campaign demonstrates that the Tea Party populism is not simply a passing fit but rather a sustained political logic.

The emergence of the Tea Party in the aftermath of the Republican’s electoral failure marks not only the ontological necessity of antagonism, but, in their fetishist inversion they demarcate the significance of economy. Their fetishized notion of economy serves as their principle of hegemonic linkage in which the various battles of the culture war coalesce. In preserving the ideal of the yeoman, bourgeois autonomy and the self-sustaining moral order of capital the populists construct a parasitic agent precisely in the terms of the new spirit of capitalism thus marking economy as foundational to their ontology. While it is plainly ludicrous to assume that George Soros, who

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28 Sarah Palin has since endorsed the Cloward-Piven reading of Obama (Kim 2010) while the vilification of Obama as socialist has become a staple of Republican politics.

29 Glenn Beck’s hysterical attacks of George Soros as the puppet master of an anti-capitalist conspiracy, through Soros’ funding of Third Way cosmopolitan and human rights groups, proves Žižek’s (2006a: 556) claim that the basic model of populism is Nazism with the Jew figuring as the outsider that threatens a good people. Beck’s
perhaps best embodies Empire as simultaneously a project of finance capital, liberal cosmopolitanism and a politics of heterogeneity, is financing the overthrow of capitalism, the populist dichotomy of the political is able to account for a contradiction that Obama cannot. While Third Way moralism offers an analysis that the proper balance between the market and state was askew, the populists identify rot in the heart of the system. The left-liberal state/market binary is incapable of grasping the ways in which the state was neo-liberalized, effectively creating the legal forms which allowed for the proliferation of derivatives markets and all manner of financial innovation, while Fannie and Freddie were transformed into market movers. What the populists do is take the emancipatory and transcendent claims of the new spirit seriously thereby constructing a parasitic agent in order to preserve the dignity of their fetish. The Tea Party thus embody the neo-liberal ‘inflationary’ critique of the state (Foucault 2008). Foucault is absolutely prescient in identifying the terms of a Randian populism that confront the interventions of Obama. This critique sees a ‘genetic continuity’ (187) between the forms of state intervention from the welfare state, fascism and Stalinism and practices a ‘disqualification by the worst’ in which every action of the state reflects an ultimate trajectory that ‘thanks to some play on words [refers] us to the analysis of concentration camps’ (188). It is this logic of government which has allowed the populists to develop a holistic narrative while Obama attempts to reconcile the contradictions of his civil society/Wall Street alliance. The stimulus, the GM bail-out, to Obama’s tax plan and government healthcare reform are all seen as attempts to overload the system and collapse free market capitalism.

**Conclusion**
The populist challenge to Obama represents the key antagonism of American politics in the post financial crisis epoch and crucially underscores the tensions of the Third Way conception of the political and the limits of its attacks may not be aimed at Soros’ because he is Jewish but mirror precisely the structure of anti-Semitism that the cosmopolitan liberal is alien and corrupt.
redemptive discourse. The Tea Party vociferously rejects the new consensus of the Third Way and flourishes in the space opened up by the contradictions of Obama. Obama’s discourse performs all the ideological contortions necessary to both secure the culmination of neo-liberalism and restore American hegemony of global capitalism. This is principally achieved through a moral discourse emblematic of the new spirit of capitalism in which capitalism itself engenders the imagination of socialist autonomy and offers new commodities that elicit a post-capitalist fantasy. In instilling the necessary redemptive potential in the American political process Obama preformed countless acts of self-effacement in characterizing his campaign as an authentic moment based in a grass-roots civil society movement. This maneuver allowed Obama to stand as the ultimate redeemer of the system in both eclipsing the left critiques of capitalism and in securing the vital interests of finance capital. The ‘people’ of the Tea Party have emerged specifically to protect their fetish of capitalism as a self-sustaining moral, political and economic system. For them, capital needs no moral supplementation and any imperfection is attributable to the parasitic outsider. While this fetishized notion of capital surpasses delusion it clearly identifies the constitutive role of economy in the political.

What this new intractable post-crisis entanglement highlights is that the Third Way de-politicization of the economy is untenable. The Third Way reaction to populism has been to treat it as ‘traditionalist’ and ‘fundamentalist’ remnants opposed to the march of history (Mouffe 2005b). However, what is thought of as a temporary condition has come to dominate American political discourse and created political deadlock, even before the Republicans retook congress in 2010. The ethico-political commitment of the populists should speak to the left and serious liberals of certain political truths and tactical calculations that that have been expunged from the history and consciousness of the left although are beginning to be recovered by the Occupy movement30. Despite the innumerable inconsistencies and contradictions of the populist right they

30 While the comparison of Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party is not a main focus of this thesis, chapter eight will consider the relationship of Occupy to the mediatized social space and the media field.
speak of an idealized community which is militantly engaged in public, antagonistic struggle with subjects described in productivist if not workerist terms. In contrast, the model of politics embodied by Obama is a privatized civil society movement largely in the virtual public sphere, with communitarianism reduced to modes of conscientious consumption, all within a reconciled nation from Wall St to the heartland. The New Deal, which remains the touchstone ideal for left-liberals, would clearly not have been won without the recognition by workers for the necessity of sectoral struggle against the owners of capital. What is evident is that the simple antagonistic logic, which offers an explanation of the constitutive role of the state in neoliberalism, will not be undone by Obama’s moralization. Furthermore as the new Third Way consensus fails to even moderately impinge upon the power of the financial class, creating a banking oligarchy that former IMF chief economist Simon Johnson calls ‘too big to save’ (2011), the next financial crisis threatens to bring radical change from the populist right with untold consequences for the liberal-democratic consensus.

Having identified the political moment and precisely what is at stake in the Third Way/populist entanglement I will turn in the coming chapters specifically to the logics of the political, populism and the media field. In order to understand populism and its correlation to liberal-democracy, or more precisely what has been termed the ‘mirror of democracy’ (Panizza 2005), I will consider the contradictions embedded in liberal-democracy which ensure the explosive return of the political. Liberal-democracy provides the very conceptual category of “the people” with limits that are both strict and ambiguous allowing a cultural specificity to fester in the place of an ill-defined universality. In the particular context of American liberal-democracy a certain republican spirit or virtue, based explicitly in private property, has persistently animated this people in various historical junctures. From the exploration of this particular historical political frontier I turn in chapter three to the political logic of populism as approaching ‘political reason tout court’ (Laclau 2005: 229). The critical distinction between populism and a truly universal struggle is the ultimate fetishistic logic of the people. Populism is not programmatic so much as geared towards restoring the people to their
proper place and enacting an impossible final ontological closure. The emergence of the Tea Party as a specifically mediatized form of populism demands particular consideration of the media field in chapter four. The importance of the media field in redefining social life, public space and modes of consumption make it the critical site for the return of the political in the form of Tea Party populism. The role of the media field in bridging the social space and field of power in biopolitical production makes it a site of return for the political logics of difference and equivalence. It is my intention in the second half of this thesis to track across the media field not simply the mediation of this political battle but the manner in which it is constituted in the media field and as such is redefining the categories of liberal-democratic universality.
Chapter Two – Liberal Democracy

Introduction

Having provided a preliminary outline of the political topography that constitutes the present entanglement between Obama and the Tea Party populists, it is my intention in this chapter to demonstrate how populism emerges out of the contradictions of the contemporary liberal democratic consensus. This chapter will begin with the present impasse of neo-liberalism in which democracy is de-emphasized and yet universalist discourses of liberal democracy abound. The principle form of de-politicization in (neo)liberal democracy is the disavowal of a specific people with a shared substance of equality. Populism represents a return of the people and the political and in the American context underscores the amalgam of liberalism and republican virtue which form the basis for the ‘Republic of Property’ (Hardt & Negri 2009).

In order to understand the emergence of the radical challenge of Tea Party populism it is necessary to consider the ways in which liberal-democracy both engenders the ‘backlash’\(^\text{31}\) (Kazin 1995: 253) and provides the necessary conceptual categories for the privileged “people” to emerge. America’s foundational document is exemplary in both outlining a revolutionary universalist conception of the people and also establishing formal mechanisms of exclusion through property and originally race and gender. This chapter begins with the work of Chantal Mouffe (2000) who identifies the struggle over the definition of the people as the essence of the political.

\(^{31}\) The term backlash refers specifically to the middle and working class opposition to the new left of the late 60s and early 70s in the US. This is the constituency of Nixon’s ‘silent majority’ (Kazin: 263) and of the Reagan-Bush new-right social conservatism. Race figured as a crucial component to this identity of the people. Republican strategist Kevin Phillips in outlining the ‘Southern Strategy’ described white working class resentment towards liberal Great Society programs of inclusion ‘taxing the many on behalf of the few’ (Kazin: 251). Thus, it is essential to understanding the undeniably racially coded origins of anti-welfarism.
The articulation of the people establishes an exclusive community with privileged access to the meaning of democracy and freedom who are set against an outside or “other” people. Contemporary (neo)liberal-democracy however disavows the antagonistic character of the people. Discourses of universalism have meant pernicious forms of exclusion while the attempts of the neo-liberal state to rationally administer away the political has led to the dramatic, public return of the people.

The recognition of the necessarily political construction of the people allows us to consider who are the people of the American constitution and what is the substance of their democracy. The fundamental ‘equality of condition’ (de Tocqueville 1953) central to American revolutionary politics has meant the privileging of individual liberty and the man of property. To necessarily buttress the institution of private property from the vagaries of democracy it was essential to construct a people with a specific moral character that was inextricably linked to property as divine. Republican civic virtue served as a crucial supplement to liberal institutions properly inspiring and restraining the people. The virtuous, rugged individual, forged in property has persisted as a central figure of the American republic against which all political progress or deviation is measured. What the present populist entanglement has crucially underlined is this internal tension in the liberal-democratic consensus. The Tea Party populists exalt what is often kept as a historical secret, namely the contempt for democracy among US constitutional framers and the founding of America as specifically a Republic of Property. This is in contrast to American liberal-democrats who see in the institutions of representative government and a living constitution all the potential for fulfilling true democratic equality.

Having identified this fundamental internal tension within the American construction of democracy I will draw out a few further implications of the crisis of liberal-democracy as it relates to the Obama presidency. What is characteristic of Obama and the Third Way left is the increasing formal separation of the spheres of the political/economic and social. This is specifically what the ideology of republicanism served to efface. The economic
sphere and private property were held as a matter of public morality while the Third Way diminishes this moral dimension through a discourse of instrumentizing markets for social democratic demands. From this tension we can grasp the contradiction of the populist re-emergence of the people as defenders of capitalism and the republic who oppose the very expansion of state power and de-politicization of the economy, which is essential for the preservation of capitalism. In this crisis of legitimacy, democratic forms and institutions have effectively functioned as a ‘fetish’ object (Žižek 2001) for liberal-democrats, assuaging fears about the health and vitality of democracy, and acting as a mandate for that which is not up for discussion.

**Some Working Terms**
Before launching into this analysis of liberal democracy and the challenge of populism, it is first necessary to clarify some of the theoretical and conceptual categories I will be working with. Firstly, the distinction between politics and the political is essential. Following from Mouffe the political is to be thought of as the ‘dimension of antagonism that is internal to human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations’ (2005b: 101). Politics is the attempt to organize and formalize this antagonistic space so as to administer the process of contestation. Whether the founding of the state is premised on republicanism against monarchy, anti-imperialism or class antagonism, the political functions as the kernel or structuring principle of the state and politics. As Carl Schmitt wrote: ‘The political is the most intense and extreme antagonism, and every concrete antagonism becomes that much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping’ (1996: 29). What is conventionally seen as the political by liberalism is party politics, ‘the scramble for office and the politics of patronage’ (Schmitt: 32). This leads to the liberal fantasy of de-politicization which, in defining the political as the all too human instinctive quest for power, seeks to isolate politics within the state as a means to moderate competing interests.

It is worth further clarifying how the terms liberalism, democracy and liberal democracy will be used in this chapter. Defining liberalism can be challenging,
particularly within the American context where liberalism is conflated with left politics; however it is here taken as the social and political principles of the bourgeois revolution, namely limited government, civil liberties, privacy, tolerance and individualism. CB Macpherson has described two poles of liberal-democracy; ‘the democracy of a capitalist market society’ or ‘a society striving to ensure that all its members are equally free to realize their capabilities’ (1977: 1-2). His conclusion is that the first definition has historically dominated and for the purposes of this chapter, particularly with its emphasis on (neo)liberal-democracy, I shall make the same assumption.

Democracy is another contested political category that is for the purpose of this analysis to be thought of in the Athenian sense. The crucial distinctions being the leveling of the costs of civic participation, effectively dismantling aristocratic qualification for public office, and placing the question of social equality within the purview of politics. Athenian democracy was characterized by the empowerment of poorer classes, small holders and peasants who directly participated in deliberation and decision-making over the issues of taxation and finance (Held 2006: 17). The contrast with this substantive equality in relation to American representative democracy is essential for understanding the way in which the Republic of Property relies upon a fundamental alienation of specific freedoms.

When describing the amalgamation of liberal democracy I wish to draw particular attention to the strain put on this concept by the neo-liberal historical context. The horrors of state socialism and its rejection of liberal political institutions, in the attempts to fulfill social equality, has engendered in and around liberal democracy all the rhetoric of the end of history. While there is a certain productive tension to be had in the dialogue between social and individual freedoms, as embodied in the competing concepts of democracy and liberalism, (neo)liberal democracy has meant the diminution of democracy and the triumph of bourgeois liberalism. Mouffe has described this imbalance as resembling Von Hayek’s utilitarian approach to democracy; ‘useful as long is it did not endanger liberal institutions but to be discarded
when it did’ (2000: 3). With the parallel collapse of social democracy the last refuge of the left within neo-liberalism has been a politics of the expansion of rights, concerned with the inclusion of minorities as opposed to social equality. Lastly, while it may be a theoretically unproductive, if not a maddening prospect, to attach a specific political content to the contradictions of the Tea Party populists who combine both libertarian and social conservative strands, they are symptomatic of the return of the political. The friend/enemy distinction that has calcified around Obama’s “socialism” and the defenders of freedom, capitalism and the republic, signals the close proximity to the key antagonism which is the political.

“We the People”
For Schmitt, the act of delineating between a homogenous people and an enemy is the essential moment of the political. Mouffe’s work has done much to clarify how this conception of the political can be retained without assuming its fascistic potential. For Mouffe, as opposed to Schmitt, political and social identities are not empirically given and the category of the people is open to contestation, re-appropriation, and can only be considered a contingent articulation of hegemony (49-54). Following from Schmitt, democracy has to be seen as political in the sense of belonging to a specific community and people as opposed to abstract notions of universal human rights that do not describe anything political. The founding premise of democracy as for and by the people serves to demarcate between those that are equal and part of the demos and those that are outside the community. While it is simple enough to make the point that the US constitution’s “We the People” really meant “We the white male slave owners” it is necessary to identify in democracy the inherent boundaries of exclusion that make

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32 The US government response to the financial crisis and subsequent bail out of the banks essentially functioned in this manner. The actual name of the bill is instructive, ‘The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008’ as this emergency necessitated the suspension of discourse and a rejection of the public will.

33 Mouffe’s formulation is that of an agonistic pluralism which recognizes antagonism and difference yet seeks to maintain the shared terrain of democracy through the forging of temporary agreements as opposed to a Habermasian final consensus.
populism a radical, if not obfuscating, articulation of the political. The inherent exclusivity around democracy is based in the notion of citizenship and the right to the city, implying a political subject engaged in civic life and the building of community. Democratic citizenship is not universal but strictly correlative to a certain state or locale with different levels of exclusion based on immigration or legal status. It is fitting then that the first populist challenge to emerge against Obama was around the question of his citizenship.

At this point we encounter one of the limits of liberalism, specifically that it cannot expand rights and justice without identifying a people based within a political project that is more than just the expansion of rights. The EU provides a rather dramatic example of the gap between the discourse of rights and the exclusivity of democracy. While the European project has been accompanied with the discourse of liberal universalism, with even hints of social democracy, it has meant the dramatic exclusion of immigrants, expulsions of the Roma and a permanent transitory class of the stateless sans papiers. Balibar (2008) has further identified the ‘internally excluded’ who possess all the legal rights of citizenship but are excluded from the full practice of social citizenship. The jobless, immigrants and working poor, inhabiting urban ghettos are literally cut off from the “city” space of the demos. Geographically sequestered from the city the only means for inclusion is as a form of ‘negative community’ (ibid: 531). Following from Ranciere, Žižek describes this negative community as the “part of no-part” whose ‘exclusion is the mode of their inclusion: their “proper place” in the social body is that of exclusion from the public sphere’ (2009b: 101). Despite the institutional discourse of universality, embodied in documents like the EU charter of fundamental rights, we are left with persistent distinctions of the people and the excluded along religious, class and ethnic lines. Liberalism, without a specific conception of the political, is unable to grasp the relations of power which shape the dichotomous nature of the people. As such it falls back on to neo-liberal metrics to assign social value, universalizing those who realize themselves in the market and culturalizing (Mamdani 2004) those who fail as unready for the modern world.
A further pernicious form of exclusion is based in the liberal conception of politics as the mediation of competing private interests. For Rawls the deadlocks of doctrinal differences between rational parties can be resolved by extending procedural forms of democracy as a means of ‘reasonable pluralism’ (1993: 24). Reason is said to be able to generate an ‘overlapping consensus’ (ibid) and morality that transcends political difference by reinforcing a sense of fairness, civility, freedom and equality. The very basis for this shared space in which competing political doctrines are honored and respected, if not reconciled, is the distinction between ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’, with reasonable persons as ‘those who accept the fundamentals of liberalism’ (Mouffe 2000: 24). Here we have an essential delineation between those people (liberals) that are assumed deserving of fundamental universal rights, and those who fall outside of politics as unworthy adversaries. This depoliticized liberal conception of reason assumes that the plurality of political, social and religious identities may co-exist so long as they are ‘relegated to the sphere of the private and satisfy the liberal principles’ (ibid: 25). This pluralist maneuver is similar to the scenario described by Žižek (2008a: 145) of the liberal acceptance of the Muslim women’s right to wear the hijab. It is permitted as an expression of an idiosyncratic, individual choice, free from communal or patriarchal imposition, but in so doing this acceptance enacts a violence on the cultural and political meaning of the ummah. In this way the space of liberal pluralism can only accept competing political doctrines and different religious and social identities as a validation of liberal individualism. What the liberal disavowing of the political and appeals to the universal does is reinforce an exclusive underlying cultural identity of the people as those who can fulfill themselves within the terms of the market and individualism. In the absence of an antagonistic conception of the political in which demos embodies substantive equality, liberal universalism excludes and the market comes to stand as the universal.

The present liberal democratic consensus exacerbates the worst tendencies in the other, democracy functions as a process without substance and liberal universality as a form of exclusion. The lack of a ‘common substance’ of equality means that ‘liberal democracy is a non political form of equality,
because it lacks the correlate of a possible inequality form which every equality receives its specific meaning’ (Mouffe 2000: 39). The basic political act of exclusion in demarcating the people, is the very condition of possibility for equality. This is what Mouffe (1996) calls, following from Derrida, the constitutive outside of democracy, in which any political identity is never reconciled but built through a process of assigning difference and equivalence with no final fixed articulation of the people. Any form of politics, democracy, or freedom then must belong to somebody and becomes ‘incomprehensible if one does not know who is to be effected, combated, refuted or negated by such a term’ (Schmitt: 30-1). Lenin’s formulation of; ‘freedom yes, but for whom to do what?’ (Žižek 2001: 114) is applicable as the very constitution of liberal democracy and its freedoms place individual liberty above any notion of collective equality. What is anti-democratic in this process is not exclusion but any attempt to de-politicize and close the battle for the people. This is why Žižek claims that freedom is the ability to reject the very framing of the choice freedom/oppression, or for our purposes to reject the framing of an exclusion without rejecting exclusion itself.

It is the state, as the people’s sovereign entity, that both aggregates the people’s demands and functions as the vehicle of formal democracy and de-politicization. De-politicization consists of displacing the founding political antagonism and embedding the interests of a people. In approaching the politics of the state the question should be posed whose state and ‘how the aims of politics are conceived’ (Badiou 2005: 86). The liberal state constructs politics as the mediation between “rational”, competing private interests, effectively managing away the political and ensuring the separation of politics, economy and civil society. Democracy becomes the measure of the ‘good state’ (ibid: 82) a formal exercise that ensures the basic upkeep of civil liberties while excluding questions of economy other than matters of technocratic oversight. What is lost in this formalism that is properly democratic is what

34 In the following chapter I will look at how Laclau formulates this outside as the ‘political frontier’ (2005) that demarcates the people not merely against its adversaries but a fantasmatic, fetishized ensemble of enemies.
Badoiu calls ‘points of reversibility’ (ibid: 90) in which the dictatorial and democratic potential of the people and politics function as the irreducible elements of mass public democracy. In this way the terms of the people remain contested and open reflecting the essential nature of the constitutive outside in democracy. While this does not eliminate exclusion, democracy is freed from the state administration of politics. It is in this way that democracy, as a qualitative concept as opposed to mere form, is ‘that which authorizes a placement of the particular under the law of the universality of the political will’ (ibid: 92). Thus in any articulation of democracy, a particular people declare themselves privileged to the universal, an act of radical exclusion, and construct the state or institutional regime that embeds their conception of the political.

At this point, having defined a concept of the political as equivalent to the demarcation of a people, I wish to underscore some of the tensions and limitations that come with defining the people as the basic political subjectivity. This theoretical debate will be crucial for the next chapter when I examine the question of how populism functions to obfuscate the political. Between the aforementioned theorists there is a critical dispute over the question of the political. For Mouffe the notion of the constitutive outside, and similarly with Laclau’s political frontier, the social and political process of hegemony involves a constant act of re-creating a people and forever re-inscribing a new outside. This notion of hegemony privileges no particular agent or social space as that which will dissolve the existing hegemonic order. For Žižek however this fails to describe what is properly political if we take revolution as the ultimate horizon of the political. What would be truly political is a radical split that is outside the constitutive outside, corresponding with Badiou’s notion of the event (2005: 24) as something that exceeds and transcends the political demarcation of hegemony and represents a ‘rupture with what exists’ (ibid: 24). In the attempt to define this position outside the interior/exterior of hegemony, Žižek has theoretically invested in slum dwellers as a potential political agency capable achieving this
universalism. Laclau’s principle of event, rupture and the Lacanian Real, that is an excess which defies symbolic representation and ‘as the impossible hard core which we cannot confront directly...[yet] always returns to its place’ (Žižek 2008b: 127), is the principle of heterogeneity. The impossibility of any one hegemonic identity to capture and dominate the social field ensures the return of the political as rupture. In the following chapter I will focus specifically on the furious theoretical debate between Žižek and Laclau over the question of heterogeneity, economy and the Real. For Laclau, Žižek’s insistence on fully formed proletarian revolutionary subjects who embody a universal condition is comparable to ‘waiting for martians’ (2006) as its demand for revolutionary purity is both too high and potentially immobilizing. While this critique of the potential conservatism of Žižek’s position is not without merit, I will in, the coming chapter, reject Laclau’s populist compromise as a threat to a genuine political notion of universality.

In my discussion of competing notions of the political the work of Hardt & Negri is absent as they do not provide a theory of the political in the terms described here, that is as a rupture and irrepressible social tendency towards antagonism. Hardt & Negri do not conceptualize antagonism in any form other than what Laclau pejoratively describes as ‘people’s natural and healthy propensity to revolt’ (2005: 243). The root of this theoretical gap resides in a certain theoretical naivety which reformulates a classical Marxist teleological argument about the contradictions between the forces and relations of production. Biopolitical production is understood as engendering certain innate forms of resistance that have the potential to realize the multitude, a category defined simply by the hegemonic condition of new social forms of labour. This identification of the hegemonic condition is problematized by the parallel development of increasing proletarianization and ‘accumulation by

35 The dramatic process of slum urbanization and de-peasantization in the Third World as a result of neo-liberal policies driven by global financial institutions in the last 30 years, has made the slum dweller the ultimate part of no part of global capitalism for Žižek (2008b) While there is no automatic assumption on Žižek’s part that slum dwellers will play the role of the new proletariat he never the less identifies slums as a potential site for an authentic event (ibid: 423).
dispossession’ (Harvey 2005: 159) in much of the developing world. At the level of praxis Hardt & Negri’s humanist assumptions of the political and resistance lead them into positions that often support Empire and the new spirit of capitalism as forces of progress. Despite critiques of a certain theoretical complacency, Hardt & Negri are essential for understanding the political economy of the media and its critical significance in bridging political, social and economic life. This has important implications for later chapters in this thesis where I consider biopolitical production and its potential to manifest the political, not by virtue of any humanist moment of recognition but rather for media to function as a critical site of hegemonic articulation.

Finally, to conclude this section on democracy and the people, it is clear that the neo-liberal end of history, specifically the universalist discourse of liberal democracy, engenders the return of the political and the people. The liberal universalist attempts to transcend the people as the principle political delineation is ultimately a failure. The managing away of the political by the neo-liberal state invites the explosive, public return of the people along the antagonistic boundaries of the political. What is important for the purposes of this thesis is how the people speak to the fundamental political antagonism of American politics.

The American People
In order to get to the heart of the political meaning of democracy in the American context, thereby allowing us to make some sense of the populist moment, we have to ask the question who are the people and how are they enshrined in the state and its laws. The American revolution and the US constitution have principally been a project of establishing a ‘Republic of Property’ (Hardt & Negri 2009), privileging the man of property as a virtuous embodiment of American exceptionalism. Hardt & Negri have identified that

36 Žižek claims that, ‘according to Negri, instead of reacting to this “new spirit of capitalism” in the traditional social-democratic fashion, seeing it as a threat, one should fully embrace it, in order to discern within it-in the dynamics of cognitive labor with its non-hierarchical and non-centralized forms of social interaction-the seeds of communism’ (2009: 103).
property and its defense is the essence of republican constitutionalism; ‘the republic, from the great bourgeois revolutions to today, is a republic of property’ (15). To put it another way, the foundational political antagonism is premised as the conflict between liberty, as embodied in property, and any encroachment upon that liberty whether foreign or domestic. Democracy and politics, specifically representative government, have been constructed in such a way so as to entrench this conception of the people as universal if not providential. Within this political space however there remains a significant bifurcation of the people’s character between a liberal and republican identity. Liberal notions of rational self interest and homo economicus are opposed to republican conceptions of civic virtue and morality. What both underscore is that the man and people of the revolution, with all of their positive potentialities, are rooted in the institution of private property. Republican civic virtue has to be seen as a supplement to the cold, rational institution of private property. This institution is supplemented by a morality which properly invigorates the people in a righteous common cause, privatized at the individual level. The people thus functions as an ontic category representing the historical crystallization of a certain material condition culminating in the regime of property. However, in an ontological sense, the signifier “the people” has come to assume a moral content that is permeable and prone to conflict with its liberal function. The extent of the conflict between supplementary strains of politics in the republic of property is reflective of the crisis of liberalism and the necessity to re-draw the lines of the political.

The primacy of the American revolution in the modern political age rests in its reinvention of democracy as a form of representative government which effectively embeds the liberal property regime. Notwithstanding the exclusion of African-Americans, native Americans and women, the US constitution dramatically extended the rights of citizenship; however this extension of rights was at the same time an alienation of the people’s power. The principle evisceration of democracy rests in depriving citizenship of its public and

37 Hardt & Negri have noted that absent from the pantheon of ‘great bourgeois revolutions’ is Haiti a truly universal event which is excluded on the basis of its lack of respect for private property, namely the slaves themselves (2009: 13).
performative aspect. Citizenship is thus detached from its social setting (city) and ‘the people are evacuated of its social content’ (Wood 1995: 226). The constitutional framers were consumed with the challenge of limiting the scope of democracy yet assuaging the revolutionary forces made up of tenant farmers, small holders and the property-less (Zinn 1980). It is between these counterposing demands that the founders conceived of political rights as devoid of essential class or aristocratic content, in essence denying property as an exclusionary institution and ensuring an ‘equality of condition’ (de Tocqueville 1953) before the law through the bill of rights. Instituting a representative form of government was crucial in managing what Hamilton recognized as the precarious status of private property within a democracy:

The most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society...the regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principle task of modern legislation. (2008: 42-3)

Representative government navigates the potential danger of democracy through the diminution of the public sphere in political life. For Madison this is the key distinction: ‘in a democracy people meet and exercise the government in person; in a republic they assemble and administer it by their representatives’ (ibid: 59). The importance of this is evidenced in the constitution where the people’s only public political act expressly accounted for ‘is the solitary one of electing their representatives’ (Yarbrough 1979: 74). Representative democracy was thus to be thought of as a way to discern the ‘natural aristocracy’ or ‘true elite’, who through the attributes of property and education were ‘naturally recognizable by the many’ (Pocock 1975: 515). In other words ‘the man of property will speak politically for the shoemaker or blacksmith’ (Wood: 216). This would protect the process from unruly passions with the selection of representatives who would ‘refine and enlarge the public views...[and] whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country’ (Hamilton: 45). This distance between representation and the public space of democracy turns the political process into the granting of consent in which ‘a
representative might be solicited but not commanded’ (Manicas 1988: 146). Democracy, as envisioned by the founders, was strictly correlative to the forms that would ensure the protection of private property and marked ‘a victory for democratic ideology against democracy’ (ibid: 137).

What is significant about this gap, between the formalism of American democracy and the universalist quality it has assumed in liberal discourse, is that the populists have embraced the exclusions of the founders around property and representative government. The battle cry of ‘America is not a democracy but a constitutional republic’ is premised on the fact that democracy does not appear in the founding documents and is abhorred by founders such as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Liberalism in its attempt to expand rights, through legislating the equality of condition, is seen as a perversion of the republic and a threat to the man of property. I use gendered terms because in whatever limited sense we may think of liberalism as democratic, it has specifically pertained to expanding the franchise from white male property owners progressively towards a contemporary politics of multiculturalism, inclusion and even up to affirmative action.

38 Glenn Beck is of course key in characterizing democracy as a fig leaf for communism (Beck 2010b) and reiterating the mantra of originalism; ‘We’re not a democracy. We’re a republic’ (Beck 2010c). What is remarkable about this slogan is that this amounts to a rehabilitation of the John Birch Society who coined the phrase (Kazin: 225). The Tea Party denunciation of democracy, even in representative form, has reached its apogee with Republican state senators calling for the repeal of the 17th amendment which gives the public the right to elect their senators (Bai 2010a).

39 ‘Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths’ (Hamilton: 44).

40 Republican Senator Rand Paul’s controversial comments on the liberal use of the state to enact civil equality is revealing of the absolutist position of the original man of property within the Tea Party. Paul drew heavy criticism for claiming that he disagreed with parts of the 1964 Civil Rights Act because it forced business owners to accept black customers (Thompson & Balz 2010). The point is that all government intervention on the rights of private property are a perversion of the constitution.
Tocqueville the fundamental equality of condition is the starting point for any freedom and leads inexorably towards substantive equality; ‘It is impossible to conceive of men forever remaining unequal upon a single point, yet equal on all others...they must in the end be equal upon all’ (de Tocqueville: 187). The Tea Party reject the aspirational qualities of liberal discourse as a falsehood, a compelling argument that is used for the purpose of a regressive politics that seeks shelter in the original virtuous man of property. It is in this sense that the populists express an essential truth about the people and the political in the American revolution.

In order to grasp the ontology of the people, in the American revolutionary context, it is necessary unpack the correlative liberal and republican strands of politics which correspond to the demands of the regime of property. The founders were prescient of the fact that the representative government in its abstracted forms was prone to lethargy and stagnation. For them the absence of civic virtue would lead to the impoverishment of citizenship and a corruption of politics in which the people would judge their leaders out of pure economic self-interest and look to government to satisfy their needs (Yarburgh: 85). The challenge was how to foster civic engagement and redefine republican virtue and morality to fulfill the objective of citizens.

This extreme libertarian position can only be seen as race neutral if one accepts private property as universal or divine and as such not historically privileging white males.

41 President Obama’s work as a community organizer is reflective of a similar optimism in the equalizing potential of liberal institutions. In representing the urban poor and laid off workers of south-side Chicago Obama was not engaged in political, antagonistic struggle with local capital and government but in civil society empowerment.

42 For Glenn Beck Laura Ingils Wilder’s ‘Little House on the Prairie’ remains a cultural touchstone; ‘Remember how they lived? You can do it without big government!’ (2010b). The frontierswoman image of Sarah Palin, rendered explicitly in her reality show ‘Sarah Palin’s Alaska’, functions in a similar manner. Here the combination of traditional patriarchal family, the second amendment and the promise of the frontier (particularly oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) are reanimated.
actively engaged within the curtailed space of politics. Specifically the founders ‘sought to combine the advantages of liberal freedom with republican virtue without the disadvantages of either’ (Yarburgh: 63). Republican civic virtue amounted to an attempt to free the people from liberal abstraction and collapse the separate spheres of the economic, political and social, not in class terms but in moral terms. The liberal and rational regime of private property would have to assume a moral character signifying ‘a spirit which bound together the political community, rather than a set of formal institutions’ (Yarburgh: 65). This moral dimension not only suppressed the question of class but served as an essential bridge for puritans into the secular state. It is in this way that we can understand the evangelical fervor for free markets and the gospel of prosperity. This feature of American ideology is properly moralistic, not exclusively in the religious sense but in providing a spirit that is over and above a simple rationalist ethics. It is in this way that republicanism served as the ideological supplement that animated formal, representative democracy. This notion of supplement is derived from Derrida for whom it functions as the filling of a void. The supplement fills but does not complete in the sense that it is ‘outside of the positivity to which it is super-added’ (Derrida 1976: 145). Thus while Republican civic virtue may provide the morality that is lacking in the rational order of liberalism, this internal contradiction of supplementation persists within the regime of property.

The American conception of republican civic virtue differed crucially from classical interpretations, reformulating civic life as a private, personal matter. In this way a polity was created that was both engaged and properly restrained with the private space of politics assuming a moral and religious quality. In this privatized ideal notion of citizenship it is the institution of private property that functions as both an individual and collective salvation, in a certain sense reconciling republican civic virtue and morality, and the liberal homo economicus. Virtue is thus crucially ‘undergirded by sufficient property to give it independence’ (Rodgers 1992: 19). The private sphere is the source of virtue and charity because it is here that the man of property is free from coercion. Civic man both ‘attains wealth because of his virtue and can display his virtue because he is wealthy’ (Lutz 1999: 560). Political participation may
be of collective value but it is undertaken by the man of virtue ‘out of concern for their own well being rather than from a devotion to the public good’ (ibid: 562). This conception of republicanism is consumed with the dialectic of virtue and corruption, seen as the preservation of property and individual liberty against any government or democratic encroachment. The civic ideal ‘founded in property, perfected in citizenship’ is ‘perpetually threatened by corruption; government figuring paradoxically as the principle source of corruption’ (Pocock: 507). The constitutional republic is opposed to direct democracy which is deemed to threaten individual liberty, violate the private space of virtue (property) through a lack of moral restraint and leads either to oligarchy or a slothful dependence on government. This is why, as Foucault puts it, in America, ‘disputes between individuals and government look like the problem of freedoms’ (2008: 218). What is truly radical in the American revolution is that the state is precisely founded in liberalism and property and not moderated by liberalism as in Europe (ibid: 217). Thus the question of liberalism and the preservation of property has persisted as a moral imperative and a fundamental measure of governance underwriting the freedom of the people. And while stark political divisions have emerged in the contemporary context between a politics of republican virtue and liberalism, this dialectic has to be understood as based in the founding political moment of the Republic of Property.

What is crucially important about the intertwining of a liberal political edifice with republican notions of morality is the way in which this created a lasting form of identification with private property as the people’s means of emancipation. The uniqueness of America as a frontier nation without a history of peasantry has meant that private property has assumed a centrality to the American people and American dream that is nearly incomparable. Its properly fetishized form in the various incarnations of American populism will be taken up in the coming chapter. Hegel noted that ‘the safety valve of the frontier accounted for the absence of class conflicts’ (in Pocock: 549), as America, already a project born of the flight from city squalor, had its own internal escape in the westward push. Private property has always been steeped in a discourse of morality as the product of bourgeois abstinence from
indulgence; however the moral dynamic of property reaches its apogee as manifest destiny in the frontier. Consider Thomas Jefferson’s exaltation: ‘America is the world’s garden; there is an all but infinite reservoir of free land, and expansion to fill it is the all but infinite expansion of virtue’ (ibid: 539).

For Jefferson private property was given an agrarian productivist and anti-mercantilist character and the husbandman’s toil was opposed to the ‘mobs in the city’ who are ‘sores’ upon the body of government eating at the ‘heart of its constitution’ (Jefferson 1975: 216). The secular institution of Lockean property reaches a properly divine status as god’s work on earth:

> Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of god, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which might otherwise might escape from the face of the earth (ibid: 217).

While contemporary property in no way resembles this ideal of individual labor, particularly with the prominence of intellectual property and rent profits even in agriculture, the moral and spiritual dimensions of property persist in the American imagination. It is in this particular historical context that class struggle, articulated in terms of property, has been overshadowed by a populist appeal to a people who embody productivism and the divine, moral elements of freedom and property.

**Crisis of Liberal Democracy and Obama**

The construction of the political and democracy within the US constitution is critical to the nature of the people. However their re-emergence in populist form owes specifically to the destabilization of republican civic virtue by the liberal-democratic consensus of neo-liberalism. The very condition of possibility for democracy under capitalism in which ‘the appropriator relinquishes direct political power’ (Wood 1995: 43) is premised on the liberal separation of the spheres of economy, politics and civil society. It is this very denial of the political nature of the mode of production that protects the sanctity of private property with the economic appearing as science ‘encased
in eternal natural laws independent of history’ (Marx 1971a: 87). The necessary alienation of the people’s power in American representative democracy has been at various times\textsuperscript{43} assuaged by the politics of morality and virtue in the republic of property. Neo-liberalism has undermined this balance of alienation and virtue through the diminished importance of the national economy, as it is eclipsed by international capital, and with the new liberal politics of rights. Many of the demands of new social movements for radical individual freedoms have been accommodated, while Third Way liberals such as Obama have staked a position that is exclusively concerned with a civil society politics of inclusion. While it is correct enough to say that this has led to the backlash against immigrants and sexual minorities, the principle problem is that of Schmitt’s homogeneity, not necessarily in cultural terms but specifically the loss of meaning in the people through liberal abstraction. The question of who the people are and what is the substance of their equality returns. And while there have been significant achievements by the republican right to popularize neo-liberalism it is instructive that this had to be done through a morality politics wedding free markets to social issues such as abortion (Frank, 2004)\textsuperscript{44}. The Third Way discourse has effectively disavowed the morality of markets, claiming that they can be instrumentalized to fulfill the objectives of social democracy (Fairclough 2006).

In the absence of the people’s collective morality, however mystifying this may be as a substitute for substantive equality, neo-liberalism has further separated the spheres of politics, the economic and the social\textsuperscript{45}. Principally

\textsuperscript{43} The welfare state should also be included in this as having a strong moral discourse in which private property and capitalist paternalism served as a wellspring for values of solidarity.

\textsuperscript{44} The elevation of economy in Tea Party discourse is overdetermined by a raft of cultural content. Thus the man of property does not denote an objective position within the labour process but stands as the embodiment of virtue and morality, both religious and secular. It is in this way the Tea Party approach the structuring role of economy in the political in order to obfuscate it.

\textsuperscript{45} There is a contradiction between can described as the de-politicization of monetary and fiscal policy in neo-liberalism and how Hardt & Negri define Empire as
this has meant the de-politicization of monetary policy and the increasing executive power of the state in the interests of finance capital. The return of the political and the people, unmoored from their proper place of restraint, has come to oppose precisely the de-politicization of the economic that is the basis for the republican defense of capitalism. Neo-liberalism has meant nothing if not the consolidation of the power of central bank technocrats in the service of financial markets. If then the financial crisis of 2008 and the bail outs represent the ‘culmination’ (Harvey 2009) of neo-liberalism then it is the right wing populists that can be said to have, at least initially, resisted this culmination. The principle plank of the Tea Party has consisted of opposing government tyranny with the federal reserve as the agent of moral hazard which threatens to destroy capitalism and the republic. There is no capacity

subsuming social life in biopolitical production, effectively ‘withering away civil society’ (2000: 329). What is evident is the manner in which economy is doubly inscribed in the social space, as both a site of production and regulation, and in the sense of Empire as a force which overdetermines the mediation of the various fields of social life (ie civil society, politics, economy). It is in this way that primacy of economy in the political can be understood while still talking about the various sites of the social. This notion of economy which departs from determination in the last instance, while still structuring the political frontier, will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. Paradoxically the Tea Party populists who resist the de-politicization of neo-liberalism and Empire do so as a mediatized social movement embodying biopolitical production. This will be outlined in Chapters Four and Seven.

46 The key figure in this is Ron Paul, the republican congressman and libertarian stalwart, whose book *End The Fed* (2009), characterizes the federal reserve as an immoral agent that allows the government to overreach and threaten liberty through the unlimited printing of money. In recent years Paul has been trying to pass his ‘Audit the Fed Bill’ through congress, a move which has been decried by the technocracy as undermining the principles of central bank independence (Matthews & Keene 2009). For Glenn Beck the Federal Reserve is the cardinal sin of progressive politics and even Sarah Palin has made monetary policy an arrow in her quiver of morality politics (Nasripour 2010). What this anti-fed fervor is symptomatic of is the moral crisis of neo-liberalism. While money is of course an objectification of social relations here it assumes a properly moral status and the crisis of the US dollar is seen as the shattering of the social pact of republican virtue.
to conceive that the interventions of state central banks are in fact essentially part of what sustains capitalism because they are invested in capitalism as a divine and virtuous self-reproducing system. This contradiction of the free market populists that resist neo-liberalism has to be seen as the result of the destabilizing of a common morality by the liberal democratic consensus of neo-liberalism.

The return of the people signifies the crisis of liberal democratic universalism. In its aversion to attach democracy to a people there is a lack of meaning in the substance of equality. In the context of this crisis it is proper to talk about an increasing formalism where the process itself covers for the absence of content. With the de-politicization of the economic and the expansion of state power, voting has functioned as a disciplinary mechanism covering up the lack of choice and giving this ‘essential disorientation’ (Badiou 2008: 17) the appearance of democracy. For the Third Way, which cannot fulfill itself in its own terms of social democracy, the electoral fetish ‘fills the place of democracy’ (ibid: 7). In this instance the fetish ‘embodies the lie’ of Third Way social democracy, which is really the embodiment of neo-liberal universalism, and ‘enables us to sustain the unbearable truth’ (Žižek 2001: 13). Žižek has described the way elections function as a Lacanian ‘big Other’, effectively a symbolic guarantor of the legitimacy of de-politicization while acting as ‘a fetish which protects us against democracy itself’ (2010: 391-2). It is in this way that:

a government not covered by “free elections” finds itself under much greater pressure: its acts are no longer covered by democratic legitimacy and those in power are deprived of the ability to say “Who are you to criticize us? We are an elected government we can do what we can do what we want” ’ (ibid: 158).

Despite the discourse of civil society politics of Obama’s presidential campaign, his election has functioned in the same way, the moment itself was the fulfillment of democracy. Obama had received gushing praise from the liberal left when he stated that Martin Luther King would not have endorsed
him but served as a tireless critic within the public sphere advancing the cause for justice (Goodman & Boggs 2008). Yet when the very same social movements of the left mildly criticized his lack of political courage Obama has clung to the fetish, dismissively retorting “who are you to criticize us”.

It is in the context of this deadlock that the popular pressure which forced the voting down of the first bail out in the US congress, has to be seen as the return of the political. However reactionary a moment it may have been the people refused to defer to the technocrats, decried as illegitimate the emergency powers of the state, rejected their exclusion from the economic and identified it as the site of the political and fundamental antagonism.

Lastly, despite the electoral and parliamentary fetish serving as a form which covers up the failure to fulfill the promise of expanding rights and equality in liberal-democracy I do not follow the populist move in both rejecting the mere formalism of liberal-democracy and the utopianism of liberal universality. Both as form and rhetoric liberal-democracy has been materially productive in engendering new democratic demands and the struggle for political recognition among new social movements. Just as republican virtue has had a life of its own which in essence contradicts its intended function, namely to protect the interests of capital, so to the universal horizon of the political has

47 In a conversation with radical and civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs, the left journalist Amy Goodman drew attention to Obama’s reading of Martin Luther King Jr as a civil society leader and not a political kingmaker. Boggs while not uncritical of Obama praised the effect of his candidacy on civil society; ‘a new generation is emerging and looking for the kind of healing this country needs...he has unleashed that’ (Goodman & Boggs 2008).

48 Shortly before the 2010 mid-term elections Obama’s Press Secretary laid out the centrist strategy for the democratic campaign by blasting the ‘professional left’ implying that these same grass roots forces were now special interests on the par with corporate lobbyists (Youngman 2010). Gibbs stridently claimed those on the left ‘ought to be drug tested’ for wanting Canadian healthcare and the elimination of the Pentagon (ibid). Obama struck similar notes throughout the campaign where he claimed that his left detractors were mad at him for not having ‘brought about world peace’ (Stromberg 2010). What’s remarkable here is how Obama’s sarcasm mirrors the republican dismissal of the messianic tones of his 2008 campaign.
meant the radical reappropriation of liberal universality in various contexts of struggle. The aim of this thesis is to identify just what is at stake in the populist reclamation of this universality, specifically in the media field as a critical site of the political, and how one might conceive of a political notion of universality that supersedes the liberal/populist entanglement.

**Conclusion**
The present conflict between Obama and the Tea party populists has to be seen as a conflict born of the contradictions of (neo)liberal democracy. Democracy is *political* in that it is attached to a specific people and is practicable within a particular civic space in which equality functions as a manner of exclusion. This principle fact of the people and the political within democracy is the formal truth that populism explains. At present the universalism of (neo)liberal democracy disavows the political which means that its return necessarily takes a radical form attacking specifically liberal democracy. What the friend/enemy distinction of the Tea Party crucially highlights as the core political antagonism of America’s founding is the imperative of protecting private property from democratic encroachment. The redefinition of democracy within the US constitution was premised on representation acting as a filter upon radical democratic demands for substantive equality. Republican notions of civic virtue have been a crucial ideological supplement to this limited form of democracy through an emphasis on private morality as realized through property. A redefined republicanism has served as the best ideological tool for overcoming the contradictions of formal democracy as the secular institutions of the state and liberal property assume a religious and moral value, in turn reinforcing a notion of civic activity that is strictly confined to its proper place. With neoliberalism, the logic of Empire and the new politics of abstract rights, the amalgamation of liberalism and republican virtue has been split. The question of the people and their moral character has returned. While the populist reiterate a radical articulation of private property as sacrosanct, over and above any form of democracy, the Third Way holds that liberalism, markets and property are a democratizing force. The ultimate paradox is that the populist defense of capitalism and the republic amounts to resisting what
capital and neo-liberalism actually demands in the form of bail-outs and state interventions. The key site of the political within this entanglement is clearly the question of private property, with the populists representing the ideological mystification of America’s founding and liberals clinging to the notion that abstract forms will effect democratic change. It is therefore necessary for any left or radical democratic project to articulate a new universal people whose experience of equality addresses the distribution of property.

This chapter has considered the ways in which democracies call forth a universalist people that is exclusionary. In the American context this subject has been the virtuous individual of property. We have seen the contradictions of liberalism in that it requires a certain spirit to animate its rationalist institutions and that (neo)liberal democracy’s tendency towards abstraction has meant more pernicious forms of exclusion. What will be required in the next chapter to advance the core question of this thesis (how does a liberal political/media culture respond to a populist challenge?) is a closer examination of how populism draws up the contours of the political. It is my contention that populism obfuscates the key political antagonism and serves as a form of its displacement. Having made an historical argument about the centrality of liberal property to the political founding of the American revolution I intend to develop this theoretically in the next chapter. Even in the face of the rightward transformation of American populism the question of property and its mystification have been central to constructing both progressive and free market populist identities. The people, linked to a moral and national spirit devoid of a material substance of equality, will always be an inherently populist classification and as such not suitable for a genuine universalist politics.
Chapter Three - Populism

Introduction

In the last chapter I established how the contradictions of (neo)liberal democracy and the American republic of property are responsible for the re-emergence of the people as a political subjectivity. The people were defined in two ways: firstly as materially constituted at a historical juncture, in the institution of private property\footnote{Private Property is of course not a static category and the Agrarian frontier character it assumes in the nation’s founding has been radically reconfigured. However it is precisely this battle for the nature of property which gives it and the political a structuring ontic status.} (ontic); secondly as a certain spirit, morality and political subjectivity (ontological). Having summarized the ontic content of the American people this chapter deals with political ontology and subjectivization. The necessary gap between the ontic and the ontological is the space in which a populist politics emerges, seeking to realize an ideological closure of the political. It is in this ‘desire for a fullness’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 121) that populism both speaks to the antagonistic core of the political while ultimately representing a mystification of the political.

Before engaging in the attempt to theorize populism as a specific political category and discourse it is worth clarifying the various attempts to wrest populism from conceptual ambiguity. In America, the term populist has a certain cachet, persisting as an illusory ideal in which left and right popular anger coalesce around democracy (Brown 2010, Moyers 2010, Sirota 2008). In Europe, populism is associated with xenophobic right-wing fringe parties (Mudde 2004 & 2010), while in Latin America the importance of populism is seen as indicative of a certain political immaturity (Cammack 2000). Despite the historical, political and regional variations, populist discourse can clearly be identified around a movement’s or leader’s appeals to a people against a corrupt political elite. While this summation could hold true for a wide variety of movements, what is crucial is the idea of a people, not in a majoritarian sense, but in the experience of an exclusive threatened identity. The populist
refrain of “let the people rule” is not a call for forms of direct democracy but an emotive plea for restoring a sense of the people’s will in elected office.

Historical variants aside, it is important to identify populism as a specific mode of politics reflecting the antagonistic nature of the political. Much of the theoretical work on the question of populism has been concerned with constructing typologies or historicist accounts casting populism as a response to a historical juncture (Canovan 1981). While acknowledging the value of such work, I shall develop, following from Laclau (2005), a symptomal reading of populism. For Laclau, a populist articulation expresses the fundamentally discursive, performative and antagonistic nature of the political process or hegemony. The act of naming a people as universal or identifying a plebs as populus amounts to ‘political reason tout court’ (ibid: 225). The people acts as a nodal point in a discursive chain whose social and political content is indeterminable and which may be stretched to incorporate a range of sub-discourses coalescing around a people engaged in antagonistic struggle. For Laclau, the constitutive ambiguity of the people as a political category is reflective of the openness of the social in which the people assume no essential political content, and are unable to enact a final closure of the political space, while serving as the privileged political and democratizing agent.

This seminal symptomal theory of populism has engendered an intense academic debate around the implications for left political theory. The most powerful critique of Laclau has been Žižek’s (2008) identification of the fundamentally reactionary nature of a people as political agent. The emergence of a people uniformly represents an attempt to portray an organic totality, threatened by an outsider whose elimination would restore unity and harmony. Seeking refuge in the people as a political identity for Žižek is the failure to directly confront the political and crucially mystifies the ontology of the political. The political is constituted in the struggle in which a particular identity declares itself universal. What is characteristic of the people as a subjectivity is the attempt to seek ontological closure or achieve ‘the fully reconciled society’ (Laclau 2005: 119). This is the central paradox of Laclau’s
theory of hegemony that, while no agent can occupy the seat of power by universal, historical mandate, this is exactly the illusion fostered by populism.

The impasse that this theory of populism presents, namely that radical democratic demands can only be sustained by a process of political mystification, necessitates an urgent reconsideration of the structuring role of political economy. This anti-essentialist theory of hegemony, in which the social is marked by heterogeneity, with no privileged site of the political, corresponds precisely to Third Way politics and the new spirit of capitalism. Political economy plays a structuring role in its very absence, allowing for the culture wars/identity politics frame of post-modern politics. In the diverse political terrain of multiple identity struggles, the site, “economy” remains central in representing a potentially substantive linkage of chains of equivalence without enacting a final determination of political struggle. In acknowledging the principle structuring role of economy in the political we are closer to breaking the deadlocks of populism and liberal democracy, allowing us to consider what a truly universal political category might resemble. Žižek’s proletariat, as opposed to working class, is the agent that is cognizant of its contingency and the fundamental ontological gap of the political and, as such, seeks to realize itself through a destruction of its own identity. Therefore, we might talk of the proletariat as the privileged hegemonic class that can actually transcend the political frontier.

Upon developing this theoretical approach to populism, I will offer a brief interpretive history of American populism. What is characteristic of American populism even in the shifting of political orientation from left to right is the parable of republican morality and corruption. Despite the fact that Jacksonian populists were laissez-faire and the People’s Party 50 and

50 The original “Populists”, the People’s Party, was a third party movement which arose in the late 19th century throughout the south, midwest and the frontier states of the south west and Rocky mountains. A largely agrarian movement, its main policy planks were inflationary monetary policy (the coinage of silver), to relieve indebted farmers, and the regulation of railway monopolies, which prevented market access for farmers. In 1892, presidential candidate James Weaver claimed over a million
Progressive movement\textsuperscript{51} were advocates of government intervention, all were primarily concerned with government corruption. Whether the risk was the creation of a new aristocratic class or the increasing power of monopolies and trusts, the principal site of antagonism was special interest capture of the Republic, not the economy directly. Thus the New Deal, while including populist elements as most political movements do, cannot be said to be populist as it involved the calculation of the balance of power between labor and capital, in essence identifying economy as the principal site of the political. The contemporary incarnation of populism in the New Right/Tea Party is both formally consistent with former left populism while representing the zenith of republican morality in the face of the crisis of capitalism. Having identified the fundamental antagonism of economy/private property, the Tea Party attempts to realize a virtuous circle of property (ontic) and morality (ontological) that negates the very condition of possibility of the political. This is the fundamental mystifying operation of populism.

\textit{Historical Development of Populism as Discourse}

The principle aim of this chapter is to develop a theory of populism in relation to political ontology, what is identified by Panizza (2005: 2) as a ‘symptomal’ approach to populism as opposed to ‘empiricist’ or ‘historicist’ accounts. However, a brief descriptive account of populist discourse and a summation of votes and won the electoral college votes of Kansas, Colorado, Idaho and Nevada. The movement was “co-opted” by the Democratic party in 1896 as William Jennings Bryan was nominated for president on a populist platform. The People’s Party endorsement tore apart the Midwest/Southern alliance spelling the end of the party (Canovan 1981: 17-59).

\textsuperscript{51} This chapter does not give particular detailed attention to what is called the Progressive era (1900-20s), focusing more on the labor-led push for the New Deal. While the Progressives railed against plutocracy, their political method was more liberal than populist. The Progressives were made up of urban upper-middle class professionals and intellectuals who sought legalistic reform, the key figure being Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. While the progressives certainly saw themselves as the besieged middle, their reforms would not eliminate their enemies so much as create the institutional framework for shared prosperity.
Empiricist/historicist theory will provide the following symptomal reading with greater depth and context. The term “populist” originated in the US with the turn-of-the-20th-century anti-monopoly People’s Party. With the exception of Margaret Canovan, American populism remains largely undertheorized in what are otherwise authoritative histories of the phenomenon. The iconoclastic, acerbic and generally progressive brand of politics the original populists of the People’s Party espoused has given the term a certain cachet in US politics. Idealized histories abound, which ascribe a certain content to the term populist that is held to transcend traditional antagonisms in a post-political democratic alternative to socialism/communism. Particularly in the New Left, populism is portrayed as a left-wing inheritance that ensures political capital for the left in times of popular unrest. This view is succinctly expounded by leftist Carl Boggs in response to the populism of the New Right:

Reaganomics cannot for long reconcile the demands of capitalist accumulation with a populist legitimation urging a return to early capitalist virtues appropriate to the frontier (1983: 344)

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52 Canovan’s work stands as both a detailed historical account of various populist movements and an attempt to delineate a ‘typology of populisms’ (1981: 13) around seven variants such as Agrarian Populisms and Political Populisms. These categories however fail to give the theoretical precision necessary for our purposes. Canovan has also identified populism as internal to democracy, as a necessarily ‘simple and vivid ideological map’ (1999: 26) that makes mass democracy possible.

53 While this chapter relies on the scholarship of Michael Kazin (1995) and Canovan (1981), Lawrence Goodwyn’s (1978) The Populist Moment is a key text in the literature. Goodwyn focuses on the agrarian populists who for him define the democratic imagination and offered an exemplary case study of democratic movement-building. His work was motivated by a desire to rehabilitate the populists in a time of political apathy born of the increasingly centralized power of the state.

54 One cannot help but notice the liberal inversion of reductionist Marxist theories of class and capitalist crisis, namely that crisis is automatically beneficial in crystallizing working class consciousness.
Such a view sees the populism of the right as “fake populism” in that it doesn’t reflect the essential reduction of populism to a progressive/leftist political content\textsuperscript{55}. The popular anger of the New Right and, by extension, the Tea Party, allied to corporate power\textsuperscript{56}, is seen as a perversion of the populist legacy and effectively astro-turf to the real populist grassroots who represent the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman. Bill Moyers, a giant of American journalism and democracy activist, offered in the final show of his 40 year broadcast career, the political blueprint of populism. His finale featured ‘the good people of Iowa’ (farmers) fighting against the banks and channeling the founding fathers; ‘they were great populists’ (2010). In a conversation with Jim Hightower, a political commentator from Texas, we get the fake-populist denunciation of the Tea Party:

Here’s what populism is not. It is not just an incoherent outburst of anger. And certainly it is not anger that is funded and organized by corporate front groups, as the initial Tea Party effort is...populism is at its essence is a, a just determined focus on helping people be able to get out of the iron grip of the corporate power...I guess that's one big difference between real populism and what the Tea Party thing is (Moyers 2010).

\textsuperscript{55} Leading in to the 2010 US congressional elections Sherrod Brown, a progressive Democratic congressman offered the quintessence of the romanticized leftist notion of populism. In a \textit{USA Today} editorial entitled ‘How to Fight Tea Party’s Faux Populism’ Brown claims that ‘history tells us that rage on the right should not be confused with populism’ (2010). A further sign of the in-authenticity of the Tea Party is its divisiveness: ‘Tea Party Populism is driven by anger at our government and our country. Real populism fights for all Americans’ (ibid).

\textsuperscript{56} Political commentator David Sirota (2008), whose book \textit{The Uprising} profiles the populist upsurge within the vein of American post-politics, labels the New Right and its corporate friendly politics as ‘fake populism’. Sirota (2008) claims that the populist swindle has run its course and that ‘as we continue building our uprising and exposing their fake populism, we are getting closer to the truly exponential change that has marked other uprising moments in American history’.
I use this extended example to illustrate the persistence of this idealized notion of populism within the American context that ascribes a specific social and political content to the term. What is also striking is the discursive similarity between this example and the Tea Party, namely that of a good people from the heartland or frontier standing against a corrupting power. In this quick analysis we can see that populism is a particular mode of politics, and an identification ‘available to any political actor operating in a discursive field in which the sovereignty of the people and its inevitable corollary, the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, are core elements of its political imaginary’ (Panizza: 4). In other words there is no privileged social base to populism and there is no reason why the corporate-friendly politics of the Tea Party cannot be considered populist.

With the predominance of histories of American populism, much of the theoretical work on populism has been concerned with Latin America or Europe, in what can be thought of as empiricist typologies. Work on Latin American populism has largely centered around Marxist theories of uneven-development, emphasizing the weakness of the urban working class and a post-colonial political immaturity (Germani & Di Tella in Laclau 1977: 151). Cammack has refined such theories to consider the resurgence of Latin-American populism as necessarily related to the 'historical conjuncture' (2000: 151) of neo-liberalism. What is broadly characteristic of the European

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57 It has been well documented that the owners of Koch Industries the second largest private company in the US, Charles and David Koch, have persistently and enthusiastically backed New Right, libertarian projects from the Cato Institute and the Tea Party through to the Americans for Prosperity Foundation (Mayer 2010). However, this corporate backing of a dichotomous vision of the political does not speak to a manipulation of an essential anti-corporate populist content. It is also too simple to claim that the Tea Party are merely the shock troops of capitalism. While the Koch brother's investment in the Tea Party has yielded fruit specifically on the issue of climate change legislation there is an anachronistic character to the nature of their endeavour. Put simply, the brothers, through their family business, are resisting Empire and the Third Way in a battle internal to capital itself over the morality and spirit of the republic of property.
approach is the treatment of populism as a ‘pathology of democracy’ (Meny & Surel 2002: 3). Populism is held as a threat to and a ‘distorted manipulation’ (Pasquino 2008: 28) of European liberal democracy, as opposed to its symptom. As a remainder of history, populism is seen as reducible to institutional weakness, the particularities of certain parliamentary and proportional voting systems or the persistence of regional identities as in Italy (Tarchi 2008). Populism is also held as a reaction to cultural shifts and the destabilization of traditional Fordist working class identity and parties in the face of globalization (Mastropaolo 2008). While all of these explanations express certain empirical facts about a particular populism there remains a suggestion that it is a temporary excess or aberration in the process of historical development. This account of populism thus fails to grasp what is expressly political within populism. The liberal critique and rejection of populism as simply unmediated political power, avarice and manipulation, is typified by Pasquino:

> there is one element above all which must exist...the presence of a leader willing and able to exploit existing social conditions of anxiety and availability (27).

The liberal critique of political opportunism or the reduction of populism to a set of historical, cultural or political contingencies is incapable of giving populism the conceptual precision necessary for a theoretical analysis of populism as a universal political category.

What we are able to deduce by way of empirical analysis are persistent discursive themes that mark the deployment of the populist mode of politics. Populism principally delineates ‘a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous “others” who are together depicted as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell 2008: 3). Their pursuit of office is contrasted to the elite or career politicians representing establishment parties, as they seek simply to restore the people’s proper place as sovereign. Populists reject technocracy and expert knowledge, offering instead to ‘crush the Gordian
knots of modern politics with the sword of alleged simple solutions’ (Mudde 2004: 542). This distinct anti-intellectual streak is premised on the belief that ‘the people are one and inherently good’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell: YR 6) therefore we must ‘trust the people’\textsuperscript{58}. Despite the allusion to democracy, and various plebiscitary forms of populism, the reference to the people’s will is not a call for direct democracy but a demand for a certain kind of leadership resulting from a ‘charismatic linkage’ (Hawkins 2003: 1138). The people of populist movements ‘want politicians who know, rather than “listen to” the people, and who make their wishes come true’ (Mudde 2004: 558).

The people in all their simple goodness are linked to a communal ideal of the ‘heartland’\textsuperscript{59} (Taggart 2000: 95) as opposed to the cosmopolitanism of the city. A linguistic mark of this geographic ideal in American politics has been the use of colloquialisms to the point of mispronunciation\textsuperscript{60}. The “elite” scoffing that this provokes often serves to reinforce the dichotomy of the people and the outsiders as ‘the more their adversaries demonize the populist leaders, the more it usually reinforces the people’s identification with them’ (Panizza: 26). The invoking of heartland or the people’s way of life is a call for its restoration and defense for ‘soon it will be too late’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell: 5). It is in this mode that populist discourse assumes apocalyptic and millenarian tones promising ‘emancipation after a journey of sacrifice’ (ibid: 5) often with themes of ‘agony, martyrdom and regeneration, blood and purification’

\textsuperscript{58} ‘Trust the People’ was George Wallace’s slogan in his campaign for the democratic nomination for president in 1976 (Lowndes 2005: 167).

\textsuperscript{59} The Midwest has always figured as the heartland to America’s liberal coasts as it is properly ‘middle’ and connected to the agrarian property ideal. I have already discussed how Sarah Palin has re-created the frontier/heartland in Alaska. George Wallace re-calibrated this heartland ideal in his populist campaigns with the emblem of the embattled south. In building his national campaign of white backlash the metaphor of the south was extended: ‘we invite you to come and be with us, for you are of the Southern mind, and the Southern spirit, and the Southern philosophy, you are Southerners’ (Lowndes, p. 152)

\textsuperscript{60} George Wallace, George W. Bush and Sarah Palin are but a few who have worn their linguistic blunders as badges of honor.
(Panizza: 23). In offering a stark foundational antagonism, with an anti-procedural vision of transformation bordering on the revolutionary, populism gets us closer to the political. However as an internal symptom of the inside/outside of democracy it fails to properly transcend the principal political antagonism and as such cannot serve as the horizon of a truly revolutionary politics.

**The Logic of the Symptom**
In the last chapter I looked at how the liberal universalist denial of a people engendered the people’s return, and here I will directly address this populist phenomenon as the symptom of democracy’s traumatic core. While the liberal approach to populism as pathology externalizes populism, it is better thought of as a ‘pathological normalcy’ (Mudde 2010) that accentuates the radical kernel of democracy. It is in this way that populism, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, functions as ‘the return of the repressed, as a symptom of democracy, as an internal element of the democratic system, that also reveals the limits of the system and prevents its closure in the presumed normalcy of institutional procedures’ (Arditi 2007: 74). The repressed element of democracy that is lost in its increasing formalism is ‘the practice of mass democracy…the group-infusion’ and its ‘terroristic-fraternity’ (Badiou 2005: 89). Populism performs the passion and radical publicness of “the crowd as one”, with all of its insurrectionary potential.

Populism is a symptom of democracy in both encapsulating this internal antagonistic form but also in the way that this very performance acts as a substitute for the frustrated realization of democracy. It is in this acting out that the symptom ‘shields us from danger by masking a traumatic experience’ (Arditi: 74). The extent to which the symptom itself effectively functions to hide this trauma is dependent upon a fetishistic inversion of the symptom as the source of what Lacan calls jouissance. Therefore the populist can “enjoy his symptom”, only in so far as its logic escapes him’ (Žižek 1989: 16) as enjoyment ‘is possible only on the basis of certain non-knowledge’ (ibid: 73). The circular relationship between symptom, fetish, disavowal and jouissance is nicely summarized by McMillan (2008: 10) with the example of the nation.
The nation functions as a source of jouissance that externalizes the failure to realize itself in its own terms (ie liberte, egalite, fraternite) through an outsider (immigrants, subversives, fundamentalists), whose recurring presence ensures the perpetuity of the symptom as a form of enjoyment. The ability to enjoy the nation as a fetish is thus only maintained by this other who threatens our enjoyment.

The populist fetishist thus actively covers up the return of the repressed by investing in a nation or people in a manner that is not merely operating at the level of false consciousness. The ‘symbolic efficiency’ (Žižek 1999: 195) of a fetish is constitutive of a certain materiality of non-knowledge that effectively constructs an experience of reality. Thus the fetishist is able ‘whether through stoicism or sarcasm, tolerate the harshness and difficulty of daily existence’ (Johnston 2004: 266). In the present entanglement of populism and liberal-democracy there are two modes of fetishism that rely on a disavowal which effectively sustains belief in the fetish. This fetishist disavowal is embodied in the formula ‘I know, but nevertheless...’ (Žižek 1991: 245). Today’s liberal-democrat may very well “know” that the present democratic form does not produce a genuine equality of condition, “but nevertheless” these procedures ensure a basic trust which protect us from political violence. In this way the electoral or ‘parliamentary fetish’ (Badiou, 2008: 7) is experienced as a manipulation for the greater good, yet in this ersatz cynical distance towards the fetish it works all the more effectively as the fetishist experiences a superiority over the duped. The populist logic of disavowal traverses the ‘manipulative authority’ of the liberal-democratic fetish to ‘totalitarian authority’ (Žižek 1991: 251) as the fetish cannot be wrested from the populist by way of rational argument as we might assume it might be from the liberal democrat who believes only in the efficiency of the lie. The populist may “know” that the nation is not united and plagued with inequities and corruption “but nevertheless” through the people it is whole and complete. The populists “know very well” that [they] are people like others – at the same time consider [them]selves to be “people of a special mould, made of special stuff” - as individuals who participate in the fetish...[as the] direct embodiment of the will of history’ (ibid: 252). As the symptom is experienced
as enjoyment, in this totalitarian mode there is no incentive to divest from the fetish. It is not enough to explain the truth of the symptom, the non-knowledge of the fetish has a certain materiality and productivity in that it constantly re-produces the antagonistic categories necessary for enjoyment.

Hegemony
The most comprehensive theoretical account of this symptomal reading of populism is Laclau’s *On Populist Reason* (2005), which represents the culmination of his defining work on hegemony and an anti-essentialist reading of the political. The antagonistic and discursive articulation of a people is the hegemonic act of a particular assuming the role of the universal that amounts ‘to political reason tout court’ (ibid: 225). Laclau identifies a certain agelessness of the pathology critique of populism and mass political mobilization, particularly within the field of crowd psychology and the anti-democratic hysteria of the turn of 20th century. In this mode of politics the whirlwind of the crowd ensures that all rationality is lost, thus populist politics are castigated as vague, ideologically inconsistent and mere rhetoric. For Laclau however this properly public, preformative and affective core of populism is representative of the discursive act of creating hegemonic links:

vagueness and indeterminacy are...inscribed in social reality as such...rhetoric is not epiphenomenal vis-à-vis a self contained conceptual structure, for no conceptual structure finds its internal

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61 *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy* is of course co-authored with Chantal Mouffe and while they remain theoretically very close, they have pursued different paths with regard to praxis. While Laclau has embraced populism, Mouffe largely remains within their original designation of radical democracy. Her model of agonistic pluralism represents the attempt to draw antagonism into the framework of liberal democracy, in this sense protecting it from the return of an anti-democratic people.

62 The key figures for Laclau are Gustave Le Bon, Hippolyte Taine and Gabriel Tarde who write of the crowd and the masses as an animalistic agency that obliterates individual rationality. One could also add to this list Walter Lippman (1993) whose benevolent liberalism was concerned with saving the ‘bewildered herd’ (145) from itself.
cohesion without appealing to rhetorical devices. If this is so the conclusion would be that populism is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political (67).

The dismissal of rhetoric as a failure to programmatically adhere to ideological dictates should be rejected as the act of discourse is the principle means to establish political objectivity and subjectivity.

The discursive act is for Laclau the foundational political act in that it proceeds from the openness of the social in which there is always the ‘experience of a lack’ (85). The discursive act is an intervention to achieve fullness: as earlier discussed, this is the delineation of a reconciled community that can claim the place of democratic power and universality. This ideal of fullness, while impossible, is ‘necessary because without some kind of closure, however precarious it might be, there would be no signification and no identity’ (70). What this nominalization of the universal fundamentally underscores is the operation of the logics of difference and equivalence, which are central to creating a hegemonic discourse. The extent to which a discourse is effective or hegemonic relies on the ability of one particular difference to assume centrality within a chain of equivalences or nodal discourse, which stands opposed to a dichotomous political frontier. Any hegemonic discourse is thus only meta-stable as the logic of difference and equivalence are ultimately irreconcilable, with this tension defining the political and social space. To return to the question of populism and the pejorative claim that rhetoric leads to an ideological indeterminacy, Laclau states that ‘the hegemonic operation will be catachrestical through and through’ (72).

Laclau’s theory of populism is not merely that its discursive operation reflects the political and hegemony, but that the people, with all its conceptual ambiguity and contingency, is the privileged agent of politics. What is important in the emergence of a people, which is defined by Laclau as the self-identification of a ‘plebs who claim to be the only legitimate populus’ (81), is the creation of chains of equivalence. Each unit of the chain is seen as a
democratic demand to the system, for example the call for access to education, healthcare or political accountability. These demands may coalesce as a hegemonic project so long as they share the identification of an antagonistic political frontier. It is this ‘crystallization of the chain of equivalences’ (93) that creates a people. However, these ‘demands share nothing positive, just the fact that they all remain unfulfilled’ (96). Thus for Laclau, the people are both universal yet contain no particular political content. A political frontier may shift through the incorporation of critical signifiers that dissolve bonds within the chain or, if the chain is stretched too thin, the particular difference may fail to stand in for the absent fullness of the social. Being of the people then is always an experience of this gap between the ontic and ontological and ‘that is why, between, left-wing and right-wing populism, there is a nebulous no-man’s-land which can be crossed - and has been crossed - in many directions’ (87). In describing the phenomenon of French Communist Party members migrating to Le Pen’s National Front, Laclau stresses that ‘the ontological need to express social division’ (88) is a political force stronger than the commitment to abstract ontic forms.

Within this hegemonic theory of populism, the process of signification is crucial to effectively bring an antagonistic frontier and people into being. I have already described how a particularity stands in for the absent fullness, thus constructing a chain of equivalences. What is required for this one moment in the chain to acquire nodal status is a ‘radical investment’ (71) in this particular. It is specifically naming a particular identity as “the people” that has the effect of retroactively constructing these chains. This particular identity becomes the source of jouissance in what Lacan calls objet petit a, as the elusive object of desire ‘which becomes the primary ontological category’ (ibid, 116). What is critical in engendering a radical investment in the people, what Laclau calls the ‘social productivity of a name’ (108), is the logic affective investment. The signifier “the people” becomes something discursively embodied and performed through affect, as a manner of social currency throughout the hegemonic chain of equivalences. In the populist community ‘affect is the active discharge of emotion’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 400) which functions as a marker of the community and elicits the whole emotional
spectrum of the fetishist, from jouissance to deadly seriousness. Affects are here understood as inherently social in the sense they ‘do not arise from pre-existing subjects but instead pass through them, revitalizing and reconstructing them’ (Ambrose 2009: 113). Thus the name “Tea Party” elicits a range of performative affects, from acting out the revolutionary iconography to embodying the rugged individualism, morality and productivism of the man of property. While affect is crucial in any particular political articulation Laclau does not identify the extent to which this may function in a fetishistic manner. Laclau’s notion of affective investment suggests greater fluidity and contingency in identity as each hegemonic articulation is crisis-prone. The fetish and the logic of disavowal is far more stubborn than this temporary investment implied by Laclau.

Signification is also essential for Laclau’s theory in accounting for the malleability of a dichotomous political frontier. To the extent to which the name “the people” functions as an empty signifier, detached from its original particularity and standing in for universality and the whole chain, there will be a whole range of signifiers that are properly floating at play. What defines the extent to which the signifiers “justice”, “sacrifice” and “responsibility” float is the ability to traverse the political frontier. It is this ‘war of position’ (Laclau 2006: 664) in times of ‘organic crisis’ (Laclau & Mouffe: 136) that defines whether such floating signifiers will create the basis for a new hegemonic order or if the links of the people will be dissolved. The exemplary case for Laclau is the transformation of American left-populism into the radical anti-communism of McCarthy. The tropes of ‘Americanism’ (Kazin 1995: 12), such as the ‘honest’ ‘hard-working producers’ of ‘middle America’, could be used in the service of either politics. However, this initial identification of an essentially contingent and porous political frontier casts the political as merely an endless binarism. This is the question we encountered in the last chapter with regard to the constitutive outside of democracy, namely what is necessary to overcome this endless process and establish a properly revolutionary politics? For Laclau the fundamentally heterogeneous nature of the social is held as the Lacanian Real as an irresspressible essence that escapes representation and eclipses the binarism of the frontier. In the way that all
discourse and signification is the experience of a lack or an incomplete fullness, no revolutionary subjectivity can arise simply from a static frontier or an ontic content, ie the internal contradictions of capital. Workers may be the revolutionary agent but that is dependent on ‘the way the actual worker – not its pure conceptual determination – is constituted’ (Laclau 2005: 149). In the creation of an antagonistic identity “the people” is never a simple negative reversal of the system or those in power. Rather the identity that may be made empty through a radical investment as the object of jouissance, is something which exceeds this binarism. Therefore ‘only an overdetermination of this antagonistic plurality can create global anti-capitalist subjects capable of carrying out the struggle worth the name’ (150).

Against Laclau
While Laclau’s work stands as the most comprehensive attempt to properly theorize populism as a universal category, not merely as a historical idiosyncrasy or remainder, it has sparked an intense theoretical debate on the academic left. What is most problematic for our purpose is the question of the political frontier and the structuring role of political antagonism. The political is said to function as an ontic category given that ‘the political has a primary structuring role because social relations are ultimately contingent, and any prevailing articulation results from an antagonistic confrontation whose outcome is not decided beforehand’ (Laclau 2006: 664). To put it another way, the political exists precisely as indeterminable antagonism and heterogeneity. The problem arises in how to account for the inevitability of the political playing itself out. Arditi identifies the trick at work in Laclau’s formulation as the dependence on crisis of representation or organic crises. Laclau holds that ‘critical junctures’ and the subsequent ‘de-institutionalization’ (Arditi 2010: 494) are the necessary pre-conditions for the radical people of populism to emerge. But as Arditi adroitly observes: ‘then the political would be subservient to those junctures, and therefore, its

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63 This debate can be tracked in the annals of *Critical Inquiry* volumes 32 and 33. The dispute between Laclau and Žižek concerns the horizon of revolutionary politics and whether one considers the political as fundamentally negative or as providing an opening for a substantive notion of universality.
status would be derivative rather than constitutive’ (494). If we wish to keep
this theory of populism intact, it becomes imperative to consider what
properly transforms the political frontier or de-institutionalizes the prevailing
hegemonic project.

Laclau’s alteration of the theory of hegemony, as comparable to the populist
discourse of the people, raises the question as to whether “the people” are
truly revolutionary, capable of transcending the inside/outside logic of the
frontier. The crucial sticking point, for Žižek, is the fact that populism is
fundamentally a ‘negative phenomenon’ (2008b: 268) in which an organic
unified people is threatened by a corrupt outsider. This is precisely the
fetishistic aspect of populism that perpetuates the symptom in order to
externalize it in the other/outsider rather than properly confront it. The
fundamentally reactionary populist logic is explained by Mudde (2004):

Although populists can be emancipatory, they do not want to change the people
themselves, but rather their status within the political system. Populists (claim to) speak in the name of the oppressed people, and they want to emancipate them by making them aware of their oppression. However they do not want to change their values or their “way of life”. This is fundamentally different from, for example, the early socialists, who wanted to “uplift the workers” by re-educating them, thereby liberating them from their “false consciousness”. For populists, on the other hand, the consciousness of the people, generally referred to as common sense, is the basis for all good politics (547-8).

The people then always retains a restorative or ‘proto-fascist’ (Žižek 2006a:
553) character that may be ‘anti-government’ but is ‘rarely anti-regime’ (Ware
2002: 110). Populism ‘is obsessed with the parasitic agent’ (Moffit: 8) that
becomes ‘reified into a positive ontological entity’ that must be destroyed in
order to ‘restore the balance and justice’ (Žižek 2008b: 278). It is in this way
that American social conservatives\textsuperscript{64} can invest tirelessly in losing battles, with an endless capacity for outrage, as this indignation produces its own reward in preserving the fetish as the source of \textit{jouissance}. So while a radical investment in an object, the people or leader, is for Laclau reflective of the contingent, indeterminable nature of the political, there is no understanding of the impasse of fetishism and its anti-political nature. Thus Žižek claims, in typical polemical fashion, that the basic model of populism is comparable to Nazism, with the figure of the Jew functioning as this outsider that threatens a good people (2006: 556). The enemy or the jew\textsuperscript{65} in populist ontology assumes an overdetermined position able to embody a plurality of meanings and assume a multifarious and contradictory evil. The very basis of the fetishist’s \textit{jouissance} requires the investment in this fantasmatic evil and omnipotent threat. For Laclau this is, not surprisingly, an incendiary charge, as the Jew may be an outsider in the same way that a populist discourse ‘presents Wall Street as the source of all evil’ (Laclau 2006: 653). This example is crucial, as surely all populist movements have a discourse of financial parasitism. The difference is whether a negative people experiences this as an external threat, \textit{perhaps even engineered by the Jews,} or whether this is symptomally read as internal to the existing political regime of capital.

Here we encounter another of the fierce theoretical battle-lines between Žižek and Laclau in regards to the proper revolutionary subjectivity: that Laclau does not grasp the fetishistic potential of antagonism and the people represents a compromise with populist mystification. A properly

\textsuperscript{64} Thomas Frank writes: ‘with the pro-life movement, the material goal of stopping abortion is, almost by definition, beyond achieving. Ask even the hardest-core activists, and they will admit that there is little that can be done to halt the practice without a fundamental shift on the Supreme Court. Their movement, however, just seems to grow and grow’. (2004: 96)

\textsuperscript{65} I use here the distinction made by Lyotard between the upper case “Jew” which denotes a concrete religious, political, or philosophical identity, and the lower case “jew” which defines a phantasmatic enemy and ‘the object of a dismissal’ (1990: 3) inscribed in a fascist politics. Thus the enemy of the populist may occupy the same dehumanized position as the jew in Anti-Semitism.
revolutionary subject will not be swept away by a fetishised notion of the people or a restored order that ultimately disavows knowledge of unpleasant realities, but will be critically engaged as, potentially, ‘all men are intellectuals’ (Gramsci 1971: 9). This revolutionary subjectivity is described in an often uncompromising brutality by Žižek as a form of internal violence that deracimates and shatters our symbolic universe. For Laclau, this is politically nihilistic, too high a price to bear as ‘no empirical actor can fit the bill’ (2006: 657) and the wait for a fully formed revolutionary subject is comparable to waiting for Martians. While in this revolutionary mode, Žižek often approaches the hyperbolic; what remains useful is the call to conceptualize what actual political acts can strike blows across the political frontier and shape a new hegemonic project.

Economy
The anti-essentialism of Laclau’s theory of populism is crucial for understanding the contingency of the political and its indeterminable manifestations in the social field. However, when we consider the current political impasse of populism, arising from the crisis of neo-liberalism, and the implicit admission in Laclau’s work of the necessity of rupture and crisis, it becomes imperative to consider the constitutive role of economy in the political. For Laclau, economy can only be one of the many sites that structure political identity, as the “Real” of heterogeneity threatens to explode antagonism at any point in the social field. Economy is not here to be thought of as the determining factor in the last instance that reduces all struggle to an essential content but rather as the very principle of contemporary heterogeneity. As Žižek has put it: ‘global capitalism, with its dynamics of “deterritorialization”... has created the conditions for the demise of “essentialist” politics and the proliferation of new multiple political subjectivities’ (2000: 319). With the new spirit of capitalism, accommodating the demands for new rights has been the means of sustaining the hegemony of neo-liberal capitalism. Not only do such demands not dissolve the frontier but the “demand” itself, which is the genesis of the political in Laclau’s theory, has at its core a deference to the power that may accommodate the demand.
The key point for Žižek is that political economy as the principle political site gives rise to the new identity politics, which seems to diminish economy to just another site. The economy is political in that all the objective categories and units of analysis are determined by the level of struggle at the heart of the system. As Marx writes ‘the establishment of the normal working day is the result of centuries of struggle between capitalist and laborer’ (1887: 178). To give economy a privileged role in ontological constitution is not to accept the bourgeois premise of economy as a concrete ontic category but rather to see it as a reification of a certain level of class struggle. Therefore, in the present delineation of the frontier between a right-wing people, engaged in the politics of moral restoration, against a liberal-left regime that is malleable to the demands for minority rights, ‘the economic is the absent cause that accounts for the displacement in representation’ (Žižek 2008b: 290). Thus it is the economic, not Laclau’s heterogeneity, that functions as the Real as ‘it is the simultaneously hard core “expressed” in other struggles through displacements and other forms of distortion, and the very structuring principle of these distortions’ (ibid: 291). The economic is a particular within the social field that is cut through by political economy. This double presence is comparable to the position of labor as ‘the special commodity’ (Marx 1887: 66) which experiences itself as particular while serving as the basis for the universal exchange of commodities. It is the direct confrontation of this contradiction that might allow for the construction of a hegemonic project that could form substantive links through the different sites of the social that might supersede the deadlock of liberal democracy and populism. For Žižek then the proletariat is rehabilitated as the revolutionary agent, not in the determinist sense of capitalism producing its own gravediggers, but as the only class capable of rejecting the organicist mystifications of populism. As Marx wrote, the proletariat ‘is not a class of civil society’ it is ‘the total loss of humanity’ (Marx 1992: 256). Thus it is the only class that openly seeks to obliterate itself as a class and in so doing transcend the political frontier (Žižek 2008b: 414-5).
Žižek’s Problem

The particular character of Tea Party populism has in a certain respect blindsided Žižek as economy no longer merely structures in its absence but has become the object/fetish of jouissance. Private property as a juridical notion is imbued with a certain spirit that enmeshes the morality of the American frontier project, patriarchy and religion. Thus I am inclined to designate the economic populism of the Tea Party as the culmination of American populism, where the culture wars and the morality of property coalesce. Rather than political economy overdetermining the various sites of the social field in populist/liberal culture wars, economy has returned as a fetish object. This is not to infer that the Tea Party really do speak to the political but rather in a neat dialectical reversal the fetish of economy is overdetermined by cultural content such as the original man of property, religion and social issues. What is often described as the Tea Party’s embrace of the economic over traditional social issues functions as a form of fetishist disavowal par excellence rejecting any contradiction in the free market and private property and sanctioning a vicious cultural politics against Obama. For Žižek however, the nominalization of an object or people is incapable of sustaining a prolonged political engagement:

A more general remark should be made here about the single-issue popular movements, for example, the “tax revolts” in the US: Although they function in a populist way, mobilizing the people around a demand that is not met by the democratic institutions, it does not seem to rely on a complex chain of equivalences, but remains focused on one singular demand (2008b: 284-5).

66 Kate Zernike, the lead reporter on the Tea Party for the liberal New York Times has constructed just such a narrative with articles such as ‘Tea Party Avoids Divisive Social Issues’ (2010d).

67 Žižek here is referring to the embryonic forms of the Tea Party that were engaged in ballot initiatives for a Taxpayer Bill of Rights and the entrenchment of austerity.
Žižek holds that a politics of specific demands, whether against taxation or heterogeneous struggles for recognition, ie sexual equality, fails to forge chains around an anti-system discourse sufficient for constructing a new hegemonic project. What Žižek misses, however, is the way economy can function as the ultimate populist object of jouissance that can traverse the social field constructing a holistic discourse of a people against a corrupt system. The appeal to economy or a fetishized notion of private property as a concrete universality that functions as the fountainhead of all morality, achieves the principle objective of populism, the final ontological closure of the people. While the populism of moral outrage has been marked by the subtraction of economy from the political, its re-inscription as the concrete basis of a people that really exist is the high point of populist mystification. It is the properly spiritual aspect of property in the original American Republic of Property that allows the particular site of economy to function in this way. This is in contrast to certain forms of European populism where national identity may predate capitalism and may see in American a certain global capitalist corruption of traditional identity. I describe the Tea Party's notion of economy as the particular because it is a thoroughly culturally specific notion of property, not a universal description of an objective economic process. It is in this way that we can understand the Tea Party's love of “free markets” and simultaneous rejection of globalization, the IMF and the World Bank as forces of global government and socialism. What is clear in the American populist relationship to the universal aspect of capital, that is the globalization of finance capital, is a retreat into a particular fetishized lifeworld. The revolutionary proletarian subject position described by Žižek, that breaks with populist mystification, sees in the diversity of particular struggles against alienation, whether as workers, peasant farmers or inhabitants of the biosphere, the universal dimension.

American Populism
The structuring role of economy as the key site of the political is evidenced nowhere better than in the trajectory of American populism. Despite the various incarnations, laissez-faire, agrarian, anti-trust, liberal and moral conservative, American populism has consistently embodied what we have
called the spirit of the Republic of Property. Michael Kazin (1995) has defined the essential populist creed, and indeed the spirit of the Revolution, as ‘Americanism’ (12). The discourse of Americanism emerged out of what we have already described as the need to reconcile the liberal property regime and individualism with a properly collective, moral and republican political project. Thus Americanism served as the necessary ideological consensus cutting across class and religion with its own vision of shared prosperity and the good life. The principle contradiction of this revolutionary ideal of Americanism is its stasis and ultimately its negativity. As Kazin describes; ‘because the American Revolution has already occurred, advocating a new type of polity and a new constitution seems unnecessary, dangerous, close to treason’ (ibid: 12). Thus America is both ‘the most idealistic and the most conservative nation on earth’ (ibid: 12). The virtues of the constitution and the liberal regime of property have proved an immobile political frontier for the various manifestations of American populism. This inability of populism to directly confront the political accounts for the present phenomenon of right-wing populism that so perplexes the liberal left who treat populism as its own legacy.

American populism therefore not only elides the question of economy but elevates private property and Jefferson’s yeoman as the fount of morality, virtue and Americanism. In this sense, economy and its mystification structures the field of the political. Historian Thomas Goebel (1997), in attempting to draw out the specific content and importance of populism in America’s political development, identifies ‘populist republicanism’ as the central current of populism. This is described as a specific model of political economy and a ‘theory of the relationship between the political realm and the economic sphere’ (ibid: 110). This theory remains firmly within the aforementioned idealistic conservatism of preserving the revolution and recreating its past battles. The republican parable of corruption is here crucial in accounting for the failure of America’s shared promise. Republican populism is concerned with the twin evils of aristocracy and government as it was deemed that ‘by manipulating and exploiting the power of the state, private interests acquired their wealth and monopolistic position’ (ibid: 110). This
theory represents the fundamental negativity and disavowing logic of populism which fetishistically clings to the notion that the substance of Americanism/private property is real and good. Its failure to properly materialize is not internal but due to some corrupting force, either the avarice of an unproductive class or the intrusion of government.

In this properly negative mode populists of all generations have divided the social field into two antagonistic camps through a discourse of productivism. While working class or proletarian identity has rarely proved a productive political category in America, a classical liberal theory of class between producers and the unproductive has been salient. The classical liberal theory of Jean-Baptiste Say and the Industrialists, which influenced Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, held that the conflict between the productive and unproductive was the principal class struggle (Raico 1993). Government loomed large in this natural battle as it might intervene to distort this competition through the use of legislative privilege and taxation. Andrew Jackson was a key figure in articulating government’s “parasitic” role, in partnership with the moneyed interests, in undermining the revolution and the Republic of Property. Jackson embodied the populist spirit through his enthusiastic involvement in the ‘infinite expansion of virtue’ (Jefferson in Pocock: 539), or the extermination of the native populations, and in the castigation of ‘special privilege’ and the ‘transfer of property by law as aristocracy’ 68 (Goebel: 118). The turn-of-the-century Agrarian populists similarly based their struggle in such dichotomous terms with, government figuring as a corrupting, though not entirely irredeemable agent. Their battle was pitched in Jacksonian language between the ‘producers and the idle

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68 The supreme irony of course is that the very creation of private property is achieved by the government’s marching armies who clear the way for the land to be made “productive”. The idea that government could somehow be conceived as artificially granting privilege through law can only be maintained by a universalist faith in property that conceives of it as pre-existing even its own creation in the state. This is exemplary of the way that embedded in the Republic of Property and republican populism is a notion of divine providence which insulates the revolution from the political.
rich...the honest toilers and the parasites who rob them of their reward' (Canovan 1981: 41 & 52). For the People’s Party, finance, railroad corporations, trusts and monopolies were the foreign agents that, through ‘a system of artificial laws passed in the interests and on the demands of special interests’ (Goebel: 125), threatened Jefferson’s yeoman and his property. The externalization of economy is again a feature of this populist discourse as the monopolies are not held as symptomatic of capitalist economy but government’s corruption of it. The call for a people’s government consisted of expelling this corruption and intervening to protect the ‘independent proprietor...not to replace him with any more large-scale and collective system of production’ (Canovan: 57). In this ideal of the small property owner as the engine of capitalism and the wellspring of virtue, against government, finance and the monopolies, there is a clear lineage to the most insidious forms of radical neo-liberalism. It was Ayn Rand who offered the most brutal dichotomization between creative men and those that through government survive only ‘by looting, robbing, cheating or enslaving the men who produce’ (1961: 20). For Rand ‘such looters are parasites incapable of survival, who exist by destroying those who are capable’ (20) and in the words of her admirer Allan Greenspan ‘parasites who persistently avoid either purpose or reason perish as they should’ (Rubin 2007).

The New Deal era represents a critical turning point for populist republicanism as the critique of government as corrupting agent was partially suspended. With the emerging form of state capitalism or social democracy, and the industrial working class’ embrace of economies of scale and the liberal state, the “small-is-beautiful” agrarian ideal was eclipsed. In this sense the New Deal, in dramatically re-shaping the site of economy through the labor/capital compromise, cannot be said to be populist, despite prominent

69 Such a belief that the independent proprietor best embodies the virtues of capitalism is recreated in the present Main Street-Wall Street dichotomy. There is a belief that you can have the capitalism of Main Street without Wall Street or global corporations. The idea that corporations and finance have taken over government, leading to an erroneous capitalism, is premised on the notion that the pursuit of political power is in no way related to the healthy pursuit of a profit.
populist elements. Populist discourse and Americanism did play a crucial role in securing the New Deal but specifically through the disavowal of the radical content of the New Deal. Kazin’s profile of the two most influential reformist trade unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), demonstrates what might be called an instrumentalist deployment of populism and Americanism. The personal ideological trajectory of AFL founder and president Sam Gompers is exemplary. A Marxist in his youth, he found the language of socialism impractical and so ‘began to muffle radical expressions of class-consciousness and to glorify American ideals that all citizens held in common’ (Kazin: 55). Whether from a genuine revelatory philosophical transformation or sheer pragmatism, Gompers reached for the discourse of populism, rejecting socialism as ‘un-American’ (ibid: 55) in order to ground the organization to the realities of the American imagination. The same maneuvering is apparent in the contradictions between the form and discourse of the CIO. The CIO’s leader from 1937-40, John Lewis, may well have been a more genuine proponent of a populist Americanism, however it functioned in the same manner of protecting the organization from exclusion as communist. Lewis engaged in the sort of firebrand Americanist populism which appealed to the catholic Anti-communist populists\(^70\), while 40% of the organization itself was estimated to be made up of communists (ibid: 150). For the Communist Party (CPUSA) the CIO was the main driver of the Popular Front\(^71\) and its leadership advocated for the political use of Americanist discourse. Thus the CP ‘lauded patriotic icons like Paine, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln and swore allegiance to the “plain people”’ (ibid: 151) eventually developing the slogan ‘Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism’ (ibid: 152). It is in this way that Americanism served as the CIO’s ‘rhetorical shield that guarded

\(^70\) Kazin notes that Lewis could at times be indistinguishable from the infamous Father Coughlin: ‘American labor...stand[s] between the rapacity of the robber barons of industry of America and the lustful rage of the communists, who would lay waste to our traditions and institutions with fire and sword’ (p: 142).

\(^71\) CP leader Earl Browder: ‘the rise of the CIO trade unions carried the whole labor movement with it. It was the basis of communist advances in all other fields’ (Kazin: 150 n44).
everything they were trying to achieve’ (ibid: 146). My intention here is not to elevate the Stalinist stooges of the CP into the inevitable agents of history who forged the welfare state, but to highlight that the discourse of Americanism was essential to mask a transformation of the site of economy that did not correspond with the traditional populist republican ideal.

What this New Deal or working class compromise with a populist Americanism has wrought (in order to cover a real social-democratic content) is the politics of the middle. Within the populist conception of class between the productive and unproductive there is an ideal of the middle threatened by ‘a tiny elite that lived of the labor of others’ and from below by those ‘whose poverty seemed perpetual and whose behavior appeared servile, undisciplined and childlike’ (Kazin: 14). Kazin writes that African-Americans have proved an almost inexhaustible resource in providing the middle with an underneath to demonize. It is this virtuous middle that has throughout history ‘paid America’s taxes, fought it’s wars, and upheld the ideal of economic independence even if, temporarily, conditions might force some to toil for wages’ (ibid: 14). The New Deal both discursively and economically substantiated this middle class with all of the illusions of its role in the Republic of Property. In a very real sense the consumer power of the professional and working classes created the effective demand crucial to sustaining high-growth Keynesian policies. To this end the CIO helped re-imagine the ‘industrial worker as consumer’ (ibid: 143) within a new ‘nation of purchasers’ (ibid: 146). Given the remarkable success of the post-war boom, union demands assumed a de-politicized character, securing improvement in the lives of workers through the spoils of explosive productivity growth, however without returning to the question of economy.

In failing to confront the mystifications around economy – through the embrace of middle-class ideology and consumerism – the materialist compromise reached a critical limit. Populist Republicanism or Americanism

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72 Even the great Howard Roark, the hero of Ayn Rand’s *The Fountainhead*, had to work as a laborer at a quarry.
necessarily returned in the form of a virulent anti-communism. McCarthyism served as a hyperventilating exercise necessary to convince Americans that their country was in fact not a social democracy but indeed a Republic of Property. While not all populism of the right is derived from this McCarthyite lineage, it is the notion of a middle whose moral bearings or material privilege is threatened by communists or the poor on welfare that has marked the shift of populism rightward. The remarkable success of the New Deal was in the end its failure, as it created a middle-class that for 30 to 40 years could experience itself as really existing and the bastion of Americanism. In this sense we can say that while populism cannot be ascribed to any objective social position, it is the politics of the middle class in the sense that the middle class ‘is precisely the “non-class”’ (Žižek 1999: 186). Žižek writes that the middle class epitomizes the fetish of de-politicization as it represents ‘impossible intersection of left and right...(and) the disavowal that “Society doesn’t exist”’73. The middle of the Tea Party finds itself trapped between a parasitic elite of socialist bankers, global corporations and the teeming poor on welfare. Obviously not all middle-class politics assumes this reactionary character, however, the liberal preservation of the welfare state is ultimately untenable in its present non-antagonistic form. It will either have to confront its mystified origins in the failure to specifically address economy or revert to the aforementioned politics of the middle where outsiders threaten the virtuous American middle.

Populism, Americanism and the spirit of the Republic of Property are political discourses born of the contradictions of the American revolution and represent a politics of stasis and negativity. Americanist populism seeks to capture a revolutionary, collective spirit while closing the battle of the political by entrenching the institution of private property. In this sense, American populism seeks to achieve a de-politicized impossibility through an ontological closure in which a people and their morality are fully realized in

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73 Žižek is here referring to Laclau & Mouffe (1985): ‘Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality’ (127). As Laclau admits however, the impossibility of a reconciled society is precisely the promise of populism.
the institution of private property. It is in this way that populism ultimately represents the mystification of the political and is thoroughly incompatible with a radical democratic politics. Laclau's insistence that such a closure is necessary in order to substantiate any hegemonic regime of signification altogether misses the stubbornness of the fetishist. The consequences of such a compromise with a discourse and politics of fullness are evident in the collapse of the New Deal coalition. With the material prosperity of the New Deal a large portion of the working class felt themselves as the productive middle, with privileged access to the meaning of America. With the emerging southern strategy and white backlash, their interests were held to lie in all the anti-communism, racial privilege and illiberalism necessary to restore the dignity to the fetish of Americanism. Thus the principle task of radical politics in the face of the populist challenge is to demystify Americanism, the people and engage in the critique of political economy.

Conclusion
In the course of the last three chapters I have identified this populist moment within a theoretical framework that accounts for the present historical rupture, the internal contradictions of liberal democracy and the structuring role of economy in the political. The first chapter served as an overview of the historical moment – the crisis of neo-liberal hegemony – and the necessity for a discursive reconfiguration that disavows the entrenchment of neo-liberalism. Secondly, populism is born of the contradictions of the amalgamation of liberal democracy, between the exclusive people of a democracy and the universality of liberalism. In this chapter, the insights gained from the present moment and the historical context of the specific spirit and morality of the people of the American revolution are used to develop a theory of populism that speaks to the antagonistic core of the political. What is key in classifying populism as a universal mode of politics is the recognition that it cannot be moored to a specific social base. In this way the American liberal-left fantasy of populism as the post-political advance of democracy is misinformed. Populism bears no essential political content and at its purest level involves the discursive act of partitioning the social field into two antagonistic camps. However, in clinging to the notion that the people exist or have existed,
populism cannot be revolutionary. Thus populism is symptomatic of democracy and the political in that it represents the acting out of an internal trauma, (antagonism, exclusion, radical publicness), while protecting the subject from their symptom. Simply put, populism plays out the antagonistic nature of the political without effectively dislodging the cause of the present antagonism. This symptomal logic of populism represents its essential negative and fetishistic character. The principle fetish of the populist is a fully reconciled and internally cohesive people or nation, which functions as the source of jouissance. The populist is thus trapped in a cycle which requires a threatening outside or others who are destined for annihilation yet are necessary if the people are to experience themselves as actually existing.

For Laclau, the logic of populism and objet petit a, as opposed to the fetish, corresponds precisely to the political and the battle for hegemony. What is pejoratively dismissed in populism, its ideological vagueness and rhetoric over substance, is exemplary of the openness and indeterminacy of the social. It is the very affective dimension of proclaiming a universal people that is the basis for any hegemonic project. This unit, the people, is to be thought of in anti-essentialist terms, originating from potentially anywhere in the heterogeneous social space yet, as the object of desire, it becomes the primary ontological category. As such, this particular may serve as the basis for metastable links across the social field, or chains of equivalence, that crystallize in resistance to those across the political frontier. Despite the inherent contingency of the links that sustain a hegemonic project, the people conceives itself as whole and reconciled. The fully reconciled society, however, remains forever illusory as the political and the unit of the people are eternal in that they are born of unfulfilled demands and there is no hegemonic regime that can enact the final closure of the political.

While Laclau’s work is crucial for us in identifying the role of discourse in creating hegemonic linkages in resistance to a regime of power, there is the need for the specific consideration of the economy. Economy is a privileged site of the political, not as the essential factor in all struggles but as the substantive basis for creating linkages. The economic structures contemporary
politics in both celebrating diversity and creating new identities which diminish the importance of the economic, while it is the distance from the economic itself that defines postmodern subjectivity. It is this material link across the various sites of the political that offers the potential to destroy the political frontier, consequently untethering political identity from simple binarism and a fetishized notion of the people.

The case of American populism exemplifies the dichotomous nature of the political, the fetishistic character of the people and the structuring role of economy with the Tea Party serving as the necessary culmination of American populism. The fundamental stasis of the American revolution as a Republic of Property has required the discourse and politics of Americanism, which elevates private property as the source of all civic virtue. Thus from Andrew Jackson to the People’s Party and the populisms of the New Right there lies an essential populist republicanism, that insulates private property from the purview of politics. In its place stands government or a corrupt class which both threatens the substance of Americanism while serving as the symptomal triggers necessary to enjoy Americanism. The New Deal, however, has to be distinguished from populism in that it did reconfigure the site of the economy. The extent to which it took on the hallmarks of populism owes to a strategic compromise with the discourse and mythology of Americanism, necessary to disguise the fact that America was a social democracy. That the New Deal alliance would be undone by the Southern strategy, the middle’s investment in anti-communism and attacks on the Great Society is attributable to the failure to confront directly economy and its mystification in Americanism. The virulent anti-communism that the unions courted could not be put to rest as it was the basis for enjoying the fetish of Americanism. While earlier populisms demonstrate the stasis of American politics in the insulation of property, the Tea Party represents the apogee of populist republicanism in that it openly declares economy as politics and private property as the object petit a. What the Tea Party specifically represents is the attempt to reconcile a people of republican morality with the form of private property, a collapse of the ontological into the ontic. This critically underscores the relationship of the economic to the political and the fundamental anti-political nature of
Lastly having established a theory of populism as a concrete political category I will turn in the next chapter to the importance of the media field in materializing the social and political logic of populism. This does not merely pertain to the discursive and affective nature of populism, and a certain commensurability with the values of the media field, but the manner in which contemporary media connects the social space. The media field functions as the critical bridge between the social and the field of power in biopolitical production. Contemporary social and political life is lived through and in media with the increasing collapse between the boundaries of work and play, the private and public spheres, spectacle and surveillance. The media becomes a key site in the return of the political as it corresponds to the new spirit of capitalism and the production of affect. Specifically the media field is biopolitical in the sense new social relations are constructed, under the auspices of capital, along the logics of difference and equivalence. The media field has not simply become populist in corresponding to the “popular” in the marketplace, but in its deference to “the people” solicits the active agency and labour of media users. The media field can thus be defined by the dialectic between capitalist expansion into lifeworld and the potential for new mediatized forms of resistance, populist or otherwise. It is with this concern for the media field’s ability to function as a site of the political that I will conduct a close media analysis in later chapters.
Chapter Four – The Media Field, Mediatization and Populism

Introduction
This thesis has proceeded by first outlining what is a perceptibly new moment in neo-liberal political economy. The success of Barack Obama’s identity politics, as a perceived moral corrective to the crass neo-liberalism of Bush, effectively marked the ascendance of the new spirit of capitalism. By this I mean the ability of neo-liberalism to be remade as an emancipatory enterprise engendering all the authenticity of a grass roots, civil society movement. The right wing populist resistance has rejected the overtones of Empire that might dislodge their fetish of a robust Americanism. The return of a certain people, as opposed to liberal universalist notions, engaged in a radical display of publicness, speaks to the very political and antagonistic origins of the American revolution. This people are symptomatic of the fundamental contradictions of securing the Republic of Property, namely buttressing the institution of private property while creating a properly restrained collective and civic culture. Thus, the Tea Party movement, even in its strong denunciation of substantive democracy, act out the public expression of a democracy frustrated. The fetish of Americanism and a crude bourgeois autonomy have functioned not only to protect private property from the purview of politics but also to inscribe a sense of *jouissance* in which “America” and its “people” are whole. By engaging in an antagonistic battle to defend the sanctity of their fetish, the Tea Party effectively identify economy as the structuring antagonism of the populist/Third Way frontier, while attempting to enact a final closure of the political.

In this chapter I will develop a theoretical approach to the media that will allow me to observe in the media coverage of the populist/Third Way frontier what is crucially at stake for the liberal-democratic consensus and the contemporary field of the media. This concerns quite simply normative conceptions of liberal-democracy and journalism and the ability of liberalism to defend itself from the populist challenge. In addition to delineating the
media as the space in which this frontier is contested, this political and discursive battle will be understood through the approach of ‘mediatization’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). While the concept of mediatization has been generally used to explain an increasing subsumption of politics to a media logic, principally of spectacle and entertainment (Strömbäck & Dimitrova 2011, Plasser & Ulram 2003, Birenbaum & Villa 2003), I will focus here on issues of interactivity and audience labour. While at a broad level mediatization allows us to track new consumptive modes of political identification and the changing conception of publics, it is necessary to anchor this general notion through Bourdieu's field theory (1996b). Bourdieu is essential in identifying the journalistic or media field as heteronomous in relation to economy, politics and the field of power. The journalistic field is divided between different forms of validation, or capital, the symbolic capital of expertise, habitus and independence, or the economic capital that is accrued from servicing the field of power. Thus the field of journalism is internally split between the liberal idealism embodied in the high modernist paradigm (Hallin 1992) and the forces of political economy. It is here that the impact of the present populist frontier upon the field’s unified liberal notion of the public and the political can be tracked.

At this point it is necessary to augment Bourdieu's account of the journalistic field with the approach of critical political economy of the media in order to properly account for the ways in which mediatization is fundamentally transforming, not just politics but the site of economy. In the Bourdieuan characterization of the field as pulled between competing forms of validation, with economic capital largely overshadowing journalistic autonomy, media texts are reduced to an epiphenomenon of this struggle. In accounting for a liberal/populist split in the field, populism is understood merely as a reflection of commercialization and giving audiences what they want. What this fails to convey is the manner in which new processes of audience commodification are not simply transforming the values of the liberal journalistic field but are spilling back into the field of power. The new audience commodity and the incorporation of immaterial labor, even within
so called “old media”\textsuperscript{74}, has fundamentally broken down the poles of valorization within the field. The appeal to an insular journalistic habitus or deference to expertise has been dislodged through a discourse of democratic interactivity in old or new, alternative or mainstream media alike. The field is thus marked by a paradigmatic struggle between liberal notions of a unified audience and polity and a more radical or populist reality of fragmentation, niche audiences and varying levels of audience participation dislodging the privilege of journalists.

This question of the new audience or the new populist logic of mediatization has to be understood as a process of commodification built upon extending the reach of ‘biopolitical production’\textsuperscript{75} (Hardt & Negri 2004). While the old mass audience commodity lacked precision, personalization and interactivity have provided advertisers and media companies with the ability to directly market to certain consumer profiles and niche audiences while securing free labour. Thus a Fox News viewer does not merely watch to inform themselves

\textsuperscript{74} The distinction between old and new media is retained here despite what is recognized as the increasing collapse of such divisions. This destabilization is principally born of the new hegemonic logic of audience commodification which is premised upon the incorporation of free labour in order to refine the audience commodity and directly target personal taste preferences. This is in contrast to the old mass audience commodity which, while still important in the press and free to air television, has been superseded by the value-added ideal of free labour and interactivity. It is possible however for these two logics to work concurrently in a medium such as cable news, and even the press through a presence online. The distinction between old an new is thus not determined by platform but the terms in which audiences are constructed, whether as a commodified mass or as self-determining active users. I persist with the classification of the audience as opposed to user for the fact that in spite of the sense of user autonomy free labour affords these users are amalgamated into an audience for advertisers.

\textsuperscript{75} As will be explored later in this chapter biopolitical production, immaterial labour and free labour in the media field consists of the labour of active media users in creating new forms of mediatized, social life. This simultaneously extends a biopolitical logic of personal capitalization and marketization while creating the possibility of new forms of being in common through new social networks.
for public life but is actively engaged in a movement logic, in attending Tea Party protests, aimed at redefining the liberal political field while simultaneously adding value to the Fox brand and audience commodity through their own free labor. The importance of immaterial labor and the extension of commodification into the very notion of publicness and the political need not assume such a totalizing populist commercialism. Implicit and internal to the field of the media in discourses of interactivity is an acknowledgement of the audience’s potential positive agency that is in principle indeterminate even in the face of an increasing consolidation of economic power in the field. In this way one may ask how a liberal-democratic polity is challenged, transformed or remade through mediatization, or if a populist logic prevails, what is lost in the absence of a field that aspires to the politics of the universal?

Mediatization
In attempting to gauge the impact of the populist challenge to liberal-democratic norms, as manifest in the media field and born of a process of ‘mediatization’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999), it is necessary to clarify how the broad category media will be used. The media field is here conceived as an organ of social circulation and meaning making, guided by its own internal logics of production, traversing both the social space and the field of power, and as such is transformative of social processes of signification. Thus the approach of mediatization holds that ‘media are not just neutral instances of mediation’ (Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby 2010: 223) but can imprint upon the social process a certain logic of signification. At this point it needs to be stressed that much of mediatization theory has greatly overemphasized a singular media logic which in a linear manner is deemed to transform the social space from a pre-mediatized ideal. My use of mediatization builds on Nick Couldry’s description of dynamic processes of ‘production, circulation, interpretation or reception and recirculation’ which effectively alter ‘the conditions under which any future media can be produced and understood’ (2008: 380). Thus the media and its logic(s) cannot be theorized in isolation or parsed from changing political, economic and social dynamics. This work then follows from what Mark Deuze has termed the ‘ontological turn in media
studies’ (2011: 139) recognizing that social life is ‘lived in, rather than with media’ (137).

It is my contention that the only way to understand the media as a specific institutional point of origin for new processes of mediatization which transcend the media field and transform the dynamics of political economy is to take on the analysis of “media life” as suggested by Deuze. In this sense it is possible to move beyond the tired political economy/cultural studies debates. This debate has for too long hamstrung conceptions of media consumers between deterministic readings of audience exploitation, at worst approaching Smythe’s notion of mind slavery (1981: 9), or sanguine ideas of ‘semiotic democracy’ (Fiske 1987: 76) in which political economy in no way precludes certain readings of texts as audiences are equipped with proper ‘discursive competencies’ (ibid 76). While the respective disciplines have made important contributions to contemporary understandings of the media field I wish to suggest that political economy/cultural studies dichotomy is of little use in grasping the new logic of mediatization. What is critically new in the logic of mediatization and the associated processes of audience commodification is the dissolution between the boundaries of work and leisure time. Thus contemporary media audiences neither escape the drudgery of the productive sphere, through potentially subversive consumption, or are completely exploited as media users, in the traditional sense of the alienation of their labour. What Deuze calls ‘media life’, or the new biopolitical character of production, is that the increasing ‘invisibility’ (140) of media serves as an ontologically constitutive factor of contemporary life. Thus the media field is a space in which active users both form new mediatized social identities and networks which exceed the control of capital while creating the very means by which advertisers and media companies commodify social, public and political life. It is this dialectic between an analysis of political economy and ascribing a materiality to the alternative discourses of new media users that I hope will supplant this political economy/cultural studies dichotomy as well as allow me to identify the media as an important field above and beyond its service to economy as Bourdieu would have it.
I begin here by advancing a general theory of mediatization in order to outline the interrelationship of the fields of politics and the media with specific consequences for the ‘dialectic of democracy versus populism’ (Mazzoleni 2003: 2). The media’s own internal dynamics and its relationship to the general field of power will be developed further along in this chapter. Mediatization is not held as an inherently new phenomenon or as techno-determinist reduction of politics to the means of its transmission, but rather to identify a concrete tendency that is transforming the space and field of politics. Media have obviously always been central to creating publics and notions of publicity which undergird normative democratic principles of the state. However contemporary media have perceptibly changed ‘politics and political action into something quite different from what has been embodied in the tenets of liberal democracy’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999: 248). Rather than political action oriented towards modes of rational deliberation in the public sphere or in making demands of state power, political actions ‘today have become reflexively conditioned by their pursuit of media attention’ (Cottle 2008: 853). Norman Fairclough in his seminal work on New Labour (1999) wrote of the fundamental transformation of language in government and politics where all engagements with forms of publicity are aimed specifically at increasing media impact. Progressively media genres of representation, discourse and performance have come to define ‘other social subsystems’ such as politics, government and business, which are now ‘dependent on the media and their logic’ (Strömbäck & Dimitrova: 33). One needs to be cautious in attributing change in the field of politics to a single media logic as media practices embody broader socio-cultural shifts, however the performative and affective dimension of media in accelerating certain dynamics is worth specific consideration. The political field has to a large extent harmonized itself with contemporary media production routines, values and the demands for ‘the spectacularization of political communication’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz: 251). Whether marketing policy or politicians, the field operates within a media logic emphasizing ‘personalization…a political star system’ and ‘sports based dramatization’ (Plasser & Ulram: 27). Within this framework populist rhetoric by virtue of its dramatic, emotive and
The antagonistic character corresponds in a manner suitable to the demands of a new media logic.

Before advancing to a definition of the new media logic, or the changing values of the journalistic field, it is necessary to highlight specific political and socio-cultural shifts that are manifest in, and account for the tendency of mediatization across the sites of the social. The question of mediatization and populism has principally been of concern to European scholars examining the rise of populist third parties or a figure such as Silvio Berlusconi who has utilized his media capital, in the literal sense of owning a media empire, to forge a ruling populism that actively denigrates government as a public institution. In order to account for the prominence of mediatized forms of politics it is essential to consider the specific the effects of neo-liberal “post-ideology.” As earlier discussed, endemic in the new spirit of capitalism and the Third Way is the rejection of the social-democratic party or collective ethico-political militancy as irreparably anti-liberal or totalitarian. With the dramatic shrinking of organized labor as the politicized bedrock of the social-democratic party and general declines in party identification and membership, mediatization has to be understood in relation to ‘the crisis of the party system’ (Mazzoleni: 252). Neo-liberal post-ideology has seen the emergence of what has been called the ‘electoral-professional’ party (Panebianco 1988: 264). This has meant the rise of the professional media.

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76 Žižek (2009a) has written that the novelty of Berlusconi is his ability to combine a touch of the boorish Everyman; racist, vulgar, corrupt, philandering, to denigrate politics and state power while ruthlessly exploiting the state. Thus the parading of ‘his personal life as if he were taking part in a reality TV show’ functions precisely to enable him to protect his economic interests, subvert legal proceedings against him and foster a sentiment of anti-politics.

77 Neo-liberal post-ideology or post-politics is understood as the depoliticization of neo-liberal political economy in accordance with Empire and the Third Way’s end of history and liberal universality. Thus the space of politics is reduced to identity struggles and technocratic administration.

78 In the US from a private sector high of 35.7% in 1953 to 9.5% in 1999 (Lipset & Katchanovski 2001: 229).
and campaign consultant (ie Karl Rove, David Axelrod, Alastair Cambell etc), ‘weak [party] ties to social groups...broader appeals to the “opinion electorate”’ (ibid: 264) and the increased presence of corporate funding for parties superseding membership dues. With the Third Way’s triangulation strategy of “transcending” the old political divides of left and right, in addition to new alliances with finance capital, politics has assumed a de-politicized character privileging ‘post materialist or identity politics’ (Milne 2005: 57). In the literal sense of marketing politicians in an ‘increasingly consumer driven politics and heightened media competition’ (Cottle: 857), political identity more closely resembles lifestyle choices in the marketplace79. As previously discussed, the de-politicization of neo-liberal political economy has meant the prevalence of populist culture wars and the rapid rise and fall of single issue movements. In terms of a more general populism, mediatized politics can be characterized by the prevalence of ‘narratives of everyday life...personal stories, ordinary problems, the subjective and the familiar’ (Plaser & Ulram: 29). Mediatized publics that have become torn from traditional identities ‘are exercising political judgement less on the basis of ideological commitments...[but] on the basis of personal and emotional evaluations’ (Craig forthcoming: 2). Craig Calhoun identifies Ronald Reagan as a key figure owing his success to the ‘spurious intimacy’ of television which enabled him to flippantly characterize political problems ‘through the simple extension of life world categories’ (1998: 224)80. Mediatization has been a critical feature of the neo-liberal reconfiguration of publicness and civic space. If we consider the importance of media in constructing the public and mediating regional publics in the origins of the nation state it is apparent that media have always served to ‘bridge spatial and

79 Chapter One featured Brand Obama and its industry award winning campaign’s correspondence to the new spirit of capitalism and the desire for “authentic” products. 80 Government deficits have been consistently popularized as a moral issue with Reagan offering the lifeworld metaphor that the debt was simply matter of balancing the family cheque book. The populist third party US presidential candidate Ross Perot claimed that national debt is ‘like the crazy aunt you keep down in the basement but no one talks about’ (Laurence 181). A bizarre lifeworld indeed.
temporal distances’ (Schultz: 88). What marks a distinctive neo-liberal notion of publicness is the use of markets as the essential metric of the public interest (Hind 2010). With the demise of organized labor and the age of neo-liberal precarity affecting all forms of social provision ‘we are encouraged to think that our private selves can be helped through strategies that are themselves limited to the private sphere’ (ibid: 147). Mediatization has been essential to achieving the ‘individuating triumph’ (ibid: 147) of neo-liberal publicness, whether promoting consumptive identity politics or mediating acts once preformed in public space such as personal banking or civic activism. What has marked public political life in neo-liberalism is a combination of apathy/anti-politics and voluntarism, which shapes the contours of a populist/Third Way antagonistic frontier. Giddens’ notion of ‘democratizing democracy’ (1998: 39) through civil society devolution is instructive here. The Third Way promotes a culture of civic voluntarism, charity and humanitarianism as a form social cohesion and self-reliance operating in the space opened up by the neo-liberal roll back of the state. Thus new ‘self-mobilized citizens’ (Mazzoleni: 253) have been brought into being that are able to navigate different forms of electronic activism and involvement with a diversity of single issue campaigns and groups81. In the neo-liberal mediatized public space the liberal activism of groups such as Move On or Greenpeace has assumed a public relations character comparable to their nemeses in Astroturf corporate backed groups such as Freedom Works or Americans for Prosperity. Such Third Way civil society movements are not engaged in building counter-hegemonic institutions or notions of the public but principally develop communications strategies to compete within a mediatized political field82. This is not to irrevocably condemn new forms of

81 It is important to stress that critiques of centralized political institutions be they the state, the party or organized labor are not without merit. New forms of activism facilitated by new media are potentially explosive. However any emancipatory fulfillment will have to break from the neo-liberal diminution of the public. The Occupy movement is encouraging in this regard.  
82 It is this reality of a mediatized politics which limits publicness, that gives the right wing populist claims of a ‘professional left’ a certain truth even if their own side is far worse. While liberals such as George Soros have become the face of civil society
online activism as reifying the power of the market, these may be neutral technologies that aid politicization. However to the extent that new modes of politicization are limited to philanthropy and private matters of consumption, with no attempt to radically reclaim public space from the market’s individuating logic, the spatial-temporal bridging of mediatization will simply mean that ‘people are more connected than ever before…yet at the same time on their own’ (Deuze: 145). It is precisely this mobilization of isolation, through the media, and its animation through fear, resentment and alienation that defines contemporary right-wing populism.

Between the poles of neo-liberal publicness of apathy and voluntarism, mediatization has been essential in converting apathy to populism. Increasingly forms of media populism have emerged as a consequence of the crisis of legitimacy in the fields of media and politics and the struggle between the two fields\(^\text{83}\). Mediatized politics can be characterized by a vicious cycle that imbricates both fields. As parties and governments orient all policy pronouncements and communications towards mediatized strategies, media analysis of the spin and “telling us what it really means” becomes a way for the media field to imagine a journalism that is independent and above the fray\(^\text{84}\).

The “liberal media elite” become a useful target for the populist politician who by virtue of acerbic polemics corresponds to a media logic of the dramatic while entrenching cynicism on all sides. What has come to dominate the field are ‘anti-party and anti-politics sentiments’ (Mazzoleni: 257) with a rise in groups such as the *Tides Foundation*, the Koch brothers have been central in developing a professional right that encompasses enormously influential think tanks and the *American Legislative Exchange Council* which provides state lawmakers with prewritten right wing bills (Graves 2011).

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\(^{83}\) Both journalists and political leaders consistently poll as the least trusted of all professions. In Britain for example recent research has found only 19% of the public trust journalists and 14% politicians (Ipsos MORI 2011).

\(^{84}\) While a media that challenges ‘behind closed doors’ policy making and illuminates the public of the political process is of vital importance to a democracy, the current tendency in the inter-field struggle is to denigrate politics and characterize politicians as untrustworthy, perhaps quite rightly.
media populist politicization. Single issue protest campaigns launched specifically by media around taxation, immigration or anti-paedophilia legislation, has to be understood in relation to the neo-liberal diminution of the public and the media’s repositioning of itself in relation to the field of politics. Such forms of popular mobilization resemble what Alain Touraine (1997) calls ‘anti-movements’ uninterested in building alternative institutions and with electoral engagement limited to a reflexive plebiscitism. In fomenting forms of protest, media present stories that ‘are recursive or self-reflexive...creat[ing] issues to which other people, media and political actors must react’ (Plaser & Ulmer: 28). This self-referentiality should not be conceived as simply an agenda-setting function; rather it is indicative of a new mediatized notion of publicness to which any protest movement must aspire. However, in the absence of counter-hegemonic movements effectively competing in and contesting this notion of the public, popular anger retains a populist form.

Common forms of media populism are unable to address complex social and political problems in a sustained manner, rather a “malaise” discourse predominates stressing ‘a vague uncertain political climate’ (Birenbaum &

85 A similar denunciation of the Tea Party as a ‘fake populist pseudo-movement’ (9) is made in Street and DiMaggio’s work Crashing the Tea Party (2011). While this book is an important examination of the convergence of corporate media and political power in molding the Tea Party it misses the fact that what they decry as fake populism is exactly what defines new forms of mediatized populism.

86 Milne writes polemically of what she calls ‘Referendum-itis’: ‘the growing use of plebiscites on television show like Big Brother and Pop Idol is acclimatizing a whole generation to the ideas of simple choices, snap decisions and quick results’ (48). At a more concrete political level Peter Schrag (2006) identifies the way in which populist plebicitism and ballot initiatives in the state of California, a legacy of early twentieth century populism, has effectively dismantled the progressive, liberal institutions of the state, plunged the state into debt and rendered it ungovernable. Prop 13 of 1978 which froze property taxes and requires a two thirds state senate majority to raise taxes, essentially defunding the public school and university system, marked the opening shot of a taxpayer populism that seeks to destroy the state’s liberal institutions.
Villa 2003: 50). Media populism at its worst ‘is nihilistic and angry...exacerbat[ing] a culture of infantile rage which avoids contradictory impulses’ (Milne: 61). The vox pop, while always an essential tool for the journalist as witness/ambassador for the people, has become a crucial means for the media to position itself as part of the ordinary people against the political class. Such media populism relies upon ‘fantasmatic representations of an entire political class’ (Phelan 2011: 137) as in the case of MPs expense scandals in the UK, and a ‘fetishization of news vox-pops’ (ibid 141) valorizing half-formed positions and contradictory sentiments as doxa. The populist people in this sense have become the big Other⁸⁷ to which the journalistic field ritualistically defers to as a guarantor of meaning so long as the people are properly in their place as an anti-politics, privatized public. This new condition of media populism and mediatization is fundamentally transforming normative liberal-democratic conceptions of journalism, politics and the question of the political with all its explosive potential.

**Bourdieu and the Field**

Having provided a general outline of the dynamic of mediatization upon the field of politics, it is necessary to position this account of inter-field competition within a broader theorization of the field of power. While the task may appear unwieldy, I intend to, following on from the work of Benson (1999 & 2006), Phelan (2011) and Couldry (2003), utilize field theory in a manner consistent with the ontological primacy of the political which undergirds hegemony theory (as outlined in Chapter Three), while augmenting field theory with a non-reductionist political economy of the media. The utility of field theory extends from understanding the struggle in the field of power between various autonomous and heteronomous fields and actors. Crucially at stake here are the terms by which a field, in this case a liberal-democratic journalism, valorizes its activities and internal notions of independence

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⁸⁷The big Other functions as the ‘symbolic order’ (Žižek 1997a) that materializes ideology as concrete social practice. In constructing this big Other of “the people” the media disavows that the people are merely a symbolic expression brought into being by the media but really do exist as a virtuous, patriotic middle.
between the poles of symbolic and economic forms of capital. Field theory allows us to map the politics of the media, in relation to the fields of economy, politics and university among others, while recognizing the political basis of the field of power and the explosive potential of the social space in bringing into being the return of the political\textsuperscript{88}. It is the media’s position as simultaneously a heteronomous and ubiquitous field (mediatization) that allows us to observe in this field the crucial struggle over publicness, democracy and the political. Within the field of power the media is the most permeable to the various antagonistic forms of the political arising from the social. It becomes essential to consider mediatization and the field as both embodying the potential to extend a new hegemonic logic arising from the social, that de-institutionalizes the reified forms of past struggles, or the extension of a spectacle and commodity logic into new lifeworlds.

Bourdieu’s social science epistemology may appear at odds with what has been laid out so far in previous chapters, namely Laclau’s discourse theory of the social and the political, as well Žižek’s symptomal reading of ideology. With regards to Laclau and Mouffe, the distinction between politics and the political is important in identifying the institution of a political regime. Bourdieu’s notion of the field and ‘doxa’ (1997: 10) is analogous to a political frontier’s ‘crystallization in sedimented social practices’ (Laclau 2005: 224), as both the field of power and a hegemonic regime conceal their political nature through discourses of “common sense”. The political is a notion of transformation and rupture that is lacking in Bourdieu. Discourse and ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1996b: 235) are critical concepts for Bourdieu in explicating the performative and materialized embodiment of the field’s ideology. My intention here is to augment this theory of discourse with the social and political dynamics of discourse, established in the last chapter. The

\textsuperscript{88} It is again worth reiterating the distinction between politics as the institution of practices by a political regime, that is a regime that has demarcated an exclusionary frontier. Media practice and its inter-field politics are dictated by the political frontier of the field of power (ie political-economy). Paradoxically the present mediatization across the field of power has positioned media closer to the social space and as such opens it up to the return of the political.
power and political efficacy of discourse resides in the eliciting of affect and *jouissance*. It is in this way that we can establish the ontological necessity of antagonism and the return of the political and rupture. Lastly the notion of the autonomous fields is in contrast to Hardt & Negri’s Empire entailing the subsumption of social life under capital and the crisis of traditional institutions. Hardt & Negri write of such institutions, or fields, as the family, school, hospital and factory, experiencing break down and the loss of traditional disciplinary authority (2000: 329). My use of Bourdieu and the field is aimed specifically at identifying this development while maintaining that it is not as far advanced a process as Hardt & Negri would have it and that it is principally evidenced in, and driven by, the media field. This is precisely what mediatization and the heteronomy of the media field speak to, namely the pulling of all fields towards the economic pole in the broader field of power and collapsing the boundaries between the social and the field of power.

My contention is that the concept of the field of power allows me to attribute to the media specific agency in new processes of commodification, not merely in audience commodification but as an essential tool in biopolitical production and in inculcating the new spirit of capitalism and commodity fetishism. This is far more precise than merely designating media as part of an ideological complex, to put it in Gramscian terms, or as simply functioning as superstructure to the base of political economy. The media field *itself* has become the site of a particular social accumulation logic. Bourdieu’s layering of the field of power within the social space corresponds to the distinction between politics and the political. The political as a double presence exists both in the institutionalized forms of past struggles (the field of power and politics) and in the ontological necessity of antagonism which arises from the social, taking indeterminable forms. One finds a similar conceptualization of the political and politics described as the:

> struggle over the power to dictate the *dominant principle of domination*...[which] is also a struggle over the *legitimate principle of legitimation*, and inseparably, the legitimate mode of
reproduction of the foundations of domination (Bourdieu 1996a: 265)

The field of power thus represents the division of labor among the institutionalized forms of the dominant principle of legitimation, whether these are the fields of economy, politics, academia or the media. A field in this sense is a ‘microcosm set within the macrocosm’ (Benson 2006: 188) of the field of power, and we can understand the inter and intra field struggles as derived from ‘the opposition between two forms of power: economic and cultural capital’ (ibid: 189). Thus the various fields are positioned within the field of power along a horizontal axis between the poles of economic and cultural capital and a vertical axis of symbolic power ascending from the social space itself (refer to figures 1 & 2). It follows that ‘economic capital on the whole, is more powerful’ (ibid: 190) both in terms of the inter-field struggle but also as the demarcating principle of the field of power itself. In addition to the triad of economic, cultural and symbolic capital, the state with its ‘monopoly of the universal’ (Bourdieu 1997: 124) wields a form of ‘meta-capital’ (Couldry 2003) that establishes the rate of exchange between fields and the varying forms of capital. Thus the founding political frontier of the state, with a corresponding notion of political economy, functions as the universal principle of the field.

The importance of the universal as the horizon of the political is central to Bourdieu’s field theory and should not be read as a reductionist economism or a fallacious universalism but rather as an enabling space. Bourgeois universality and enlightenment are essential to critical notions of autonomy within separate fields that serve to preserve the universal against a totalizing logic of the economic. As encountered in the previous chapter, Laclau is invested in a softer universalism, that while rejecting a final enclosure of the political, acknowledges the necessity of the universal as a referent for any hegemonic project. My own aspiration, following from Žižek’s notion of the proletariat as the universally excluded, is that rather than indulging in populist fantasies of ontological fullness there might exist a self-reflexive universalism that does not ascribe a privileged cultural content to the space of
the universal and seeks to re-contextualize liberte, egalite, fraternite in different global contexts. This is not meant to defend a contemporary liberal universality that is incapable of constructing the political frontier necessary to realize a genuine substance of equality around such rights. In this sense the particular, whether a sub-region of a field, cultural identity or worker’s struggle against the dominant principle of domination, is an essential locus for the political as it may articulate the necessary inclusion/exclusion in order to realize a substance of equality around universality. Žižek describes this political rupture as ‘the authentic moment of discovery…when a properly universal dimension explodes from within a particular context and becomes ‘for-itself’, and is directly experienced as universal’ (2008a: 129)

Returning to Bourdieu’s notion of autonomy as it relates to the media within the field of power, the ability of the media to accrue cultural capital is dependent on a differentiation of its “profession” from the dominant principle of the field of power. The internal discourses of the field have rested upon modern notions of rationality and the function of unifying a liberal public through the ability to ‘produce knowledge of universal validity’ (Hallin 2006: 1). The paradox of autonomy and universalism lie at the heart of the professional field of journalism as the very institutionalization of the field is co-dependent on capitalist ownership of the press. Nevertheless a spurious liberal universalism is productive as:

A field’s autonomy is to be valued because it provides the pre-conditions for the full creative process proper to each field and ultimately resistance to the “symbolic violence” exerted by the dominant system of hierarchization (Benson 1999: 465).

Despite a strong internal discourse of autonomy, with journalists ‘fiercely protective of their “independence”’ (Langer 1998: 15) from economic power, the media field can be ‘characterized by a high degree of heteronomy which is to say that it is a very weakly autonomous field’ (Benson 2006: 195). While various sub-regions of small-scale production exist within the field and enjoy a ‘relatively high degree of autonomy’ the mass media are predominately
‘subject to outside rule’ (Hesmondhalgh 2006: 214). It is worth reiterating that despite the fact that autonomy and universalism belie a certain economic power that structures the field of power, field theory does not reduce media to a mere functionalism in that it offers a mapping of ‘the space of possibles’ (Bourdieu 1996b, 234) and acknowledges the productivity of the field’s notion of autonomy. Whatever service journalism may render to the field of power it must correspond to a certain ‘habitus’ (ibid 235) or embodied dispositions which validate the independence of journalistic practice. In this sense field theory offers a very real autonomy of action within the field that political economy approaches to the media have neglected in emphasizing coercive managerial and editorial practices as a filter upon content. Within this space of possibles the moral concerns of the new spirit, climate change, developing world labour practices, the food crisis, may feature regularly, a fact largely precluded in political economy analysis of the media. While these may feature simply as exceptions validated through industry awards and peer recognition that effectively overstate journalistic independence, the perception of independence and autonomy from the field of power remains crucial in allowing the media field to retain the potential openness to the political and the ability challenge the field of power.

The Liberal-Democratic Field of Journalism
To return to the fundamental question of how normative liberal-democratic notions of the polity and the media field itself are being transformed by populism and mediatization, it is necessary to lay out the journalistic field’s most idealistic conception of its autonomy and cultural capital. While it may

89 Chomsky & Herman decry the lack of quality investigative television journalism and documentaries as ‘television networks learn over time that such programs will not sell and would have to be carried at a financial sacrifice, and that, in addition, they may offend powerful advertisers’ (1988: 17). Robert McChesney writes of the creative industries that for every Michael Moore ‘there are many more prominent artists who internalize the dominant commercial mores’ (1999: 32). While both above statements ring true they discount the importance of the field’s ritualistic subversion of the economic pole of valorization as an exercise that minimally reaffirms the independence of the field.
appear contradictory to talk of the mediatization of the media, the extent to which the economic pole of the media field has made it an increasingly heteronomous field, with specific effects in the field of power, demonstrates how one media logic (mediatization) is supplanting another (liberal-democracy). The professionalization of journalism that was inculcated in the universities and consecrated in the mass circulation press of the early 20th century defines a modernist demarcation of an autonomous discipline. Within the high modernist paradigm (Hallin 1992) the journalist is the dispassionate technocrat of the liberal democratic public sphere that through scientific method renders facts intelligible to a public that is ‘assumed to be engaged in a rational process of seeking information’ (Baym 2010: 32). The public is conceived in liberal terms not merely in its rational pursuit of enlightenment but in its consensual and inclusive nature. Geraldine Muhlmann writes that modern journalism’s self-validation as an autonomous field lies in the claim ‘to bring people together to unify’ by ‘giving readers the “truth”—that is, something that is acceptable to all, beyond differences of opinion’ (2008: 6). This liberal ideal crafted in the face of the radical indeterminacy of the social space that was marked by popular uprisings, labor militancy and the threat of fascism91, sought to neutralize the political through the principle of a mass liberal public transcending political divisions and united by the ‘demand for truth’ (ibid: 7) that is realized in the field of the media. Thus the journalistic field’s claim to cultural capital and symbolic power in the field of power rests in this ability to bring a liberal-democratic polity into being. Specifically this symbolic power allows the media a concentration of resources in being able ‘to describe the social itself...[and] the inequalities in the social world’ (Couldry 2003: 39) in a manner that economic and political fields are unable. The content of news therefore concerns ‘our nation, our society, our economy’ (Langer: 19). In spite of divergence in opinion it is assumed ‘that “we” all still have enough mutual interest “to keep a level head” and to use the proper channels to reconcile “our” differences’ (ibid: 19).

91 The key figure here in forming this ideal of liberal journalism is of course Walter Lippman who believed a liberal paternalistic journalism would serve to protect the “bewildered herd” from itself.
The limits of this liberal conception of the social space is evident when considering the political boundaries of this *we* and to what extent difference can be tolerated. Muhlmann’s account of Edward R. Murrow’s impassioned defense of American liberalism from McCarthyism, perhaps the high-water mark of modern American liberal journalism, is instructive. Murrow’s attack on McCarthy amounts to a battle for the definition of this *we*, which while still staunchly anti-communist need not be characterized ‘as a rupture, or a radical and fearful exclusion’ (Muhlmann: 105). Murrow thus is able ‘to sustain the discourse of individual liberty without confronting its ultimate problem: are individuals free to be communists?’ (ibid: 101). Populist political strains thus present a clear challenge to the liberal journalistic imperative of ‘unifying the largest possible us’ (ibid: 13) and highlight the tensions of a field whose claim to autonomy rests in its relationship to an idealized social space that effectively disavows the political.

In terms of journalistic practice and the habitus of the profession, journalists are invested in the notion of a trade and objective science. Even within critical traditions of journalism and those media institutions that define the pole of cultural capital in the field, objectivity defines the application of the trade. As an autonomous, modernist pursuit the journalistic field is empiricist with a strong disinclination towards any level of theoretical abstraction. It is in this way that the field lends its symbolic power to the broader field of power and political economy in establishing the doxa which renders certain social phenomena “objective” and empirically valid. In mediating political and social struggles the field will disavow its symbolic power maintaining a notion of its objectivity as above the fray of politics. It is the failure to properly conceptualize itself and journalistic practice in properly political terms that hinders the field’s ability to defend and define itself in the face of the populist challenge.

*Neo-liberalizing the Field*

I have rendered two diagrams based on Benson’s (1999) mapping of journalism in relation to the field of power. The first depicts the modern or Fordist field of power in which the autonomy of various fields is relatively high
and the prominence of the economic field and capital pole of valorization is comparatively lower. In fact the economic field itself guided by the Keynesian objective of full employment sits closer to the pole of cultural capital. The neoliberal field of power is marked by increasing heteronomy associated with the prominence of the economic field and the pole of economic capital. The media is critical both as a bridge between fields but in extending the reach of the field of power into the social space.

![Figure One – The Modern Field of Power](image-url)
What we could call the neo-liberalization of the field of journalism from the high modern ideal corresponds to the process of mediatization and the increasing heteronomy of the field of journalism. The symbolic power of the media field to monopolize ‘the public space...[or] the space of mass circulation’ (Bourdieu 1998: 46) has been instrumental in neo-liberalizing this public space. What has characterized the neo-liberal field of power is a pulling of all fields towards the pole of economic valorization as well as internally reorganizing separate fields. In terms of media political economy this has meant the deregulation of broadcasting, the globalization of media companies, new satellite and online services and the structural relationship of media technologies to the international circulation of finance capital\(^{92}\). The effect of

\(^{92}\)Craig’s (2001) work on the relationship between media and financial markets, particularly Reuters news agency, is important here. In addition to the origins of the press and public sphere as servicing the merchant class with market information, Reuters was founded in 1851 as the official stock price supplier to the London stock
this neo-liberalization has extended beyond the journalistic field (mediatization) commensurate with its symbolic power:

as the journalistic field has become more commercialized and thus more homologous (more overlapping) with the economic field, it increases the power of the heteronomous pole within each of the fields, producing a convergence among all the fields and pulling them closer to the commercial pole in the larger field of power (Benson 1999: 471).

Particularly with new metrics of audience share, the direct targeting of niche audiences and new media platforms, the mass liberal audience ideal has been supplanted, problematizing the field’s conception of itself. Contemporary mass media, that is media still aimed at securing large audiences such as newspapers and broadcast, can be characterized as split between the old pedagogic, paternalistic liberal media and a ‘populist spontaneism and demagogic capitulation to popular tastes’ (Bourdieu 1998: 48). Bourdieu’s polemics of the media field as one increasingly subservient to an economic logic has rightly been criticized as reducing the media/audience relationship to a closed loop of production and consumption (Hesmondhalgh: 225).

Departing from Bourdieu, Phelan (2011) has done much to elaborate a neo-liberal habitus as an enabling form of power and subject formation for journalists and audiences. Characteristic of this neo-liberal logic of the field is the fundamental demarcation of the social space as undergirded by a ‘market determinism’, a competition of ideas as opposed to consensual deliberation exchange. This symbiosis has reached new levels in the hyper-circulation of neo-liberal financial markets. Reuters was instrumental in establishing global foreign currency markets and derives an overwhelming majority of its profits from services to investors and transaction fees.

\[^93\] It should nevertheless be noted that alternative re-interpretations of the field are ‘taking place on the boundaries between sub-fields of mass and restricted production’ (Hesmondhalgh: 222) and that audience agency need not assume a strictly populist form, however this will be returned to in the following section.
and rational choice assumptions about human self-interest (Phelan: 141). Within the neo-liberalized and mediatized field of power *media entrepreneurs*94 proliferate corresponding to the spectacle, individuating and self-commodifying logic of the market. What defines this space and dislodges a modernist notion of autonomy is the manner in which ‘celebrity intellectuals have used the media to bypass the scientific field and the way that demagogic political leaders have used the media to make an end run around the normal political process’ (Benson 1999: 474). In terms of media practice, journalistic autonomy has been transformed by self-commodifying strategies of performatively embodiment with ‘the disproportionate economic and symbolic profits that now accrue to polemical forms of journalism; [and] the inflexion of “objective” news reportage through an opinionated register’ (Phelan: 141). The neo-liberalization of the media field has destabilized the pole of cultural capital that was based on maintaining a rational, enlightened liberal polity. New notions of journalistic autonomy certainly underlie a fundamental marketization of the field of power with populism representing the height of the media’s temporal-spatial bridging of individuation. Mediatization and populism however should not be simply read as the extension of the dominance of economy across all fields. Rather media as the crucial link between the social space and the field of power are enabling new forms of audience inclusion and the potential to express the antagonistic character of the social. While the ‘normalization of self-expressive modes of public discourse...[and] the enthusiasm for...cheap contributions from “you the audience”’ (Phelan: 141) comes from a logic of commodifying and consuming social identity, this expansion of the field of power opens it up to the indeterminacy of the social.

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94 This term merely articulates what is a certain habitus within the neo-liberalized field. As Bourdieu writes ‘Some journalists act much like small time capitalistic entrepreneurs who need to preserve, and increase, their symbolic capital’ (1998: 5). I am also borrowing from Paul Krugman’s identification of neo-liberal ‘policy entrepreneurs’ (1994) such as Arthur Laffer, that were able to popularize spurious notions such as supply-side economics.
Political Economy of the Media

Bourdieu’s field theory understands mediatization as a phenomenon demonstrable across the field of power effectively pulling politics, academia, government and civil society movements towards a performative media logic. Due to the heteronomy of the media field, its own internal notions of liberal autonomy have been increasingly undermined as the field is pulled sharply to the economic pole of valorization, effectively transforming the liberal unified public ideal into the rational-choice neo-liberal public. What mediatization in this sense does not account for and where we must depart from Bourdieu is in the claim that the media’s impact in the field of power is simply derivative of the underlying political economic forces it serves. The media field is exercising a critical agency above and beyond merely reflecting the interests of capital in that its reconfigured logic of production, built upon social labor, is approaching the ‘real subsumption’ (Marx 1992: 1035) of labor and social life under capital. It is precisely the symbolic power of the media as public space, in bridging the field of power and the social, that allows it to function as a crucial site of ‘biopolitical labor’ (Hardt & Negri 2009: 140). Mobile devices and new media social networks have been crucial technologies in dissolving the boundaries between work and play, self-realization and comprehensive surveillance. The labour of workers outside of the factory/office is biopolitical in the sense that it creates new social relations that allow for the extension of the market into the social. This extension into the lifeworld and the opening of new terrains of profitability that is characteristic of the new spirit of capitalism cannot proceed without conceding of the necessity of audience valorization and labor. Thus the new political economy of the media is not to be thought of simply as the alienation of mass audiences in the corporate media’s servicing of advertisers. Rather in congruence with the ‘hegemony of immaterial labor’ (Hardt & Negri 2004: 108), the incorporation of forms of ‘free labor’ (Terranova 2004) and user generated content, the new political

95 A typical quote from Bourdieu: ‘the journalistic field, which is more and more dominated by the market model, imposes its pressures on more and more other fields’ (1998: 56).
economy constitutes a dialectic of real subsumption and the opening up of the terms of alienation to audiences.\footnote{A prominent example of the concession to new media user power has been the controversy over Facebook’s terms of agreement, or quite literally the terms of alienation. The site faced resistance after it altered the terms of agreement in a manner that gave it rights to all information on the network for as long as the company pleases to be used in whatever manner the company decides. CEO Mark Zuckerberg was forced to reverse course in response to protest groups that were using the site itself to criticize the policy. In a manner typical of the lauding of new media users Zuckerberg remarked that, ‘the trust you place in us as a safe place to share information is the most important part of what makes Facebook work’ (Khan 2009). This example is not meant to suggest that new media posses the intrinsic capacity to self-correct but rather is open and commercially dependent the activity of users.}

The emancipatory democratic rhetoric\footnote{The apogee of this discourse is of course Time magazine’s 2006 “Person of the Year” which featured a reflective computer screen on the cover and simply the word “You”. This of course corresponds to the aspirational qualities of the new commodity fetishism in which the commodity addresses an innate human quality that transcends mere commodity relations.} of new media represents both a reconfiguration of the media’s sense of itself and pervasive commodification, however this crucially signals the constitutive power of audience labor. The incorporation of new media forms into processes of audience commodification is ever marked by the challenge of properly containing this biopolitical labor while unleashing its creative potential, a process that is intrinsically open to the political dynamism of the social. To return to the broader concerns of this thesis, namely how a liberal logic of the political deals with the return of populist antagonism, it is imperative to consider the points at which a media populism opens up genuine emancipatory potential or whether the field devolves into spheres of cantonized particularisms.\footnote{As earlier considered, the crucial distinction is between a populist particularism which believes a specific fetishized cultural identity has exclusive access to the universal, and a particular movement/group that experiences itself at the coal face of
One must defend the conditions of production that are necessary to bring progress toward the “universal” and at the same time, one must work to generalize the conditions of access to the universal, to see that more and more people fulfill the conditions necessary to appropriate the universal (Bourdieu 1998: 77)

It is in keeping with the problematic of this thesis that while recognizing the contradictions and hypocrisies of liberal universality, or the liberal media’s notion of itself, that we must nevertheless defend the possibilities of the universal that are born of the aspirational claims of liberalism. This is in contrast to the populist closure of the ontological, which revels in the fetishized cultural specificity of the people and as such precludes the conditions of possibility for the universal.

The Audience Commodity
To understand the internal accumulation logic of the field of the media, that is the political economy of the media, it is necessary to grapple with the question of the audience commodity. The approach of critical political economy has understood the liberal/populist division of the media space as generally a question of market differentiation. Media content is explicated through a relationship to dominant institutional and class power relegating the importance of journalists, audiences and the values of the field. Political economy has been essential for understanding the media’s relation to capital and the constitutive role it plays in international finance as an indispensable tool for the necessary ‘time-space compression’, ie the circulation of financial capital, that which defines neo-liberalism (Harvey 2005: 4). This codependent relationship accounts for the concentration of resources around the centres of power privileging institutional sources over the public, all justified by a pernicious rationale of objectivity and empiricism. The particular accumulation logic of media corporations themselves involves the aggregation the universal condition and thus might approach the question of what substance of equality could enable real universal rights.
and commodification of audiences to be sold to advertisers, in addition to the extraction of rent profits from intellectual property. In the service of advertisers media seek to cultivate affluent audiences while sustaining the ‘buying mood’ (Chomsky & Herman 1988: 17) that legitimates commercial culture. In this quest for the right kind of audience, those engaged in conspicuous consumption, mass media can be defined by the division between a prestige, often liberal press and the more populist common fare that operates in the space once occupied by the working class press as in the case of Rupert Murdoch’s takeover of The Herald. In terms of broadcast news, Fox News’s success can be seen as exploiting the political space left open by the liberal consensual model of network news and cable competitors such as CNN or MSNBC. A populist antagonistic identity by a media brand like Fox signals a strategy of market differentiation from the dominant liberal consensus model and as such engenders a deep brand identification. In terms of the prestige media’s coverage of populism and populist movements typically those that reject the underlying liberal consensus are likely to be portrayed as deviant or beyond the pale (Hartley 1982: 83), with liberal journalism wielding all the rhetorical tools necessary to dismiss populist malcontents. What is more problematic are those forms of populism that may well represent a pole of elite political opinion or a fraction of class power, as in the case of the Tea Party. In this case the backing of a populist movement by a major transnational corporation such as NewsCorp, buttressed by the right wing intellectual complex of think tanks such as Cato and Heritage, may prove too strong to be summarily dismissed.

While this picture of media functionality is useful in the first instance in providing an understanding of the relationship of media to institutional and economic power, and the acceptance of populism so long as it is wedded to elite power, this does not adequately capture the dynamic of audience labor and its indeterminate potential. Field theory and traditional political economy

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99 Of course Fox is not the only media brand identity rather it has to be seen as the antecedent to MSNBC’s partisan Democrat identity and others. The New York Times has staked a position in contrast to this tendency of “Foxification” in retaining a liberal cosmopolitan identity.
theory around the audience commodity share an equal disposition towards reducing audiences to a mere marketized identity. Benson identifies that for Bourdieu a media populism, driven by television and the increased sophistication of audience metrics, simply represents a closed loop of conditioning content to ‘pre-existing demand’ (1998: 485). While political economy need not reduce audiences to the status of passive automatons this is all that the formulation of audience labor in the traditional Marxist sense of alienation and exploitation will allow. There is no necessary compulsion to consume media as there is to surrender to wage labour for one’s survival. Caraway’s (2011) work on the nature of audience labor, and its status as a special commodity, allows one to transcend the political economy/cultural studies dichotomy between a deterministic reading of audience exploitation and sanguine notions of polysemy. Audience labor does not approach formal subsumption in the sense that there is no “equal” exchange in the labor market and ‘the activities of the audience are not under the direct control of the capitalist’ (Carway: 697). Thus as audiences do not “freely” sell their labor power, and in fact are increasingly willing to pay for content on cable, online and wireless systems, we cannot grasp the exploitation and alienation of their labour in the traditional sense of commodity relations. The audience may well be exploited in the realization of surplus value in the spheres of production and circulation, but as audiences they are a form of ‘fictitious capital…[or] a fabricated image of an audience’ (701). Despite innovative means of audience surveillance and ‘rating firms to give the credibility or appearance of being able to reliably assist in the realization of surplus value’ (701) the terms of audience engagement cannot be pre-determined only constrained.

What further problematizes deterministic notions of audience labor and exploitation is the increasing fragmentation across platforms of the ‘Fordist system of delivering general programming to a mass audience’ (Mosco 2004: 157). This should not be understood simply in terms of technological deterministic discourses of new media and the various neologisms of
active/productive audiences\textsuperscript{100}, but the parallel development of such a participatory discourse alongside the increased corporate control of informational streams and the fragmentary nature of neo-liberal publics. For Benson the rise of niche and segmented media merely accentuates the media’s ability to deliver content for pre-existing tastes and represents the shifting of musical chairs that may produce ‘some discursive change’ (192). This is not thought of as an ‘external shock to the field’ (ibid: 192) capable of countervailing the neo-liberalization of media and audience identity. And indeed the fragmentary power of online media has been grossly exaggerated as ‘audiences on the Web are actually \textit{more} concentrated on the top ten or twenty outlets than are traditional media’ audiences (Hindman 2009, 134)\textsuperscript{101}. Not withstanding the very real effects of concentration\textsuperscript{102} which undermine any authentic sense of audience participation and determination, the self perception of the audience, as result of the new hegemonic participatory discourse, has undergone change. Terranova writes of a ‘fractured’ or ‘micro-segmented mass’ (147) where we experience corporate controlled mass

\textsuperscript{100} New categories abound such as ‘produsage’ (Bruns 2007), ‘prosumage’ (Ritzer & Jurgenson 2010), and ‘craft consumers’ (Campbell 2005), all suggesting the eclipse of passive models of consumption by the creative and democratic forces of Web 2.0 technology.

\textsuperscript{101} Traditional media remain crucial authorities in framing political discourse as opposed to the perceived independence or radical potential of the blogosphere’s long tail. In 2010 research from the \textit{Pew Center Project for Excellence in Journalism} found that ‘more than 99\% of the stories linked to in blogs came from legacy outlets such as newspapers and broadcast networks. And just four – the BBC, CNN, the New York Times and the Washington Post accounted for fully 80\% of all links’.

\textsuperscript{102} New wireless technologies have the potential to entirely merge corporate media, telecoms and tech companies as illustrated in the \textit{Apple iPad’s} exclusive newspaper owned by \textit{News Corp, “Daily”}. Available only on the \textit{iPad} wireless device, the subscription model of \textit{Daily} may prove superior than attempts to monetize web newspapers. Murdoch himself states \textit{iPad} users were typically more ‘immersed’ in the personal interface of their device than in online news consumption where users could be lost to ‘unfocused surfing’ (Helmore 2010). Additionally \textit{News Corp} itself is in the business of cloud computing with its subsidiary \textit{NC3} which allows wireless devices to perform advanced computing remotely, so much for running DOS.
communication as information networks assembled by our own agency. It is in this logic of personalization and difference, embodied in the ubiquity of pronouns\textsuperscript{103} addressing the new media consumer, that populism comes to dominate the media field. This dynamic of contemporary media political economy whereby concentration and control are experienced as individual self-determination is far more permeable to the return of the political\textsuperscript{104}. In Laclauian language we can say that the individuating interface of media latches on to logics of difference and equivalence making the ‘world less tolerant’ (Terranova: 148) by ‘reinforc[ing] cultural identification and social antagonisms fed by shared experiences of injustice or indignation at imagined or real wrongs’ (150). With the neo-liberal diminution of publicness in a mediatized social space, the temporal spatial bridging of new media networks is susceptible to the mobilization of populist isolation. If new media user agency is to function with truly radical democratic potential then new media publics must correspond with a return of publicness at the sites of the political (work, state, city etc). In order grasp this contradiction of intensified commodification and the return of the political it is necessary to delineate the new processes of commodification that originate in the media space and as such allows one to identify the media as critical to the return of the political.

The New Audience Commodity and Immaterial Labor
To return to the concept of mediatization, not just with regards to a media driven spectacularization of politics, but in attributing to the media field specific agency in the field of power, media function as an essential organ of

\textsuperscript{103} While various new media such as YouTube and MySpace are based in this logic of self-expression Apple’s signifier “i” is a triumph of individuation and the new spirit of commodity fetishism. A mass produced commodity, whether it be the \textit{iPad}, \textit{iPod}, or \textit{iPhone}, is experienced as an extension of individual creativity and self-realization.

\textsuperscript{104} To reiterate what was established in Chapter Two the political is understood as both the ontological necessity of antagonism, that is the delineation of the inside and outside of a political frontier, and the residue of a past institutionalization of a political frontier. Thus a populist frontier corresponds to the logic of the political (antagonism) while performing a fetishist inversion at the site of the political (the people of ‘the nation’ are whole and reconciled).
biopolitical production. It is too simple to say that the discourse of participation and personalization merely extends corporate media power and the logic of audience commodification into new domains as the very nature of audience commodification is transformed in the process. Audience commodification, in new media platforms as well as traditional media, is inextricably linked to the harnessing of free and ‘immaterial labor’ (Hardt & Negri 2004: 65) from active audiences. This biopolitical labour, increasingly hegemonic across all manner of production, produces ‘networks based on communication, collaboration and affective relationships’ (ibid: 66). The general condition towards immaterial labor is marked by the ‘blurring [of] the distinctions between production and consumption, and between the economy and the political communicative sphere’ (Thrope & Gregory 2010: 276). What is essential about the specific site of the media in new immaterial forms of production is the manner in which a mediatized social life, in which media are increasingly invisible, is a necessary precondition for the hegemony of immaterial production. Media in this sense do not merely reflect the interests of the economic field and capital but are privileging a specific form of circulation, labour and expansion into a lifeworld best characterized by the metaphor of the ‘social factory’ (Virno & Hardt 1996), that is the real subsumption of labour under capital. In the blurring of boundaries between

\[105\] Hardt & Negri are critically aware that their de-lineation of immaterial labour as the hegemonic form of production is nominal and does not discount the increasing proletarianization of the developing world. Rather this transformation of the relations of production within the core capitalist countries of Empire is held as creating the conditions for new emancipatory modes of being in common. However it should not be overlooked that the very immaterial logic of production in developed countries is accelerating forms of material production and worker exploitation to unimaginable levels. The emblematic example of this is of course the production Apple products, which define the new self expressive, social and productive modes of consumption, at Foxconn’s Shenzhen and Chengdu plants (Duhigg & Barboza 2012). The example highlights the problems inherent of overemphasizing what is happening in core or Western countries to the extent that immaterial labour has become the general condition. However at the level of the analysis of the media field, the hegemony of immaterial labour is clearly demonstrable.
production and consumption in immaterial labour, media function as a critical biopolitical apparatus where interactive users learn ‘a kind of online personal brand management in a network comprised by multiple lines of valorization (both social and capitalist)’ (Cote & Pybus 2007: 95). Thus media, as that which connects the social factory, perform a crucial function of neoliberal devolution which in extending a logic of self-capitalization emphasizes ‘lifelong learning...[and] re-skilling’ (Gregory & Thorpe: 280). In this logic of the social factory in which we experience the collapse between work and leisure time and the disintegration of traditional prohibitions the subject experiences what Žižek calls the ‘superego injunction to enjoy’ (1999b: 368). The ceaseless process of ‘enjoying a well balanced life’ functions as a form of social acumen marking us as a desirable ‘quantum of capital’ (Cremin 2011: 45).

Immaterial labour within the media field can be seen as both the construction of social networks that allow new media corporations to surveil for and monetize the minutia of personal taste preferences and as users constituting their identities in this media life. This labour can defined as free, as opposed to necessarily exploited, in that it is ‘willingly conceded in exchange for the pleasures of communication’ (Terranova: 91). Immaterial labour approaching real subsumption epitomizes the new spirit of commodity fetishism whereby the commodity, or in this case socialization of production itself, is open to the indeterminate projections of the consumer as a fulfillment of their identity ideal. The new audience commodity has become more precise in terms of identifying consumer habits, allowing micro-targeted advertising campaigns, product placements and promotions: however sustaining the necessary personal identification with and construction of new media networks by audiences is precarious. Notions of the social and collaborative logic of the wiki106 have been deployed in legitimizing the voluntary surrender of personal information to advertisers as YouTube “community guidelines” emblematically state: ‘Remember that this is your community! Each and every

106 In Chapter One I looked at how the Obama campaign effectively characterized their online apparatus as a grass-roots movement around their “wiki-candidate”.
user of YouTube makes the site what it is, so don’t be afraid to dig in and get involved!’ (Van Dijck 2009: 45). With the perfection of the audience commodity lies an irreducible tension in that it is entirely dependent upon the active free labour of users and as such must correspond with how people see themselves or the social life they aspire to. This is not to make any humanist assumptions of the innate qualities of social media rather this is simply to identify what is both a political economic phenomenon (pervasive commodification) and the necessary ontological consideration of positive human agency whether fetishistic or not.

Free Labour and the Tea Party
The penetration into the lifeworld is predicated upon the appearance of a consent and the lauding of new savvy self-determining audiences. While there may in fact be a gap between discourses of user agency and corporate control107, nevertheless this is the new hegemonic identity of neo-liberal audiences. As the quality of this audience commodity is superior in the sense of divulging consumer tastes in greater detail and in terms of personal identification with media brands, traditional media practice has been dramatically changed in order to incorporate free and affective labor. Whether this is simply the comment threads that follow an online story, the invitation for user content accompanying a report of a public event or catastrophe (“Were you there? We’d like to hear from you”), digi-polls and tweets to the editor, instilling a sense of interactivity and deference to user agency is essential for success in the new media political economy. Fox News may not be able to surveil to the extent of Google or Facebook in the selling of mouse

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107 Eli Pariser has identified what he calls ‘lock-in’ (2011) where the networks created by the free labor of users, yet monopolized by new media companies, act to centralize control of the internet and make it prohibitive for users to disengage: ‘users are so invested in their technology that even if competitors might offer better services, it’s not worth making the switch. If you’re a Facebook member, think about what it’d take to switch…probably re-creating your whole profile, uploading all of those pictures, and laboriously entering your friends’ names would be extremely tedious. Likewise Gmail, Gchat, Google Voice, Google Docs...are part of an orchestrated campaign for Google lock-in’ (40-41).
clicks and individual user profiles, however as a subsidiary of Newscorp, which operates within the broader political economy where new media, telecoms and tech companies converge, Fox represents a populist mobilization around a ‘brand community’ (Van Djick 45). What began at Fox as a strategy of market differentiation\textsuperscript{108}, operating in the space left vacant by the liberal tradition of broadcast news, has seen the co-development of a populist movement logic, the Fox News brand and the incorporation of free labor. Thus as an extension of brand loyalty and the politicized intensity of Fox News audiences, viewers do not merely watch the news but make it as Tea Party protestors. In aiding, promoting and at times staging Tea Party events Fox creates content that reinforces its brand image, engenders a loyal and active audience whose free labour creates the very spectacle Fox covers. Those viewers whose free labour consecrate Fox’s brand as an experiential commodity do not merely follow Fox as a trusted media source but as an authentic voice in the populist struggle. It should be stated that not every Fox viewer is necessarily a Tea-Partier, and forms of Fordist or traditional mass audience commodification still operate: however, the interactive, self-determining audience that engages in free labour for broadcasters or new media companies is the hegemonic ideal. The securing of a mass audience to sell on to advertisers still functions as an important source of profit but this process of commodification sits alongside the objective of locking in active audiences that will follow the Fox brand across new media platforms, mobile devices and divulge greater detail about their consumption habits, thereby refining the audience commodity. It is then crucial that political economy approaches take the ontological turn in understanding processes of commodification as dependent on the agency of audiences. This new immaterial logic of accumulation, central to the media and traversing the field of power, latches on to the differential or equivalent hegemonic chains.

\textsuperscript{108} Ken Auletta of The New Yorker has written of the audacious founding of Fox News, breaking away from the sterility of liberal broadcast news, as a ‘perfect joining of politics and business; a more conservative news channel would create another niche in a fragmented marketplace’ (2003, 254). What was particularly ingenious with Fox’s populist politicization was the cultivation of a viewership that consumed news with greater ‘intensity’ (ibid, 259) and brand loyalty.
media field is thus a key site for the return of the political as it opens itself up to the indeterminacy of the social as a result of user agency.

**Biopolitical Labour and Rupture**

What is decisively new in the biopolitical logic of production is the concession to labour, or in this case audiences, of a certain autonomy in constructing the very ‘biopolitical networks’ (Cote & Pybus, 90) and mediatized forms of the social that expand commodification into the realm of human relations. As Hardt & Negri emphasize a certain power of centralization in production has been conceded by capital and emerges ‘from the productive energies of the [immaterial] labour itself’ (2004: 113). The media field serves as a crucial site in expanding this logic of biopolitical production through the creation of communicative networks, social relations and collaboration. Thus the produce of the new media political economy, the new audience commodity itself and the means by which it is precisely surveilled in new media networks constructed through free labour, are social even as they address the commodified individual. While constructing the active user as a combination of taste preferences, the engagement of the audience is premised upon a ‘sense of connection and participation in something that is larger then one’s self, which provides the impetus for exploring new techniques and practices of communicative and affective productions’ (Cote & Pybus: 96). Despite the fact that this participatory discourse may serve to mask the very real commodification of immaterial and affective labour, these social relations constructed by labour itself represent a potential crisis of control for capital. Hardt & Negri take this tension between harnessing biopolitical labour and the unleashing of its creative potential to mean that capital is increasingly parasitic with its ‘mechanisms of control contradict[ing] the productivity of

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109 One of the critical concrete practices that defines the new spirit of capitalism, identified by Boltanski & Chiapello in management literature, are workplace discourses of autonomy which served to overcome work stoppages and a sense of alienation from one’s labour while in fact increasing exploitation. This tendency is intensified with new mobile technologies in which affective labourers no longer experience a demarcation between work and the home.
biopolitical labor and obstruct[ing] the creation of value, thereby exacerbating the crisis’ (2004: 144).

While I wish to retain this tension as fundamentally inscribed in the incorporation of free and affective labour there is no historical inevitability in the contradiction ‘between productive forces and the relations of production’ (Žižek 2006c: 266) playing itself out. As discussed in chapter one the very desire for socialist autonomy engendered in capitalism has served as the core of the new spirit of commodity fetishism. There is no necessary moment where those who have invested in this fetishized identity awake from their deception, this experiential gap may even entrench their position. The media field has been a site where the contingent nature of commodification has been conceded, however the ability of capital to privatize forms of the general intellect and accrue rent profits through regimes of intellectual property, buttressed by a strong central state, should not be underestimated. It follows then that the media field is a crucial site for articulating the return of the political, whether as populists, proletarians or the multitude. While media have the potential to create new forms of being in common, there are concrete material regimes of property that will not simply dematerialize as communicative networks are appropriated by those that have created them.

110 To return to some important categories and distinctions between political agents, I have already demonstrated how the unit of the populist “people” represents the ontological necessity of antagonism but ultimately seeks the end of the political in a final ontological closure. In Chapter Two I have stated my preference for Žižek’s notion of the proletariat as it functions as Ranciere’s part of no part and does not fetishistically cling to its identity but rather seeks its total dissolution. The multitude nicely captures the universal logic of capital in that each particular community is faced with a certain incarnation of this universal condition. What is missing from this formulation is that which might lead to a recognition of this universal condition and the realization of the multitude’s own universal project of democracy. One should not fault Hardt & Negri for the inability to answer the question of our time, my intention here is rather to restrict the multitude to a descriptive term rather than as a universal political subjectivity.
This is not to construct a straw man of Hardt & Negri and the implications of immaterial labour but rather to identify the usefulness and limits of the category of resistance called the multitude. The multitude may be the point of departure for articulating the political, condensing signification around a new universal hegemonic frontier. However the multitude’s realization of its constitutive free labour will not be enough for the old political frontier to dissolve. Thus, it is essential to theorize the political and rupture as born of an antagonistic discourse and the construction of logics of difference and equivalence. The multitude may well be the category of affective investment but it will not materialize without this antagonistic struggle. The media field occupies a critical position in expanding the scope and universality of this struggle as it traverses the economic, political fields and the social space. What is crucially at stake in this question of the return of the political in the media field is whether universal notions of the field are appropriated by a populist fetishism or whether the media space is opened for a new universal project.

**Conclusion**

To return to the imperatives of this dissertation and the question of populism and the political, the media field is a crucial site for the return of the political and ontological antagonism. As a heteronomous field of high symbolic power, in which the populist/liberal tension is fundamentally inscribed, the media functions as the principle site of this battle which threatens to dramatically reconfigure the field of power. The media is here not merely privileged as the constitutionally enshrined space of national publicness, but understood through the logic of mediatization, the media field is fundamentally transforming the social space. In performing the essential temporal spatial bridging of the nation at a time when political parties and unions have experienced historic decline, the media field has been critical in neo-liberalizing the public. Mediatization, in the absence of a strong public notion of democracy, has dramatically altered the nature of political communication, protest and social movements. The era of neo-liberal post-politics has meant a fracturing of the polity between the self-mobilized engaged in philanthropy, new identity struggles and the populist mobilization of anti-politics sentiment.
As the political and media fields have become principle targets of populist contempt, both fields have taken aim at one another in order to sustain their dwindling popular legitimacy. The media have been essential in mobilizing the isolated around single issue populist protest and reinforcing a populist “common sense” of the man on the street, while for politicians, attacking the “mainstream liberal media” has proved an almost inexhaustible populist ploy. What is critically at stake in the mediatization of the field of power is the liberal notion of the media field’s autonomy, which while erroneously seeking to unify the public in the quest for truth effectively disavowing the political, nevertheless retains the universal as the horizon of politics. What allows one to understand both the decline of this ideal and the significance of the media field and mediatization, not as derivative of economy but as a constitutive factor in the changing nature of economy, are new processes of audience commodification. The internal accumulation logic of the media field has undergone change in a manner analogous to the nature of neo-liberal individuation as new media and audience fragmentation has meant the dissolution of the Fordist mass market ideal, in favor of the new savvy self-determining individual. As new media technologies of audience surveillance have come online, the contingent nature of audience commodification has been conceded as the very process is dependent on audience participation. Increasingly free labour and the active construction of new media networks by audiences has become the hegemonic form of audience commodification even in traditional media contexts. In an increasingly individuated media milieu the journalist is dislodged from their position of authority instead deferring to the people whether through polls or online fora, or in the case of Fox News deep identification with populist protest. What is critical in this lauding of the savvy new media user is that it represents both a penetration of lifeworld by capital approaching the real subsumption of labor, and the return of the political. In conceding to audiences a certain autonomy in constructing the new media networks to be surveiled for the minutia of personal taste preferences, the new media field can be characterized by the social logics of difference and equivalence signifying the political. The existential challenge for the media field and a liberal politics of universality is whether the field devolves into a commercialized populist cantonization or whether the positive
agency of the new media multitude might fashion a notion of autonomy, that while acknowledging the ontological necessity of antagonism, rescues universality from a populist particularism.

In the previous chapters I have set out to identify the contours of the Obama/Tea Party frontier and its basis in the historical conjuncture of the financial crisis. This ideological crisis has consolidated the new spirit of capitalism and the forces of Empire, while drawing out the contradictions between the contemporary liberal-democratic consensus and the original founding of the revolutionary republic. What has persisted as a measure of the people in the various incarnations of American populism has been the yeoman, or man of property. I have established the discursive and symptomal basis of populism as it both acts out the ontological necessity of the political while seeking to disavow the political and the fact that the people do not exist. In addition to this principal ontology of antagonism I have identified the role of economy in the present political frontier as that which is either fetished or disavowed, but not identified as a site of antagonism. In this chapter I underlined the critical importance of the media field, not just in staging this confrontation, but as the space in which this conflict emerges. What will follow in the coming chapters is an analysis of different locations in the field and their treatment of, or participation in, the liberal/populist entanglement. From a close analysis of media texts I establish how the liberal-democratic institution of journalism responds to the political as well as identifying the precise constitutive role of the media in the Tea Party fetish. Finally with the return of the political I will address just what potential space of possibles exists to articulate a properly political notion of universality.
Chapter Five – Method of Media Selection & Analysis

Before proceeding to my media analysis I will first outline the timeframe from which texts will be selected. This timeline explains how the media itself, particularly Fox News, became critical actors in the Obama/Tea Party conflict. The selection of texts will be drawn from across early 2009 to late 2011 around key inflection points. While in Chapter One I explained the emergence of the Obama/Tea Party frontier, this timeline will detail specific events and political battles that are crucial to understanding this struggle as a mediatized phenomenon. After delineating this timeline I will explain the selection of different media used for analysis. The New York Times, Fox News, Tea Party Nation and The Young Turks represent a cross-section of the media field. The Times and Fox are positioned at the height of the media field’s symbolic power but are at polar opposite ends around cultural and economic capital (see figure three). While the Times and the Glenn Beck Program on Fox News are clearly governed by different conventions, both occupy the field and are engaged in the struggle to define the universality of the field. Tea Party Nation and The Young Turks are positioned within the mediatized social space and represent different incarnations of the political and the field, that emerge from this space. My selection of these two media allow me to identify both the limits of Fox’s populist commercialism and the potential for a critical redefinition of the field.

Timeline for Analysis 2009–2011
As we have seen in the first chapter, the populist othering of Obama was established by the nomination of Sarah Palin as the Republican nominee for vice president. In branding Obama as a Harvard-educated elite liberal, an insult that implicates him as part of a big government ruling class responsible for the economic crisis, Palin’s conservative identity politics of the frontier, traditional patriarchal family and the Second Amendment, set the tone for Republican opposition politics. Obama’s discourse of healing the rift between Wall St and Main St, effectively surrendering the antagonistic terrain, left his administration vulnerable to the simple populist polemics of what became the
Tea Party. Responsible for overseeing his predecessor’s bailout and putting himself between the bankers and the pitchforks, the populist opposition was able to channel widespread disgust with the Toxic Asset Relief Program 2008 (TARP) and a series of Wall St executive pay scandals. Obama’s embrace of the neo-liberal technocracy of Geithner and Summers, and the construction of a liberal frontier in which government is not positioned against the banks, consolidated the right-wing populist discourse of government. Proceeding from the crystallizing moment of TARP, in which a base-level antagonism emerged in opposition to Wall St, the Tea Party populists were able to affectively invest in the fetishized, overdetermined enemy of government. In this way the stimulus, the auto bailout, and healthcare reform all function as an extension of the original sin of TARP, in which socialists and Wall St conspired to ruin free market capitalism. The ability of the Tea Party to monopolize the antagonistic terrain is due to the affective invocations of the very name and act of “Tea Party”. The name “Tea Party” in this sense becomes the objet petit a that serves to constitute chains of equivalence and draw the antagonistic frontier. The name evokes a revolutionary fervor and zeal that is exclusively restorative and functions as a fetish that covers the actions and carnivalesque transgressions of Tea Partiers, assuring them that they are the

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111 Early in his presidency Obama held a private White House meeting with the CEOs of the leading Wall St financial firms to impress upon them a message of moderation in the face of public outcry over executive compensation. At the time Obama famously stated that ‘my administration was the only thing standing between you [CEOs/banks] and the pitchforks’ (Javers 2009). It would appear that Obama was not politically wise enough to step out of the way. It was subsequently revealed that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the stimulus) contained within it the so-called Dodd Amendment. Added at the insistence of administration technocrats Geithner and Summers, the amendment added a loophole to TARP that allowed bailed-out banks to compensate executives as they saw fit (Hornick, Barrett & Keck 2009). The administration would later claim publicly that the amendment was essential to ensure the ‘sanctity of contracts’ between executives and banks (Mogulescu 2009). In what should have been his own populist or pro-worker moment, the Obama administration managed to realize in the stimulus the twin fears of right wing populism that of government intervention in the economy and coming down on the side of Wall St.
people of the republic, representing the lineage of the nation’s founders. The indeterminacy of the name, as those who would claim the legacy of the revolutionary founders are innumerable, accounts for the often contradictory amalgam within the chain, ranging from libertarians to social conservatives and birthers, Islamophobes, anti-communists and end-timers. Correspondingly, Obama as an enemy becomes overdetermined by the complex of equivalences around the signifier Tea Party with conspiracies managing to incorporate Wall St, socialism, reparations, the New Black Panther party, the global caliphate, the green conspiracy to de-industrialize and much more.

The Tea Party signifier emerged in February of 2009, shortly after Obama’s inauguration, in Rick Santelli’s famous tirade against the passage of the stimulus and the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Program 2009. Sporadic Tea Party protest ensued across the country, culminating in a day of national, coordinated action or what one Fox chyron called ‘FNC Tax Day Tea Parties’ (Media Matters 2009a). Fox was critical in promoting and coordinating events, not just in their opinion formats (Hannity, Beck, Cavuto and Van Susteren all broadcast their shows from Tea Party rallies) but also in straight news programs. Bill Hemmer, host of America’s Newsroom, after covering a story about local Tea Parties directed viewers to the Fox News website:

If you go to our website, you will find a growing list of these events, hundreds of photos, and a new Tea Party anthem that you will hear from the man who wrote it and recorded it next hour. And there's a list of the nationwide Tax Day Tea Party events coming up on the 15th of April, which will be a huge deal for those organizations. So check it out online right now (ibid).

As a network so closely associated with the defeated Republican Party the enthusiastic coverage of Tea Party protests as “grassroots” and “non-partisan” was a crucial way to re-establish a genuine populist credibility. Tea Party protest was drawn out into the summer months during the recess of congress
with the town hall setting extending the revolutionary iconography of the Tea Party to incorporate the antebellum ideal of the republic. The direct confronting of lawmakers raised the pitch of indignation, resulting in a remarkable spectacle of anti-government sentiment from Sarah Palin’s claims of death panels, to the bearing of arms at Obama’s town hall meetings and the now infamous cry “get your government hands off my medicare”.

From the initial populist opposition to concrete government action (TARP, stimulus, healthcare reform) the chain of equivalences expanded to more far-flung regions of American political discourse. While Fox played a crucial role as self-imagined dissenters true to the universal principles of the founders it was left to Beck to stand in for the particular ideas of the movement. Beck announced himself to the world outside Fox with the claim on Fox & Friends that Obama has ‘a deep-seated hatred of white people’ (Associated Press 2009). What marked a real shift in Fox from enthusiastic supporters of the movement to a space at times indistinguishable from the movement was Beck’s “9/12 Project” and Rally on Washington. The year’s largest Tea Party rally functioned not only as a self-referential news event but established Beck as a de-facto leader able to set the movement’s agenda and required reading. In this symbiosis of the movement and the network many of Beck’s more

\[112\] This proved a critical moment in many regards. The organization Color of Change launched a campaign urging advertisers to boycott the Glenn Beck Program which proved effective and has to be seen as a contributing factor in Fox’s decision not to extend Beck’s contract. Beck himself keenly aware of the outer bounds of permissible discourse used the controversy as a moment of self-discovery. Beck routinely engages in self-deprecation to emphasize to his viewers the importance of educating themselves, which functions as a manner of populist enlightenment as they consume his books and reading list. Beck used the controversy to show his own failings confessing that he misread the president as a racist when in fact Obama was really ‘a guy who understands the world through liberation theology...[which is] Marxism disguised as religion’ (Wallace 2010). This enlightenment about the corruption of the gospel in America would even be used by Beck to stage the “Restoring Honor” rally where the Tea Party, dogged by charges of racism, would ‘reclaim the civil rights movement’ (Associated Press 2010) at this supposed non-political religious revival.
delusional theories became stories within the straight news programming of Fox including the supposed indoctrination of school children and Obama’s appointment of communist subversives within the administration. The most prominent case was green jobs czar Van Jones, who was forced to resign by the administration, an action that seemed to both validate the claims of Beck and give Fox every invitation to engage in further mayhem. Other attempts by the White House to manage Fox’s populist challenge have proved equally inept. In October, the administration launched what was dubbed a war on Fox, with communications director Anita Dunn seeking to divide the media between responsible liberal journalism and Fox. Fox was denied access to White House officials, including a snub by Obama of a Sunday talk show appearance, until other bureau chiefs revolted against the lockout of Fox from an interview with executive pay czar Kenneth Feinberg. In this protest the liberal media not only gave Fox credibility as an equal within the field of journalism but allowed Fox to indulge in a narrative of victimization and political persecution reminiscent of Nixon’s enemies list.

At the level of Republican party politics, Sarah Palin consolidated her position as Tea Party insurgent, resigning from her governorship to pursue a mediatized role between the party and the media field. Palin has functioned as media entrepreneur, co-authoring her memoir, starring in a reality TV show, serving as a Fox News contributor, and taking to her Facebook page to make policy evaluations about healthcare reform and supposed “death panels”. Palin’s media capital had real impact in the Republican primary process for the 2010 congressional elections. With varying degrees of success, Palin

113 After the story of Jones’ resignation broke “straight news” host Megan Kelly read the following lead-in: ‘Well, more of Obama’s special advisers are now under scrutiny following the resignation of his green jobs czar...And now, questions are being asked about his so-called science czar, John Holdren. Now, he is under fire for a textbook discussing population control policies like forced sterilization and mandatory abortion’ (2009b).

114 Dunn appeared on CNN to deride Fox: ‘Lets not pretend Fox is a real news network like CNN’ (Madden 2009). In response Glenn Beck in trademark style misrepresented a speech of Dunn’s to brand her a Maoist.
anointed candidates\textsuperscript{115} as Tea Party representatives within the party, engaging the base and dislodging moderate or multi-term candidates. While not singularly responsible for the expulsion of Republican moderates, Palin rode the Tea Party’s disgust with the party establishment, which both re-energized the movement and held Republicans to a test of purity, including no-compromise with Obama. It was this \textit{jouissance} in engaging in a purification ritual, that simultaneously warned of a mighty enemy and promised righteous rebirth, that fuelled the 2010 electoral success of Republicans. The Republicans in the House of Representatives, which now included a Tea Party caucus of 62 Congress members, was able to make substantial policy gains on tax and fiscal policy. Obama proved remarkably inept in political negotiation, ready to jettison what little progressive principles he may have had and even budgetary considerations as he agreed to extending the Bush tax cuts without securing consent for raising the debt ceiling, while validating Lafferian notions of tax cuts and revenue. In the Republican brinksmanship that ensued around the debt ceiling, raising the prospect of a government shutdown, the White House lauded the eventual compromise deal as ‘historic deficit reduction’ (2011)\textsuperscript{116}, while the Republican speaker of the house boasted that ‘I got 98% of what I wanted’ (Pelley 2011), that is more than $2 trillion in spending cuts without tax increases. In spite of the fact that the Tea Party managed to fundamentally shift the discourse on the economy within the framework of the debt and the size of government, their outrage has proved inexhaustible. There is a disavowal of their own efficacy, as necessitated by an identity of victimization, where every real achievement is experienced as defeat at the hands of the socialists\textsuperscript{117}. It is this ontological necessity of, and

\textsuperscript{115} Prominent endorsement successes include Kentucky Senator Rand Paul and South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, while Nevada’s Sharron Angle and Delaware’s Christine O’Donnell have to be seen as dramatic failures ceding conservative seats to Democrats.

\textsuperscript{116} The deal was castigated by the Democratic head of the black caucus Emmanuel Cleaver as a ‘Satan Sandwich’ (MacAskill 2011).

\textsuperscript{117} Tea Party Patriots co-founder claimed the debt ceiling deal was ‘destroying America’s future’ (Gomez 2011) as cuts were too small, while Judson Phillips vowed
investment in, the spectral presence of the outsider that prevents the Tea Party populists from being effectively corralled by party discipline. Following these electoral and legislative victories, the Republican Party has been marked by deep dysfunction and a farcical presidential primary process. The Tea Party base has demanded both a standard of ideological purity and callousness that defies realistic expectations and fatalistically assures their disappointment and embitterment as constitutive of their identity. And in spite of the damage inflicted upon the Republican Party by this internal war, this calcified identity and resistance to liberal democracy may well continue to prove effective even out of power.

With the successful Republican recapture of the House signs of the complicated relationship between Fox and Beck soon emerged. Beck was essential for Fox in being able to directly channel into the network a devout following that consumed Fox with greater intensity and whose free labour created the movement authenticity of Fox. Beck in this sense bridged the heights of Fox’s symbolic power, smaller scale regions of production and the social space in which the movement emerged. In this operation we can observe the competing logics of accumulation within the media field. Throughout his two and a half years on Fox, Beck boasted remarkable ratings for the 5pm timeslot, peaking at 2.8 million in January 2010 while declining to 1.7 million in the last months of the program (Carusone Media Matters 2011 see figure five). What proved crucial was the exodus of advertisers following various controversies that drove down ad rates for the program, essentially making it a loss leader for Fox. Beck’s program did not serve the traditional logic of accumulation but rather functioned as a flagship of authenticity that would attract the new media user that follows Fox across platforms and into social media/super fan sites like Fox Nation. However by this same logic that Republicans who voted for the deal would targeted in 2012 primaries by the Tea Party.

118 Fox Nation (FN) serves both an ideological function and the imperatives of the new accumulation logic. The FN site offers a statement of purpose that mimics the weathered paper and ink blotches of the nation’s founding documents and reads:
Beck’s own media capital was not always easily monetized by *Fox* and often exceeded its auspices, as with his online “Glenn Beck Insider Extreme” subscriber service. The political value of Beck was diminished after the 2010 elections as these provided a legitimate site of political mobilization and a concrete objective. In the absence of such an institutionalized outlet for populist anger there emerged increased concerns over the truly indeterminate and political nature of much of the movement. With the shooting of Democratic Congresswomen Gabrielle Giffords in January of 2011 and the subsequent concerns over civil discourse, not even *Fox* could withstand the pressure to conform to norms of the field.\textsuperscript{119} In response to the tumultuous events of early 2011, including the Arab Spring and the Wisconsin labour

\begin{quote}
The Fox Nation was created for people who believe in the United States of America and its ideals, as expressed in the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Emancipation Proclamation...The Fox Nation is committed to the core principles of tolerance, open debate, civil discourse, and fair and balanced coverage of the news. It is for those opposed to intolerance, excessive government control of our lives, and attempts to monopolize opinion or suppress freedom of thought, expression, and worship (2012).
\end{quote}

FN functions as the equivalent of *Fox’s Facebook* wall where it puts out a mural of the different stories and issues *Fox* is covering in terms which exceed even the network’s standard polemics and engages the user in a populist exercise of sending stories up the “Hot List” as they “Fire Up” a flaming icon to indicate their interest. Stories and accompanying videos are snappy soliciting comments from subscribers of FN, who are offered of plethora of feedback options. In addition to the ubiquitous *Facebook* “Like” button and the invitation to tweet or e-mail the page in question users may indicate the following sentiment: “offensive”, “funny”, “cool”, “obnoxious”, “scary”, “inspiring”, “crazy”. This site not only gives *Fox* information about viewer attitudes but also allows them to construct a more precise sense of their audience (commodity), as internet “cookies” and user preferences are collected.\textsuperscript{119} However is should be clear from *Fox’s* slogan “Fair & Balanced” and the above citation of FN’s statement of purpose that these liberal, universal ideals can be utilized as a form of *populist exceptionalism* and disavowal whereby the people are “committed to civil discourse” but the outsiders are not.
struggles, Beck clearly stretched the chains of equivalence too far for Fox, engaging apocalyptic theories of the Communist, Islamic, environmental alliance, without the safety valve of elections. Beck’s final show aired in June where he reflected upon being cast down from the heights of Fox’s symbolic power into the smaller regions of production and thus closer to the social:

This has become a movement. It’s not a TV show, and that’s why it doesn’t belong on television anymore. It belongs in your homes. It belongs in your neighborhoods (Hagey 2011).

Ever the media entrepreneur, Beck has since expanded his independent media holdings to include subscription-based GBTV, which includes the traditional Beck format, a news satire show, a survivalist reality TV show based on the frontier homestead entitled Independence USA, a children’s program and more, as well as the conservative news site The Blaze modeled on the Huffington Post. Beck has continued to enjoy massive radio success having signed in June 2012 a five-year $100 million deal with Clear Channel Communications (Tourtellotte 2012).

What is evident in this development of the Tea Party frontier in the mediatized social space is that the movement embodies that aspect of the political which makes for a better audience commodity. However, this cannot be contained even within politicized institutions such as Fox and the Republican party. While the likes of Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin are clearly ruthless opportunists and media entrepreneurs that are not authentic movement leaders in any conventional sense, they speak to the mediatization of the political field. I hope in the subsequent analysis to be able to identify to what extent the return of the political and the mediatization of political and social life has transformed the media field and crucially the social symbolic space of the public. The critical question for the media field’s ideal of a liberal universal public, as embodied in the journalistic habitus of the New York Times, is whether such an inclusive notion is able to cope with or even explain the antagonistic return of the political. As this thesis contends, liberal-democratic notions of universality wedded to the anti-politics of the Third
Way are clearly riddled by contradiction and cannot withstand the populist attempt to the collapse of the universal horizon of politics. And while the task of indentifying a new politics of universality clearly exceeds the bounds of this thesis, it is critical to identify the fissures in the media field born of the new media logic of free labour and interactivity. The extension of the field into the social space creates with it the potential for a being in common and self determination that goes beyond a mere populist commercialism.

**Method of Media Selection**

The purpose of having fleshed out this timeline is not simply to identify the role of various media as political actors but rather it is to determine how different articulations of the media field treat this political frontier. In the media analysis that follows I have selected four media outlets that occupy distinct positions in the media field and will be used for a comparative analysis of the different conceptions of the political and the competing attempts to define the media field. These are the *New York Times* (NYT), *The Glenn Beck Program* on Fox News, the social media website *Tea Party Nation* (TPN) and the online/cable news program *The Young Turks* (TYT). These contrasting positions represent both the heights of symbolic power of opposed poles in the field, the liberal NYT and the populist Fox News, as well as new mediatized networks emanating from the social space and embodying the political logics of difference and equivalence. It is my contention that these selected media offer a cross-section of the field (see figure three) and in spite of differing of genres and principles of journalistic practice, exemplify the conflict over the new emerging terms of the media field. The different positions in the field of the NYT and Fox can be seen as based in the very opposition between the prestige of the broadsheet newspaper as the foundation of modern journalism and contemporary cable broadcast news with its emphasis on immediacy and spectacle. The *Glenn Beck Program* represents the antithesis of the liberal field’s technocratic pursuit of truth, as Beck’s show is premised upon the spurious intimacy of the televisual and the spatial-temporal bridging of a populist public. The comparison of the NYT and the *Glenn Beck Program* is not merely meant to identify the bounds of the field, as Beck’s and Fox’s
populist exceptionalism takes aim specifically at the tradition the NYT represents and threatens to re-define the very terms of the field. It must be stated that these different media possess certain emotive and rhetorical tools that predispose them towards a particular treatment of populism. The Times, as a print medium, cannot showcase the same populist authenticity as Beck who uses the mise en scene of his show and his wild range of emotions to convey a populist non-professionalism. Yet the professional journalistic convention of the feature story, that profiles an ordinary citizen/American/activist, can do more in legitimizing populism in the terms of the liberal field than Beck’s wild antics. These are different treatment of the same phenomena where the universality of the field is critically at stake.

The TPN social media site represents that aspect of the political and mediatized subjectivity that is coveted by Fox with the audience commodity increasingly defined by free labour and intensity of usage across platforms. My consideration of TPN as a subset of my analysis of Beck is concerned with the political character of this media, the logic of affect and whether there are any tensions between the populist Tea Party netroots and Fox. Lastly I will turn to TYT as what might be designated as a left-liberal media originating from the mediatized social space, assuming an antagonistic identity and politicizing liberal journalistic values. In order to consider the potential for new notions of universality in correspondence with a hegemonic frontier I will look at TYT’s coverage of the Occupy Wall Street Movement (OWS). I recognize selecting this moment may be perceived as a digression from my thesis argument, however this example is critical. Firstly in identifying TYT as a left-liberal counter-tendency to a populist commercialism, I am able to consider how the network asserted its notion of the field, not merely how it defensively responds to the Tea Party movement. TYT’s live broadcasts from Zuccotti Park were a defining moment in bridging a mediatized public with the political and antagonistic occupation of physical space. And while it may exceed the bounds of this thesis to consider the point at which mediatized social life converges with the return of the notion of democracy as antagonistic struggle, I hope to gain some insight into this critical question. Secondly OWS cannot be understood without the Third Way/Tea Party frontier that has been
identified in this thesis thus far. To the extent that OWS does in fact represent a rupture from the Third Way it will have to overcome the Third Way notions of the political and the new spirit’s moral discourse of capitalism. Lastly I have refrained from doing a comparative analysis of how the media field treats the divergent movements, in order to establish whether there is bias, as such a study would fail to convey the radical transformation that is taking place within the media field as Fox disposes all of its tools of spectacle in facilitating the emergence of a movement. Even in the case of TYT there is nothing comparable to this in regards to OWS. The Glenn Beck Program is unique and worthy of consideration on its own as it best exemplifies the new social and political logic of audience commodification.

**Figure Three** – The New Media Field
Before proceeding to a specific consideration of the different media from across the field I will explain my rendering of this cross-section of the field. This diagram is not intended to portray the entirety of the field. Rather, it depicts the position of my four selections vis-à-vis the social space, symbolic power, economic and cultural capital. Notably, Fox News extends across the field from the heights of symbolic power down into the social space. It is able to assume this position in its association with Glenn Beck as part of its attempts to capture new forms of audience labour and consumption. Beck’s efficacy in this role extends from his own presence in the field outside the auspices of Fox. Beck’s media empire overlaps with Fox’s and occupies the same space as Fox Nation, the entity at Fox which best defines their attempt to embody the new social logic of the field. Included within Beck’s position in the field are his various ventures such as his website, radio show and online news site The Blaze. The boundaries of his and Fox’s position in the field are porous, by virtue of the logic of free labour, and as such places them in close proximity to a social media entity such as TPN. It is in simultaneously approaching the antagonistic logic of the social, while commodifying protest as a form of free labour, that Fox may be thought of as connected to both the social space and the pole of economic capital. At the other side of the field lies the NYT defining the pole of cultural capital while remaining isolated to the emerging social logic of audience production and consumption. Thus there exists a gulf between the NYT, and its symbolic power, and the lower regions of the field. My selection for a left-liberal counter-tendency to the populist commercialism of biopolitical audience production, TYT, straddles the boundaries of the field and the social space. It exists both under-the-wing of cable television station Current TV, with the Young Turks producing a nightly news program on the station, while retaining its independent presence on the web. TYT is similarly positioned to TPN as a space in the media field that represents the return of a political and social logic, due to the proximity to the social space. It is in this way that the signifiers “Occupy Wall Street” and “Tea Party” become names of affective investment in a mediatized social space. What differs of course is the manner in which a political articulation, in the media field such as TYT or Fox/TPN, conceptualizes the universal.
The New York Times

The *NYT* has been selected for this media analysis as it functions as the standard-bearer of the high modern liberal paradigm of the media field. Its symbolic power within liberal and Democratic party politics, as well as the broader polity, is based in its claims to the cultural capital or autonomous values of the journalistic field. The New York Times Company highlights its extensive journalistic code of ethics prominently on its website with the company’s core purpose vowing to ‘enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news’ and upholding the First Amendment through the ‘highest standard of journalistic ethics’ (2005). The *NYT* thus typifies the traditional elite liberal media as opposed to traditional conservative media such as the *Wall Street Journal*, whose symbolic power, while considerable is derived more of the proximity to investment community (economic capital) in addition to the cultural capital of journalism.

Occupying this space in the field has a profound impact upon how a phenomenon such as the Tea Party is covered. Positioning itself as the American paper of record, the *NYT*’s journalism is conditioned by a sense of responsibility for the historical record. In writing for a liberal unified public it attempts to strike a measured tone, imagining itself above the fray even as a competitor in the field such as *Fox* engages in a political battle to undermine all that the *NYT* stands for. In the process of assembling materials for this analysis I have come across the stark disparity between the two media in their treatment of the historic record in valorizing journalistic practice. The *NYT* website boasts a complete online archive dating back to 1851, with advanced search options that allow one to pinpoint searches to any month, week or day within its archives. In contrast, the *Fox News* website offers only a rudimentary search engine that yields innumerable results in descending order from most recent dates with no ability to rank by relevance for the most basic searches. This disparity speaks to the largely throwaway nature of live

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121 Entering the search term “Glenn Beck Rally 2010” on the *NYT* site on April 30, 2012 yielded 426 articles, the first being an in-depth feature on the rally titled ‘Glenn Beck Leads Religious Rally at Lincoln Memorial’ (2012). The same search on
cable news and the fact that the NYT wants to have their record researched while Fox is either unconcerned with this or does not want their record researched.

In terms of positioning the NYT and Fox as diametrically opposed in the field, the question arises as to the validity of treating NYT as a broadsheet paper, with Fox representing the increasing hegemony of a multimedia mélange across different platforms. And despite the fact that as a researcher I am accessing the NYT online, the “Grey Lady”, as it is known, for its high proportion of text to photos, still maintains the aesthetic of its print edition. The extent to which the NYT is a newspaper online, as opposed to an online newspaper, is evidenced by its reluctance to supersede editorial authority to the new media user. The NYT website did not adopt the ubiquitous user comment thread until December 2011, previously user comments were relegated to a separate page entirely (Abramson 2011), while comments are still not enabled for feature stories.

Based upon the NYT’s notion of itself as the paper of record, with the journalistic and historic responsibility to report with an unimpassioned eye, I have selected the Times as representative of the general liberal master-narrative of the Tea Party. In order to establish the nature of this liberal narrative and its developmental stages I have conducted an exhaustive survey of over 240 NYT articles. My selection ranges from early 2009, when the movement first emerged, to the end of 2011, where the antagonistic terrain became increasingly cohabited by OWS. Articles from 2009 are selected from periods of high visibility and Tea Party protest, including Tax-Day protest in April and town hall protests in August. From November of 2009, the Tea Party became a featured online “Times Topic” with a single page dedicated to all articles dealing with the Tea Party. The page now has over 700 articles and features. Articles were selected from this archive on the basis of national

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Foxnews.com produced over 100,000 results. Ranked by relevance the first article was on professional footballer “John Beck” (2012a). There is but one mention of Glenn Beck on the first page of results while the featured slideshow for “Glenn Beck Rally 2010” is titled ‘24 years of Hooters calendar Miss Aprils’ (ibid).
importance (as opposed to political races for state government) and articles that dealt with the movement in contrast to standard “horse-race” political journalism.

All of the texts that have been used for analysis have been compiled on the DVD which accompanies this thesis. This compendium is organized by chapters, with the Chapter Six folder containing all of the *Times* articles, Chapter Seven includes all eleven episodes of the Glenn Beck Program and Chapter Eight contains both *Tea Party Nation* and *TYT* texts. Files are named and organized by their full reference. Where I have coded the different formats of *Times* articles the file names are color coded. Figure four displays the distribution of articles selected from across the 2009-2011 timeline, as well as the prevalence of the discursive frames that I identify in my analysis.

![Figure Four](image)

*Figure Four – New York Times Articles and Frames*

In identifying this narrative I intend to establish how the *NYT*, and more broadly the liberal media field, defines and defends itself in explaining the political. This narrative will not be used as a straight comparative analysis to consider how Beck covers the same story, rather I am concerned with the question of how these contrasting positions define themselves. Determining
the nature of the liberal defense of the journalistic field requires an approach commensurate with the contrasts in media. For the NYT this is a task that involves tracking the assemblage of various discourses and actors within the Times that demarcate the contours and bounds of the liberal narrative. This narrative is not singular, rather it marks the range of acceptable opinion, that is articulated through the different genres of the broadsheet. Thus I have coded the selected articles as either “straight news”, “feature” and “opinion”. The emergence of this liberal narrative traverses these formats and is embodied in the ensemble of journalists and commentators who mark out the range of the field. While the likes of Frank Rich, David Brooks and Kate Zernike all stake out their different ideological positions, each does so in an attempt to embody the ideal of a liberal journalistic habitus.

My survey of the Times has revealed distinct discursive stages in the making of the liberal narrative. I have designated these (1) the initial reaction; (2) making sense of the movement; (3) political pathology; (4) beyond the pale. From my selection of 240 texts the close analysis that follows in the next chapter features a selection of 36 articles; 5 texts from the “initial reaction” period, 12 from “making sense”, 12 from “political pathology” and 6 from “beyond the pale” [see figure four]. While these discursive elements do in fact overlap there is a clear progressive trajectory within the coverage that spans

122 In contrast Fox and Beck’s staging of self-referential political rallies leaves no ambiguities as to how they define themselves and the political. Furthermore on the question of not doing a precise comparative analysis of a single event covered by the different media; the political frontier has been described both in real and theoretical terms thus allowing me to use different moments in the timeline to establish how the values of the field are being contested or defended.

123 Straight News pertains to the convention of event-reporting, the formula of “5 Ws plus H”, with articles generally appearing in the “Politics”, “U.S.” or “Regional” news sections. A Feature story is generally over 800 words in length and offers more in-depth analysis and at times allows the voice of the journalist to transcend the role of passive spectator. The feature often appears in the weekend edition or accompanying magazine. Opinion is self-explanatory. These are color coded in my compendium as Straight News, Feature and Opinion.
an initial surprise, subsequent curiosity and eventual repulsion. The initial response to Tea Party protests takes the form of straight event-reporting primarily concerned with the scenes of protests as opposed to context. From this sporadic reporting emerges in early 2010 an intensive period aimed at “making sense” of the movement and “what it means” for party politics. Upon the passage of healthcare reform, the deterioration of civil discourse and Glenn Beck’s civil rights posturing, the Tea Party is increasingly pathologized as malcontents, paranoid and racist. Following the electoral victory of 2010 there arose an expectation that the movement would transition to, and defer, to the political realm. The Giffords shooting seemed to perfectly mark the loss of patience with the Tea Party’s more eliminationist rhetoric and the limits of acceptable discourse. And with the subsequent brinksmanship that ensued over the debt ceiling, the Tea Party was largely designated as beyond the pale, representing a destructive base impulse that, while dominating American politics, cannot be properly explained.

What is evident in the NYT coverage of the Tea Party is a journalistic treatment of the movement within the dichotomy of a liberal humanist frame or a political pathology frame. There is a critical tension here born of the liberal journalistic field that can only humanize its opponents or objectify them as incarnations of a pathological condition but cannot understand this frontier in properly political terms. The inability of the NYT to explain the political has to be understood as derived from the liberal ideal of the field and the conventions of the genre. The journalistic habitus and identity of the technocrat to the liberal public sphere is limited by the notion of objectivity or the premise that there may exist a truth or set of facts that are unobjectionable to a liberal public. The pursuit of this truth can be contradictory as it requires both the seeking out of expert opinion, in order to frame events, and also the importance of “the people” as an elusive and authentic subject position. The journalist as witness-ambassador undertakes what Couldry

125 Those that cannot reconcile these facts are outside this public, whether as culturalized primitives or illegal subversives, but are not essential to constitute the very ideal of the liberal public, as in the case of populists and the outsider.
describes as a ritualistic ‘reverse pilgrimage’\textsuperscript{126} (2003: 93) in which the media descend into the public space, a process that mediatizes this very space, in pursuit of an authentic human truth. The implications of this humanism/pathology dichotomy is that the Tea Party is portrayed either as the embodiment of a democratic ideal or is subject to a liberal exclusion that does not view them as real ideological opponents but merely the remnants of history. My intention is not to make a straw man argument about the media’s inability to properly theorize the political at an academic level, rather given the range of coverage from straight reporting, features and opinion, whether there is some illumination of the threat to liberal-democratic norms and the field of journalism that are fundamentally based in the political construction of American liberalism itself.

\textit{Fox News and The Glenn Beck Program}  

\textit{Fox News} and the Glenn Beck program have been selected as both representative of the opposition to the liberal ideals of the field and as reflecting the new mediatized, social and political logic of audience commodification in which the poles of valorization in the field between economic and cultural capital collapse. The principle distinction between Fox and the \textit{NYT} lies in Fox’s appeal to legitimacy in terms of populist commercialism as opposed to principled liberalism. While notions of journalistic impartiality persist as a veneer (“We Report, You Decide”, “Fair & Balanced”), Fox’s populist credentials derive from its status as “#1”. Fox News’ website proudly proclaims its status as the top-rated cable news network in the 25-54 adult demographic and offers the following barbed comment to its competitors:

CNN and MSNBC use an asterisk in their ads to point out some half-baked one-time statistic to prove that somebody stumbled

\textsuperscript{126} Couldry writes of the media as a revered symbolic space that audiences might even travel to in order to experience the mystique of media spectacle, for example \textit{Lord of the Rings} tourism in New Zealand. In what he has termed a reverse pilgrimage, for journalists themselves, guided by notions of the new savvy self-determining media user, the site of the ordinary people has assumed a similarly revered status.
across their channels giving them a temporary spike in the ratings, which they would tout as unprecedented, earth-shattering and monumental. It’s actually pathetic since we all know if they massage their statistics long enough they can come up with something to make their tiny lame point. But deep in their little hearts, even they know that FOX NEWS IS NUMBER ONE [sic] in cable news and has been for years (2012b).

The directly populist appeal of Fox represents a harmonization of its economic capital interests, maximum viewership and, paradoxically, a closer proximity to the social space. The populist posturing of the network is politicized specifically against elite liberal media and a liberal democratic polity and represents a perfection of the audience commodity. Fox is able to engender an intensity of viewership that both sustains audience share across various platforms and reinforces a social and political bond through a conservative movement around the Fox brand. The Glenn Beck Program has occupied a particular position within the Fox/Newscorp media empire. Glenn Beck as a media entrepreneur was positioned both at the apex of Fox’s symbolic power within the field and in the regions of smaller scale production through his independent media ventures. Beck was thus crucial at Fox in not merely politicizing audiences against the network’s competitors but in articulating a political frontier emanating from the social space. We have already seen how this bifurcation led to the eventual conflict between Beck and Fox as the indeterminate nature of Tea Party political formation and Beck’s own interests ultimately exceeded the bounds of Fox.

The selection of texts from the Glenn Beck Program will be drawn from across his two and a-half years spent on Fox. I have selected eleven episodes from the show, that cover key moments both in the Obama/Tea Party frontier and Beck’s own self-declared high water marks. These episodes are viewable in the thesis compendium. Figure five plots the selected episodes across Beck’s time at Fox in relation to key political moments in the Obama/Tea Party frontier and Beck’s ratings on Fox.
I have concentrated on Beck’s *Fox* program as opposed to his radio show or post-*Fox* ventures which, while significant, do not ascend to the same heights of symbolic power and represent less of a threat to normative notions of the field. The ability to discern Beck’s pointed challenges to the liberal field is made simple by the fact that the mediatized populist logic of the show continually staged protests and impassioned campaigns for a personal, spiritual and political rebirth. Beck’s “9/12 Project” and the “Rally to Restore Honor” represent the self-proclaimed high water marks of the program and the movement, and clearly articulate a populist notion of the polity and media field. These self-declared political moments will be compared to the liberal
narrative, however, what is critical is the manner in which liberalism constitutes Beck’s populist definition of the field. Liberalism exists both as the phantasmagoric other that threatens “the people” and paradoxically as the source of a populist exceptionalism that allows Beck to declare exclusive access to the universal. In addition to considering the political logic of Beck’s program, I will examine Beck’s own trajectory and counter-narrative. This is not an attempt to establish a Tea Party master narrative but rather to consider how Beck skirted the limits of antagonistic discourse within the field. In contrast to the NYT and its concern for the historic record, Fox can be characterized as an inexhaustible populist outrage machine that resets every news cycle. Beck is novel in the sense that he developed a sustained rationale and movement logic, however, we can see in his political evolution the contortions, ultimately unsuccessful, that were necessary to remain on air at Fox. What was key for Beck, and speaks to the importance of the values of the media field, were his attempts to monopolize truth, rationality and enlightenment. In painting a dark web of communist subversion Beck appealed, quite ludicrously, to the standard values of journalistic practice in validating his claims. Having reached an unobjectionable notion of the truth, and spurring his active audience to do the same, Beck cloaks his politics in a universal humanist guise. The critical challenge to the field here is Beck’s notion of a post-politics that is deeply colored by the particular culture content of the Tea Party fetishists. It is at this point that an anti-political notion of liberal universality is clearly under threat and ultimately indefensible.

It needs to be reiterated that the very ability of the Beck program to directly confront traditional notions of the field lies in the opposition between the cable news opinion format and the press; this is what precisely puts the two at opposite poles of the field. We have already seen how Fox positions itself in the broadcast market as against the establishment, however, the Beck program was clearly a niche market even for Fox viewers as it aimed for those

127 The range of Tea Party discourse extends well beyond Beck’s program, while the NYT’s position in the field ensures that it is central to American liberal political circles.
super fans who consumed Fox within the logic of a political movement. Even within Fox’s hybridization of cable news, as it brought right-wing talk radio to television, Beck represented something entirely different. While the journalistic claim to function as the witness/ambassador of the people is derived from the “objective” news-making process, Beck represents the height of the spurious intimacy and extension of lifeworld into politics that defines mediatization. Perhaps the most radical break from convention is the twenty-minute monologue in which Beck showcases a combination of his convictions, personal frailties and direct emotional pleas, obliterating the rational lens and elevating the personal as political truth. While it may seem absurd to juxtapose Beck and the NYT as even inhabiting the same field there is a crucial interplay with liberal universalist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth, remade by Beck and Fox into what I have termed a populist exceptionalism, that threatens to dramatically close access to the universal.

*Tea Party Nation*

In order to analyze the paradox and contradiction of Fox’s proximity to the social even as it destabilizes the values of the media field, aligning them closer to economic capital, I will draw on an analysis of the *Tea Party Nation* (TPN) social media website. As a subset of my analysis of Fox and Beck I hope to establish where the commodification of the social and political life succeeds or fails and TPN’s symmetry or dissonance with Beck’s crafting of a populist exceptionalism. TPN is arguably the most organic Tea Party group as it has not been funded by the Koch Brothers and is not run by Republican lobbyists as in the case of the Tea Party Express and the Tea Party Patriots. TPN functions as a political group exclusively in the online realm, offering members the ability to form their communities and splinter cells around issues, regional locales or even conservative media fan groups such as the “Glenn Beck – Support Free Speech in America” group. Members may post events, publish discussions and comments, post original videos and photos. The site provides information about how to contact state and federal legislators and offers a study group on the constitution. To access the site I signed up as a member of Tea Party Nation using my real name and personal e-mail address. My membership was subject to the approval of site
administrators. Upon receiving membership I “friended” Tea Party Nation founder Judson Phillips in order to gain access to his archive of posts. The friend request stated that I wished to be able to access the archive of his posts.

In order to effect an analysis of this social media site that is not lost in the sheer voluminousness of this space I have selected the blog posts of the site’s founder Judson Phillips. Phillips himself is a media entrepreneur who appears on Fox and other cable news channels, is regularly quoted in the press as a “go-to” voice of the Tea Party and is able to monetize his site’s page views. In 2010, Phillips rose to prominence as TPN organized the “Inaugural Tea Party National Convention” in Nashville, in February. The event was a significant moment for the movement both for the visibility and credibility it brought as the Tea Party became “organized” in the conventional political sense. This conference, and the fact that it was organized by a social network, cemented a discourse of TPN as analogous with Obama’s 2008 netroots driven campaign. What is clear, rhetorical flourishes of democracy and the grass-roots aside, is that TPN represents the new mediatized character of politics, which is a mixing of political machinery, individual opportunism, media entrepreneurialism and new social media.

My selection of texts will come from Phillips’ TPN page; he has authored more than 5,000 posts. In order to focus on the question of TPN’s relationship to Fox I will select from the over 200 posts that are returned with the search terms “Fox News” and “Glenn Beck”. One challenge posed by this cross-media analysis between the logics of Beck and TPN is that, as a zone of pure politicization TPN is not bound to the conventions and self-referentiality of the news cycle. Thus blog posts are often incongruent with the topics of mainstream media discussion, even Fox News and Beck. Therefore I will not attempt to match broad narratives or discourses within a particular timeline. Rather I will concern myself with the more limited objective of the

129 The event also brought a level of critical scrutiny to Sarah Palin as a movement leader as it was revealed that her keynote address earned her a speaking fee of $100,000.
relationship between Fox and a mediatized social and political movement such as TPN. My intention in trawling through posts and comment threads is not to find the most outrageous Hitler comparisons and wild conspiracy theories, as these are almost too plentiful, but rather to assess how TPN users construct a political frontier through affect investment in the mediatized social space and how they see themselves in relation to Fox.

The Young Turks
I will also attempt in my media analysis to consider the opening provided by the destabilization of the media field for left or liberal counter-movements against populist commercialism. This is not meant as a straight comparative analysis as there does not exist a comparable relationship between prominent liberal media, small-scale independent media and a social movement such as Occupy, as exists on the right. Rather this should be seen as attempting to identify new spaces within the field that might defend, recreate or politicize liberal universalist values. My own nominal selection for such a fissure is the TYT Network, known most prominently for their show The Young Turks. The selection of TYT over alternative media such as Democracy Now!, traditional leftist publications such as The Nation, online advocacy groups like Move On or the liberal internet newspaper Huffington Post, is premised upon the network’s independence, uniquely mediatized identity and presence across the field in different capacities. The network consists of various online news and entertainment programs, a YouTube channel that boasts over a billion views and a news commentary show on Al Gore’s cable news network Current TV. The network’s founder and principle host Cenk Uygur, a media entrepreneur, has presented on MSNBC, contributes to Huffington Post and has used the network to spearhead a political action committee, Wolf Pack, aimed at campaign finance reform. An avowedly left-wing network with a pay subscriber following labeled the ‘TYT Army’\(^\text{130}\), the flagship program plays on

\(^{130}\) The network offers different tiers of membership and levels of access. A basic subscription costs $10 a month while solidarity prices over $25 earn the user a title from Lieutenant all the way to General at $1000 a month. Members of the TYT army are often consulted for their opinions on the direction of the show and are routinely
Uygur’s Turkish extraction and the revolutionary iconography of the Young Turks. The website offers a dictionary definition of a Young Turk as a “Young progressive or insurgent member of an institution, movement or political party...who rebels against authority or societal expectations” (2012). Despite Uygur himself having worked for traditional liberal media, the network positions itself in contradistinction to mainstream media, both liberal and conservative. The TYT Network represents both a political opening in the field for a more robust liberalism and perfectly embodies new modes of audience commodification and political mobilization.

The TYT network represents the new social logics of media production and consumption, while retaining and politicizing certain liberal ideals of the journalistic field. What is critical here are notions of truth and objectivity that “shouted out” on the show. Uygur has sited the TYT army as key to his ratings success on MSNBC as the army mobilized in support.

Uygur’s public airing of his contract negotiations with MSNBC was a critical moment of exposure and legitimacy for the network. Uygur had been working for MSNBC provisionally hosting the 6pm hour for several months while still running the Young Turks. A ratings success, Uygur was dropped in favor of Al Sharpton but was still offered a contract that doubled his pay to host a less prominent weekend show. Frustrated by the decision, Uygur said he subsequently came to understand the rationale of the corporate media giant in a discussion he had with president of MSNBC Phil Griffin. Uygur revealed on the Young Turks and other media outlets that Griffin had told him: “Hey listen Cenk, outsiders are cool but we’re not outsiders we’re insiders, we’re the establishment, you got to tone it down. People in Washington tell me that they are a little concerned about your tone” (Mirkinson 2011). In a Young Turks monologue Uygur explains that he walked away from the money because:

I didn’t want to work at a place that didn’t want to challenge power...The point of this show is truth-telling that’s what we’re supposed to do and we’re supposed to challenge the government, that’s the role of the media... and that’s what we will be doing on the Young Turks more than ever (ibid).
are not premised on one indivisible truth, or a post-modern relativism, but rather a notion of the truth that is political. This notion is political in that it marks those subject positions that are beyond the truth, (i.e. corporate media, corrupt politicians), however, this exclusion is reversible and there exists no fixed or culturally determined people that function as a fetishized ideal.

In considering how TYT politicizes liberal ideals and creates the possibility for new notions of publicness and universality, I will focus on the network’s high water mark, its coverage of the OWS movement. In the second week of October in 2011, TYT broadcast its “politics hour” live from Zucotti Park in New York City, the epicenter of the Occupy movement. As earlier discussed, OWS represents a critical moment in the Third Way/Populist frontier and may well be considered a rupture or a new antagonistic frontier to the extent that it exceeds the Third Way’s liberal civil society politics. What is noteworthy about the TYT broadcasts is the relationship between occupied/politicized public space and the symbolic space of the media. As I look at the broadcasts from OWS, I hope to establish what traces we may discern of a new political notion of liberalism, universality and the media field. While these questions may well exceed the scope of my thesis I hope to be able to identify the new mediatized social spaces and logics that might offer a path toward a new hegemonic project that breaks from the liberal populist deadlock.

Conclusion
The following media analysis will begin with my longitudinal examination of the NYT coverage of the Tea Party from early 2009 to the end of 2011 in order to establish the nature of the liberal grand narrative that explains this populist movement. This method is media-specific as the journalistic treatment of the Tea Party is conditioned by the concern for establishing an unimpeachable historic record. It is this very journalistic habitus that allows us to identify the manner in which the NYT defines and defends the field and how it deals with the question of the political. In the humanist/pathology dichotomy that emerges from the coverage, the NYT is caught between lending the movement the symbolic power of the media field, as the place of democracy and popular
legitimacy, and an inability to explain the Tea Party, which reinforces a populist victimization and blinds liberalism to its own crisis. In my selection of the high water marks of the Glenn Beck Program on *Fox News* there is a clear political articulation of a movement logic that corresponds to the network’s economic interests. What is crucially at stake is not merely the damage done to the liberal values of the field, through a populist assault, but the extent to which there emerges a populist exceptionalism aimed at usurping and closing the liberal universality of the field for a privileged people. The limits of this populist commercialism, which attempts to monopolize the free labour of political subjects, can be seen not merely in the tension between Beck and *Fox* but in the social media site *TPN*. *TPN* represents a pure populist logic of antagonism in the construction of the political frontier against an outside, in which there is a fetishistic investment in and over-determination, of Obama. However, as with the indeterminacy of the political, a logic of antagonism pervades and *TPN* exceeds even the bounds of the politics of *Fox* and Beck. Lastly, with the destabilization of the liberal field of journalism, born of mediatization and the increasing social and political character of audience consumption and commodification, I turn to the prospects for new politicized notions of liberalism within the field. *TYT*, in bridging the social symbolic space of the media with the real occupation of public and political space in the *OWS* movement, seeks to remake the field’s key notions of truth, democracy and universality. What I hope to establish in this analysis of a cross-section of the field is the extent to which the field has become disrupted by the return of the political. To what extent are the autonomous values being remade along increasing commercial lines? What are the tensions and contradictions of a populist commercialism and exceptionalism? In what manner does the liberal journalistic field emerge from the Tea Party/*Fox* challenge? Is the field completely open for redefinition and how might new social media, populist or otherwise, reconstruct liberal universality for better or worse?
Chapter Six – The New York Times and the Liberal Narrative

Introduction
What my analysis of the NYT coverage of the Tea Party movement has found, from its early stages to its electoral and legislative impact, is a master narrative that embodies the tensions and contradictions involved in sustaining the liberal ideals of the field in the face of the return of the political. The journalistic tools of the field, used to bring a liberal unified public into being, are either incapable of properly explaining the Tea Party’s antagonistic and fetishistic mode of politics or, at their worst, lend credibility to the Tea Party as the embodiment of an authentic movement in the liberal-democratic public sphere. With the emergence of the Tea Party meme in February and March of 2009 and the unruly spectacle of town hall protests in the congressional recess, the bulk of NYT coverage assumed a reactive, event-reporting character. In the discursive stage that I have termed as the initial reaction, the Tea Party is encountered as novel and eccentric but ultimately is dismissed in Lippmannian fashion as the dangerous return of an irrational public. In the inter and intra-field struggle the NYT lays blame for this return of irrationality at the feet of an irresponsible cable news media, political demagogues and special interests.

From this initial reaction to highly visible public events, the Tea Party movement or story was deemed to “have legs”, necessitating a period of intensive profiling and reporting aimed at making sense of the movement. Its seizing of the Republican Party machinery gave the movement an institutional credibility and signaled that the Tea Party would play a decisive role in political primaries and the 2010 mid-term elections. Possessed by the journalistic questions of: “How do Tea Partiers feel about the President?”, “Where does their political anger come from?”, the movement and adherents are extensively featured and profiled. What predominates in the straight or feature reporting of the movement is the liberal humanist lens, derived from the witness/ambassador notion of the journalist, who understands the pursuit
of truth as originating from the source, in this case the people of the Tea Party. This humanism ascribes a fundamental validity and authenticity to the often contradictory and fallacious assumptions of the Tea Party and thus we are no closer to understanding where their political anger comes from. This inadequacy of the field is inscribed in the work of the lead Tea Party reporter for the Times, Kate Zernike, who characterizes the movement as the embodiment of liberal-democratic people power. Matt Bai, a self-described elite liberal journalist, also unwittingly reinforces the very mythology of the movement as being comprised of Randian supermen. Throughout the entirety of the texts examined, productivist notions of capitalism and the iconography of the yeoman are unexamined. And while Bai’s profile unconsciously reinforces the Tea Party’s productivist fetishist of capitalism, prominent conservative Times columnist David Brooks engages in a full-throated glorification of the virtuous yeoman class. In this sense, the answer to the nature of Tea Party anger, militancy and cultural anxiety is embedded in the reporting but left unidentified.

What develops parallel to the humanist interrogation of the movement is the pathology frame. I have identified two subsets within this frame as race and the paranoid style. The pathology frame is generally format-specific and features more prominently in opinion columns around key inflection points such as the passage of healthcare in March 2010, Glenn Beck’s 8/28 rally and the shooting of Congresswomen Gabriele Giffords in January 2011. The Tea Party, its politics and militancy, are treated as a political pathology brought on by the external shock of economic crisis or the perceived loss of cultural hegemony. The most expedient explanation offered in the Times for the irrational outbursts of the Tea Party and their calls for “taking back America” from the “radical” presidency of Barack Obama is racial animus and inter-generational anxieties. This is a self-affirming liberal narrative as it both overstates the import of Obama’s identity politics in defining his presidency and casts the Tea Party as remnants of history. The Tea Party are in fact the inverse of post-racial America, not simply in terms of resisting multicultural progress but in embodying a neo-liberal racism that substitutes explicit reference to race with phantasmic images of welfare recipients and social
democratic “tyranny”. It is in this way that we can best understand the twin shocks of cultural change and capitalist crisis in producing the overdetermined outsider of Obama, who embodies not just multiculturalism but the transcendence of the Tea Party’s fetishized notion of capitalism. As we saw in Chapters Two & Three this fetish of the Republic of Property (Hardt & Negri 2009) pertains to the virtuous man of property or yeoman who is constituted in the American frontier mythology of private property and capitalism.

The question of economic crisis is dealt with by progressive columnist Frank Rich, who embodies the historical concerns of Keynesianism for the political effects of recessions in spurring extremism. Rich is cognizant of the ideological indeterminacy of antagonism and the political that opened up with Obama’s failure to ameliorate economic insecurity. As a result of Obama’s foundering leadership, a ‘faux populism’ (Rich 2010a) manipulated by big money and special interests, is left to flourish. The exposure in October 2010 of the Koch brothers’ role in funding Tea Party groups, think tanks and lobbying firms fits this schema perfectly as Koch money represents the manipulation of anxiety for the self-interest of oil billionaires. The political is thus understood as derived from irresponsible politicians, media and nefarious special interests, which corrupt a liberal democratic polity. The Times in this sense distinguishes itself from Fox News and its parasitical effect on a liberal-democratic polity.

While the backing of the Tea Party by the Koch brothers and Rupert Murdoch’s empire goes some way in explaining the effectiveness of its organizational efforts and an over-amplification in the media, the characterization of the political as the manipulation of base impulses by self-interested billionaires does not account for the efficacy of the fetish and why the Tea Party faithful really believe132. Following the electoral success of the

132 In Chapter Three I looked at the nature of the investment in the fetish which is central to populist ontology. This is not a temporary investment in objet petit a which might be displaced as the hegemonic chains of equivalence dissolve or are stretched too far, as Laclau would suggest. Rather any threat to the sanctity of the
Tea Party and Republicans the initial curiosity in media coverage shifted into an expectation of political normalization. The Giffords shooting saw the forceful re-iteration of the media field’s concern for civility, toleration and restraint in politics, thus those elements of Tea Party discourse that exceeded normative liberal bounds were increasingly deemed by the Times as beyond the pale\(^\text{133}\). Similarly the Republican/Tea Party congress defied any notion of the loyal opposition in pursuing a political brinksmanship that contributed to the reduction of the American government’s credit rating and nearly caused a government shutdown. At this point the Tea Party is characterized, in the liberal master narrative of the Times, as a genuine threat to liberal-democracy, responsible for the dysfunction of government and a political climate that is both uncivil and charged with the threat of violence. However it is precisely at this moment, when the Tea Party is at its most powerful, riding roughshod over the rest of the country, its own party leaders and even important backers\(^\text{134}\), that the Times is at a loss to explain the phenomenon. The denunciations of the Tea Party in the Times reach a crescendo of liberal derision representing the NYT’s attempts to defend the field’s notion of liberal democracy from irresponsible politicians and media such as Fox. However as the tone of coverage becomes more snarky the defense of the field, rather than becoming political, functions as a form of disavowal protecting the field from

fetish is likely to be met with entrenchment and disavowal of contradiction. It is in this way that the Tea Party fetishist is not a victim of false consciousness, duped by Koch/Murdoch propaganda, but is fully invested in the fetish as the structuring entity of their being, even if the politics of this investment is against their own economic self-interest.

\(^{133}\) While this part of my analysis will focus on the Times’ liberal voices (Maureen Dowd, Matt Bai) the paper’s stable of conservatives (David Brooks, David Frum) were equally bemused by the Tea Party.

\(^{134}\) The vehemently anti-Obama business lobbying group the US Chamber of Commerce spent over 30 million in 2010 elections supporting Republicans, making it the biggest spender independent of either political party (Center For Responsive Politics 2012). Fearing the looming crisis the Chamber issued a letter urging Republican leaders to raise the debt ceiling as a failure to do so ‘would create uncertainty and fear, and threaten the credit rating of the United States’ (Josten 2011).
the fact that the political pathology of the Tea Party represents an internal symptom of American liberal democracy.

To return to the broader concerns of this thesis, the master liberal narrative of the Tea Party, established by the Times, has critical implications for the media field and more broadly the liberal/populist political frontier. My analysis demonstrates that the Times was unable to both properly identify the political or defend itself and the media field from the populist challenge. This would necessitate a political notion of liberalism that would forcefully challenge the anti-liberal basis of Tea Party populism and articulate its own antagonistic frontier. In the absence of this political defense of liberal-democratic notions of the field the Times is left either normalizing Tea Party populism as the embodiment of liberal-democratic people power or clinging fetishistically to a liberal cultural superiority over the distasteful Tea Party. The Times’ inability to properly identify the nature of the political and to defend itself from the populist challenge is symptomatic of the broader crisis of the liberal-democratic consensus. Within the mediatized field of power the Times is not simply reflecting the struggles in the political field or the clamor of the social space, it is the place where the battle for the terms of liberal democracy in the broader field of power is contested.

Lastly, before advancing to my analysis, it is necessary to elucidate what is implied in my use of the term “frame”. What is critical here is the manner in which a discursive framework may ‘define problems’ (Entman 1993: 52) and elicit a circumscribed range of solutions to an issue or problem. The critical omission in the various discursive stages and narrative frameworks the Tea Party movement passes through is the question of antagonism and the political. In the initial reaction frame, the issue of the Tea Party is defined as a problem remediable through the liberal-technocratic administration of the public sphere. Subsequent to this the implications of the humanist frame holds that the sincerity shared on all sides ensures there is no problem that cannot be solved in the public sphere and through normative political processes. The pathology frame takes seriously the Tea Party as a problem of the liberal-democratic polity, however reduces the populists to pseudo-actors
that will be overcome with a return to economic prosperity or the eventual demographic shifts of the country. Having failed to frame or pose the question of the Tea Party in political terms we are left simply with the deeply unsatisfactory frame of the Tea Party as beyond the pale in which the answers to this problem are simply unknowable. What is critically at stake in the framing of the liberal master narrative of the Tea Party, by the Times, is this deadlock in which the problem of illiberalism defies the terms of liberal-democracy.

Initial Reaction
The emergence of the Tea Party as a nodal signifier of affective investment just a few weeks into the Obama administration, defying the normal political cycle of a hundred-day “honeymoon”, proved a puzzling development to a media and liberal class that had largely declared the 2008 election the “death knell” of Republican politics. Initial coverage of the Tea Party is limited to passing comments on the various Times blogs135 and a small story in the business section on Rick Santelli’s outburst. With the Tea Party national day of action on tax day April 15th the emergence of the movement was observed in the pages of the Times. The protests were described as comprised of eccentrics and cranks that have been riled up by an irresponsible media and Republican lobbyists. The opening line of Liz Robbins coverage of nationwide protests reads: ‘Some people wore their tea bags hanging from umbrellas or eyeglasses’ (2009). Later she would quote a protestor who was described as ‘holding an umbrella with an American flag pattern even though the sun was shining’ (ibid). From the outset the intra-field tension between the NYT and broadcast media is pronounced. The eccentricity of the movement and its ‘inchoate and unnamable’ (Carr 2009) rage is explicated as derived from the ‘clamour of cable news and fuelled by the financial and political support of current and former Republican leaders’ (Robbins).

135 Paul Krugman (2009b) on his blog ‘Conscience of a Liberal’ offers a succinct post entitled ‘Armey of Darkness’, which reads in full: ‘Aha. So the “tea parties” are to a large extent being run by Freedom Works, which is basically Dick Armey with a lot of Koch-Scaife-Bradley-Olin support. Same old, same old’.
David Carr, whose ‘Media Equation’ column serves as a topography of the media field, identified the Tea Party as a mediatized phenomenon that threatens the values of the field. Carr in an entry entitled ‘Cable Wars are Killing Objectivity’ (2009) reiterates the tired tropes of the liberal field. The Tea Party is derided as reactionary as ‘the movement – if that’s what it is – was spawned by a rant’. Carr offers the explanation that the Tea Party is merely driven by the ‘hysteria’ of cable news and the quest to ‘goose ratings’ as ‘the Tax Day Tea Party was all but conceived, executed and deconstructed in the hothouse of cable news wars’. Carr’s piece serves as a lament of the fact that ‘we seem to be returning to the days of the party press’ and with this objectivity and a journalistic habitus that is above the fray is lost. While Carr is correct that the Tea Party does not look like a movement in the conventional sense, and that Fox went to great efforts to promote it, he is at pains to castigate the whole spectrum of cable news, creating a false equivalence in order to restore the dignity of the field as defined by the broadsheet. Thus he explains that Susan Roesgen of CNN ‘could not have been more contemptuous of the people she was interviewing, shaking her finger at them and shouting them down’, while Rachel Maddow of MSNBC ‘frantically belittled the rhetoric and motives of those involved in Tea Party events’. In this denunciation of cable news journalism Carr foreshadows the liberal humanism that is to define the much of the Times’ feature reporting. Lost in Fox’s exploitation and MSNBC’s dismissal of these people is the question of “what do they really believe?”. Carr notes that ‘these are scary times for all working people...The [debt] burden being placed on the American economy and future generations is a significant issue’. The problem in this humanist approach, as will be discussed further along, is the assumption of a fundamental validity and objectivity to deeply held personal convictions. What occurs here and in numerous other instances is the naturalization of a deficit populism that completely inverts the tradition of working class and popular struggles. One might assume that this inversion is the very question worth specific consideration and that the Times would pose this question out of self-interest for its position in the field; however, it escapes the corpus of the Times’ Tea Party coverage.
Following this small window of protest coverage, the Tea Party does not reappear in the pages of the *Times* until August of 2009 with the summer’s congressional recess, which saw rancorous town hall meetings and protests against healthcare reform. The treatment of protestors has changed from novel curiosity to the threat that unhinged antagonism (ie the political) poses upon democratic processes and the ability of lawmakers to do their jobs. Coverage of the protests emphasized some of the more hostile and radical rhetoric including the invocation of Nazism, the shouting down of congress members and the hanging of their effigies. This aspect of the political and its defiance of civility and rationality is portrayed in an extensive front page straight report of a key town hall meeting in Democratic senator Arlen Specter’s Pennsylvania district. In attempting to explain the rash of healthcare protests the journalists juxtapose the militant mobilization of Tea Partiers and Specter’s attempts to hold an open debate and defuse tensions. The article begins in tones of realism: ‘They got up before dawn in large numbers with angry signs and American flag T-shirts, and many were seething with frustration’ (Urbina & Seeyle 2009). This is evidenced by the fact that 1,000 people, four times the capacity of that particular town hall, showed up largely to voice their dissent. The article references the anguished statement of Katy Abram to Specter that “This is about the dismantling of our country...We don’t want this country to turn into Russia”. Faced with this political intensity and eager to avoid the unedifying spectacle of other town hall events Specter is portrayed as striking a respectful and approachable tone. He is described as being ‘careful to let people speak their piece’ while standing ‘face to face with his questioners, a move, he said later in an interview, that he had hoped might make it harder for people to scream at him’. The article continues however that ‘for all his efforts, tempers boiled over 15 minutes into the meeting. Standing two feet from the senator, Craig Anthony Miller, 59, shouted, “You are trampling on our Constitution!”’. Confronted by security Miller is described as ‘shaking’ but carries on “One day,” he said to loud applause, “God is going to stand before you, and he’s going to judge you!”. What this article conveys is a sense in which the grievances of Tea Partiers and town hall protestors is derived from an antagonism constituted by base human emotions and irrationality that are not easily overcome. In spite of Specter’s
humanist appeals he is mercilessly attacked, not simply as a rival but as an enemy of God and country. This elision speaks precisely to the overdetermined spectral presence of the outsider that threatens the fetish. This article portrays a remarkable scene of Tea Party anguish however wild statements about God and country are not treated in the *Times* as anything other than pathological delusion.

This straight reporting is insightful in identifying the nature of the political, but, in terms of how the *NYT* explains the political and defends notions of liberal-democracy, the supplementary feature and opinion articles are instructive. What is prevalent is a Lippmannian conceit that is expressly antipublic and concerned with the radical indeterminacy of crowds and publics as a technocratic issue. In a weekend magazine feature Matt Bai states that the town hall protests, in spite of their uncivil tone, have ‘yielded a few important insights’ (2009) into what stirs such irrational passions. Bai writes that ‘we now have a visual sense of the kind of voter who is militantly opposed to Obama...white, male – and perhaps most significant - advanced in age’. Race and generational politics are at the heart of the Tea Party’s animus whether because of Obama’s race or the fact that ‘he seemed to embody with his fist bumps and his failure to cover his heart during the national anthem, the further decline from some Rockwellian cultural ideal’. In deriding this sentimentality, or what I have identified as a political fetishism, the Tea Party’s cultural malaise simply stands in the path of history. Bai’s derision here is emblematic of a social liberalism that relishes its perceived cultural superiority136, which functions to disavow the crisis in the American liberal-

136 It is significant that in spite of all the praise for Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, in academia, left-liberal political circles and even in the *Times*, where Stewart has been compared to luminaries Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite (Carter & Stetler 2010), liberal satire and derision should not be thought of as a defense of liberal-democratic notions of the field. What this format principally achieves is the indulgence of a liberal cultural superiority, through sophisticated humour, without defending liberalism on antagonistic grounds. While Stewart does not claim to have any serious role within the polity commensurate with journalism, his more “serious” interview segments belie a similar unantagonistic liberalism symptomatic of the field.
democratic polity. Similarly for Bai, the cherished ideal of the town hall meeting is antiquated as it has ‘reached the end of its usefulness in the internet age; if you’re looking for thoughtful dialogue, you might as well hold your next meeting on the stern of a Somali pirate ship’.

In less acerbic terms, academic James Fishkin pens an editorial to address the perceived shortcomings of the town hall forum and argue for new technologies of deliberative democracy. Fishkin begins with a characterization of the health-care meetings as ‘political sideshows’ (2009) driven by the misinformation of cable news and talk radio while fuelling a spiral of protest and counter-protest that leads the public into widespread dissensus. He continues that the town hall meeting is ineffective in gauging the actual public mood as it assumes that it can be ‘represented by the unscientifically self-selected who decide to show up’. Thus the town hall has become a means for ‘grass-roots campaigns to capture the public dialogue’. Fishkin offers a methodology of a deliberative town hall meeting, in which a scientifically valid microcosm of a congressional district is brought together, given balanced information on an issue, compelled to engage in critical discussion with their peers all in the hopes of reaching a rational consensus that can be presented to their lawmaker. This liberal notion of the political par excellence is premised upon a fallacious equality of opinion, so long as these opinions fall within the normative range of Rawls’ reasonable pluralism which accepts liberalism as the basis of reason. Thus the performative and public aspect of the political, its radical exclusivity and the capture of dialogue by a militant minority are seen as the ultimate danger that must rationally managed away by a liberal technocracy. Fishkin concludes that such deliberative methods have helped ‘overcome sharp divisions’ around the world, including between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland and in producing tolerance in Bulgaria towards the Roma. We are left with the impression that if such methods can alleviate centuries-old divisions in Europe then surely there are no irreconcilable

In his interviews with Tea Party figures such as Rand Paul, Marco Rubio and David Barton, Stewart is at pains to establish some notion of a shared terrain, as the basis for civility, while routinely finding his guests unremitting in their defense of a populist exceptionalism.
antagonisms in the US.

This initial reaction to the emergence of the Tea Party represents the liberal notion of the political and the field *par excellence*. In framing Tea Party protestors as cranks, irrational, old-fashioned and sentimentalists one has the impression that this antagonism and the political can be overcome or managed away through liberal technocratic means. The *Times* is thus holding to a normative notion of itself in the field as a place for cooler heads, as opposed to cable news, and for rational disputation. The problem here is the humanist assumption, foregrounded by David Carr, that a fetishist can be reasoned with or is willing to submit their convictions to a test of validity claims. The humanist treatment of the Tea Party, aimed at making sense of the movement, is incapable of comprehending the chasm between normative notions of liberal democracy and the populist closure of the ontological. The Tea Party’s claim of exclusive access to the universal, or quite simply to be the virtuous people of America is what should be the concern the liberal media field.

“Making Sense” of the Movement
Subsequent to these upsurges of political protest, the Tea Party showed signs of what might be conceived as a political normalization, that is its emergence in conventional party politics. The Tea Party proved itself a force in the Republican Party infrastructure, dominating the party’s primary season and delivering a remarkable upset as Republican Scott Brown won the by-election for Ted Kennedy’s senate seat. Thus, late in 2009 the *Times* classified the Tea Party as a “Times Topic” in order to examine the sustained critique of Obama, which symbolized more than just a passing fit. What defines the majority of straight and feature coverage of the Tea Party, leading into the 2010 election, is the frame I have termed *making sense of the movement*. This coverage attempts to give the backstory of the movement, what motivates followers, where this anger comes from and what the inside of the movement looks like. What predominates in this coverage is a journalistic humanism that posits an essential truth in the narratives of “everyday people” and the world they inhabit. Within a mediatized politics and in the absence of traditional
institutions through which one might understand social movements this method of liberal journalism assumes an increasingly populist character. While in the coming analysis of opinion pieces one finds differences in the treatment of the political and populism, it is in the straight or feature reporting, which defines the field’s autonomy, cultural capital and claims to objectively represent the public and social world, that the stakes are highest. It needs to be acknowledged that this period of straight and feature reporting overlaps with the *pathology* frame that is more prevalent in opinion pieces and editorials, although not exclusively. The humanist/pathology dichotomy is indicative of an essential limitation in the field as the political in both instances is understood as a personal response rather than being a deeply embedded social symptom of the American Republic of Property\(^{137}\).

The principal reporter on the Tea Party beat during this *making sense* period is Kate Zernike whose byline is associated with over 50 articles on the Tea Party during this time, while having since produced a smaller output of 20 articles between November 2010 to the present. Zernike’s dispatches range from standard event reporting of protests and conservative political conventions, profiles of prospective Republican candidates and conventional horserace political coverage. Within this large body of work there are key articles and features in which Zernike pulls together the range of collected information and journalistic tools to offer a more thorough and contextual argument as to the importance of the Tea Party in contemporary liberal-democratic America. As the lead reporter for the *Times* on this topic and

\(^{137}\) In Chapter Two I expounded upon the fundamental tension inscribed in the founding political frontier of the American Republic of Property. This tension resides between the liberal political forms necessary to ensure a bourgeois “equality of condition” and the republican spirit of civic virtue which animates this institutional order. Both have their origins in buttressing private property either institutionally or through the collective morality and virtue of the people. What the Tea Party exemplifies is a critical rupture between the two and the residual force of the original notion of the people as founded in property. Tea Party fetishists thus embody the broader social symptom of the Republic of Property and the fight to define the terms of capitalist morality.
having invested in the Tea Party to the extent of publishing a book on the subject, Zernike’s key in-depth reports represent those moments in which the *Times* defines its position in the field. One of these moments that defines a liberal-humanist, journalistic habitus in framing the political and the Tea Party is Zernike’s front page 1300-word Saturday feature entitled ‘Unlikely Activist Who Got to the Tea Party Early’ (2010c). This is a key article in Zernike’s corpus as she claims to have achieved a certain journalistic scoop and exclusive understanding of the origins of the movement. Zernike is not offering a new insight into the inner-workings of the movement or an analysis of the historical evolution of conservative populism; rather her achievement is to have identified the source of 2009’s first Tea Party, Keli Carender. What follows is an in-depth personal portrait of the activist, her human idiosyncrasies and her personal story of putting together a protest early in 2009 as the exemplification of the Tea Party’s liberal-democratic grass-roots. The article begins:

*Seattle* - Keli Carender has a pierced nose, performs improve on weekends and lives here in a neighborhood with more Mexican grocers than coffeehouses. You might mistake her for the kind of young person whose vote powered President Obama to the White House. You probably would not think of her as the Tea Party type.

The article proceeds as an authentic portrayal of democratic empowerment and, in a recurrent theme in much of the in-depth feature reporting, draws a parallel between Obama’s and the Tea Party’s grass-roots. Zernike writes of Carender’s ‘frustration’ with government spending and her realization that ‘I can do something different…I can find a new avenue to get my voice out’. In meticulously detailing the process of organizing the protest, such as arranging for speakers, permits and food, Zernike unleashes a flourish of eight consecutive sentences beginning with the pronoun ‘she’ (she called...she scanned...she sent...she put out, etc). The protest is given color in describing

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138 Promoting her book on National Public Radio Zernike claims that Carender ‘really is the germ of this movement’ (Greene 2010).
Carender’s unique talents for street theatre and the process of collating e-mail lists is compared to the Obama campaign effort. This portrait of authentic citizen power is said to offer ‘a lens into how the movement has grown, taking people who were not politically active...and turning them into a force that is rattling both parties’. This portrait of Carender is determined to go beyond the common reduction of Tea Partiers as angry older white Americans anxious about President Obama. And while this reduction does not tell us much about the novelty of the Tea Party, the characterization of the movement as simply the embodiment of liberal democratic people power is equally unsatisfactory. The equivalence of Obama’s aspirational and inclusive politics to the Tea Party’s radical notion of the political fails to explain the nature and origins of Tea Party anger and does a disservice to the field and liberal-democracy. Here the credibility and rhetorical tools of the field, that is the ability to objectively represent the public, is deployed to normalize a politics which is anti-liberal and does not see Democrats and the Obama administration as worthy adversaries but existential enemies.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze the entire body of Zernike’s work, this liberal humanist normalization of the Tea Party is the dominant theme of her reporting. Throughout her articles emerges a consistent narrative of the awakening and politicization of everyday people as they attempt to capture the Republican party infrastructure. Upon the publication of her book she described in an interview the authentically grass-roots nature of the movement: ‘I was struck that they [the Tea Party] figured out that the way you get involved in politics, the way you have an impact in American politics is to start at the bottom and work your way up’ (Zernike 2010h)\textsuperscript{139}. Zernike thus ascribes no specific significance to the uniquely antagonistic nature of Tea Party discourse in accounting for its prominence, and offers no value judgement of the radical rhetoric of militancy, sacrifice and revolution. Her reports are replete with personal vignettes of ‘stay at

\textsuperscript{139} It is no wonder that the fiercely conservative \textit{Wall Street Journal} opinion pages lavished praise on Zernike’s book: ‘The book itself is a pleasant surprise. Kate Zernike has produced a largely fair and measured account of the populist rebellion against Barack Obama’s aggressively liberal presidency’ (Taranto 2011).
home moms’ (2010a) such as Anastasia Przybyski who previously were disengaged from politics but have become Republican party precinct leaders. Or there is Diane Reimer who quit her job to become a Tea Party organizer: ‘Ms. Reimer often wells up talking about her work. “I’m respected,” she said, her voice breaking. “I don’t know why. I don’t know what is so special. But I’m willing to do it.”’ (2010e). Reporting from the Tea Party convention organized by Tea Party Nation Zernike remarks on the ordinariness of the movement: ‘it could have been an annual gathering of dentists or teachers’ (2010b).

Zernike’s humanizing portrait of the movement does not merely overlook the importance of corporate activism in building the infrastructure of the Reagan revolution and beyond, but extends a grassroots authenticity to the likes of Freedom Works and Americans for Prosperity who are merely described as ‘advocacy groups’ (2010d). Remarkably the Koch brothers enter into discussion as founders of Freedom Works, which is described in the language of the 2008 campaign, as behind the emergence of the Tea Party as a ‘community organizing force’ (2010g). In one profile of the group, leading into the 2010 elections, they are characterized as an eclectic mix of ‘hard-charging conservatives in their 20s and 30s’ who model their community on the Grateful Dead and require new employees to read Saul Alinsky’s Rules for Radicals (2010g). Freedom Works and the political right are even accorded a certain underdog status as it is noted that in the 2010 campaign that:

Other groups will spend more. On the left a coalition of unions will spend $88 million; on the right American for Prosperity will spend $45 million. But FreedomWorks’ pitch to activists is that the money is not really the point. It is about convincing friends, neighbors and strangers in congressional districts where 100 or 1,000 votes can make a difference (2010g).\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{140} A similar sentiment is portrayed in the profile of Carender as the piece ends with her quote: ‘there is no way we will out fundraise the liberals...the only weapon we have is energy and time’ (Zernike 2010c). Such an underdog discourse plainly seems ludicrous with the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision and Republican Mitt Romney out fund raising Barack Obama for the 2012 election.
The Tea Party of course does have a grassroots and loyal adherents who really believe in spite of their economic best interests, but this fact alone does not make it the embodiment of liberal-democratic people power as surely a neo-fascism also has an authentic grassroots.

At this point it is important to note the prominence of discourses of authenticity and the everyday in both validating political action and the *Times*’ coverage of the Tea Party as “objective”. As noted in Chapter One, discourses of authenticity drawn from the new spirit of capitalism, were critical to the success of Obama’s 2008 campaign. There is a clear attempt by the Tea Party to appropriate Obama’s 2008 campaign discourse as self-styled Tea Party leader and intellectual John O’Hara wrote ‘We’re all community organizers now’ (2010: 12). This hegemony of authenticity is crucially linked to mediatization, not simply in the emergence of the people as the media and political field’s guarantor of meaning, but in the centrality of the media field to biopolitical production. The performative and affective embodiment of authenticity is a crucial form of cultural capital in the media field that is essential in the mediatization and extension of the market into the social space. The *Times*’ emphasis here on authenticity in no way resembles the brand strategy of Fox and Beck, which solicits free labour. However it still speaks to the centrality of authenticity to the mediatized field of power and biopolitical production.

In extending an authenticity discourse to the Tea Party and the associated web of corporate backed think tanks and lobby groups effectively normalizes what is most novel in the Tea Party, namely the Ayn Rand inspired rebellion in a time of economic crisis. Throughout the *Times*’ coverage there is a total failure to ask the Thomas Frank question of “why do Tea Partiers hold sincere beliefs about the nature of capitalism that run counter to their own economic interests?” Zernike’s inability to pose this question and the contradictory treatment of class has the effect of normalizing the inversion of the traditions of popular struggle. In one article profiling the economic precarity of some Tea Party activists Zernike writes that ‘the Great Depression too, mobilized
many middle class people who had fallen on hard times’ (2010e). It is assumed that the Tea Party are those effected and mobilized by the recession sharing the lineage of the virtuous middle, which they do to the extent that this middle (yeoman) is the essential ideological construct of American capitalism. Following a NYT/CBS poll which found that the Tea Party were in fact slightly over-represented by the middle class Zernike is perplexed:

> It makes sense that people would take to the streets to protest government spending and enormous deficits during the Great Recession, when they are feeling economic pain most acutely. But the Tea Party supporters now taking to the streets aren’t the ones feeling the pain (2010f).

What is remarkable in this confusion over the language of the virtuous middle is the fundamental assumption that those affected by the recession should be mobilized in anger against government stimulus in favor of austerity. The effect is to normalize an austerity populism that inverts the tradition of American populist struggles during economic crises.

Zernike’s liberal humanism is the dominant treatment of the movement in this making sense period. However, it is chief political correspondent Matt Bai’s feature article ‘D.I.Y. Populism Left and Right’ (2010b) that brings this discourse to its apogee. Appearing on the front page of the Sunday Week In Review section just days before the 2010 election, the 2,300 word feature

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141 This statement is indicative of the liberal-humanist notion of the political and populism, as it relates to the Great Depression and the New Deal. There is no ability to conceptualize the mobilization of fascism in times of crisis as the Depression saw the Ku Klux Klan emerge as one of the largest movements in US history with over two million members in the 1920s and 30s (Kazin 1995: 104). In the liberal humanist teleology all populist social movements lead towards a strengthening of liberal-democracy.

142 On the key issue of economic self-interest and the Bush tax cut for those earning over $250,000 a year 13% of Tea Party supporters incomes exceed this threshold as compared to 12% for non Tea Party supporters (New York Times & CBS 2010).
deploys the humanist profile of an “authentic” Tea Party leader, David Kirkham, in order to declare a new epoch in American politics. This profile represents the NYT conferring upon the Tea Party the legitimacy of embodying a democratic awakening while the piece uncritically reinforces the very mythology and iconography of the Tea Party. However it should be stated that this legitimacy is timeline-specific as it assumed that the energies of the grassroots faithful are limited to the normative bounds of electoral politics. There is thus a complete inability to foresee the impact of the political and antagonistic nature of Tea Party discourse upon the polity and the functioning of government. Bai’s piece begins with a gesture of self-ridicule reaffirming a red state/blue state divide as he characterizes himself as an in-authentic liberal:

Generally speaking, Tea Party enthusiasts don’t think much of East Coast media types, and it was hard not to consider this fact as David Kirkham slammed his roadster into fifth gear, topping out at more than 100 miles per hour as we hurtled toward another curve...As Mr. Kirkham expertly maneuvered this car he had designed and built in his factory, I began to understand that there was a point to his having invited me along for the ride, and it wasn’t to give me a heart attack. The message he seemed to be sending was, We are not who you think we are. We are serious people with serious abilities [sic].

The article parallels Kirkham’s entrepreneurial spirit both as an industrialist and in becoming an influential Tea Party leader in Utah. Kirkham’s rugged individuality and ‘D.I.Y.’ spirit embody a ‘political awakening that says a lot about grass-roots activism in the new century’. And in an extension of the roadster metaphor Bai states that: ‘American politics in the years ahead will almost certainly continue to careen wildly from one sharp curve to another, steered not by politicians and their parties, but by the David Kirkhams just waiting to emerge’.

Bai’s invoking of a new political epoch is based upon his journalistic expertise
of having covered the emergence of liberal online activism during the Bush years, a process he claims is mirrored in the advent of the Tea Party. Kirkham’s conversion to activism ‘seemed oddly familiar’, ‘like seeing a movie for the second time’ as his story is said to parallel the everyday people who ‘just had to do something’. The article continues with Kirkham’s personal ‘journey’ to activism, which embodies the creative and empowering character of today’s new grassroots politics. The story begins with Kirkham’s surprise discovery in the mid-1990s of a Polish cold war era jet fighter in storage in Utah, which led him to contemplate manufacturing replica vintage cars in Poland. As Bai continues, ‘it wasn’t before long Mr. Kirkham, possessed of a gregarious soul and irrepressible confidence, was on his way across the ocean, armed with a Polish-English dictionary and pictures of the car he wanted to manufacture’. Kirkham subsequently bought a factory and employed skilled workers but experienced first-hand ‘the economic detritus of communism’ and the destruction of people’s lives. It was this episode that forever instilled in him the dangers of communism and led him to conclude of Obama that “he’s a socialist...there’s no question he’s a statist”.

In a feature article where the journalist’s voice is pronounced and even authoritative at times, with Bai declaring the new political epoch, there is no attempt to challenge the extraordinary notion that Obama is a socialist. Rather, based on Kirkham’s unique and “deeply authentic” story, this idea does not appear so far-fetched. What is remarkable in this article is the manner in which Bai reheats the end-of-history discourse that accompanied the neo-liberal raiding of the former eastern bloc and unconsciously constructs Kirkham as the quintessential embodiment of the productivist people of American capitalism that serves as the central fetish of the Tea Party. In Bai’s article capitalism, is explicitly portrayed as a moral order, able to rebuild the lives of Polish workers. The example is telling, however, of the Tea Party’s notion of globalization in which America is the Mecca of a virtuous capitalist order\(^\text{143}\). The particular product in question, high-end replica

\(^{143}\text{It will be clear once this thesis proceeds to an analysis of Glenn Beck that “Tea Party Capitalism” contains a significant strain of anti-globalist sentiment. The free-}
roadsters, is a commodity that embodies magical or fetishistic qualities, existing at the heart of Americana. Bai even writes that the Cobra roadster ‘is to car enthusiasts what pink unicorns are to little girls’. Finally, in addition to the moral and fetishistic aspects of capitalism, Bai claims that it is run by everyday people like David Kirkham. There is no attempt to consider whether this is what capitalism really looks like or ask what cultural permutations exist within the Tea Party’s articulation of capitalism. Not only is the populist inversion of Randian rebellion in the midst of capitalist crisis not examined, it is normalized, not by Fox News, but by the NYT deploying the liberal humanism that defines its cultural capital in the field. There is no ability to question why members of the middle and working class would mobilize against their own economic self-interest because the productivist fetish of capitalism is not merely overlooked but constructed by the NYT in this instance with tremendous rhetorical vigor.

At this point my critique of Times reporters Zernike and Bai may appear overly determined by individual professional failings as opposed to being reflective of the field and the broader political economy of the media. The aforementioned journalists are not to be critiqued for any personal prejudices but rather for embodying a journalistic habitus that employs the cultural armoury of the field, that is the ability to bring a liberal-democratic public into being, in order to lavish praise upon the Tea Party’s illiberal authenticity. This speaks to a deep crisis of the field to find the conceptual terms necessary to defend its liberal-democratic basis. In the absence of this defense, populism predominates across the field of power. Perhaps it may appear unreasonable to assume that journalists operating within a field that is weakly autonomous and characterized by its service to the broader field of power, might defend the field or be able to identify aspects of the Tea Party’s fetishized and culturalized notion of capitalism. However the NYT position within the market and the media field as the paper of record is based on embodying the market fetishized by the Tea Party is not the neo-liberal global free market that is universal. The Tea Party hold that free-market capitalism is an exclusively American preserve that was consecrated by the founding of the Republic and is embodied in the virtuous yeoman or productivist middle of the Tea Party.
pole of cultural capital in the field. With that comes a certain literary culture that should be able to ask questions of history; from the iconography of the yeoman, to the nature of popular mobilization during the Depression. Lastly the Tea Party may revere capitalism, but they are not the singular embodiment of power as such that would preclude these questions. It is in this way that a textual analysis allows us to discern the existential crisis of the field. This crisis is not simply determined by the field’s service to the market pole but by its own inability to find the terms necessary to deal with the populist challenge.

Pathology Frame
While Zernike’s liberal humanism is the principal, although not exclusive, straight news treatment of the Tea Party in the *NYT*, it has to be seen as one side of a humanist/pathology dichotomy. Much of the opinion pages that supplement the straight reporting of the Tea Party movement can be defined by a pathology discourse that explains the Tea Party and the political as epiphenomena of base human emotions such as racism or anxiety in the face of economic precarity. This discursive frame is prevalent in the pre-election or making sense period and is pronounced at key inflection points during this period and beyond. While this pathology frame prevails in much of the *Times*’ opinion writing, it should be stressed that opinion journalism occupies a different position in the field linked less to the authority of journalism as an autonomous practice but the broader cultural capital of openness and diversity of discourse in the field. While I do not wish to construct a strawman argument about the inability of the media field to reach an academic level of inquiry, one might nevertheless hope for an engagement with what is novel in the movement. And in spite of the fact that opinion writing occupies a space in the field that is encouraged to “push the envelope”, coverage of the Tea Party is stuck within this liberal dichotomy which fails to explain the political. The humanist frame celebrates the deeply authentic, if not contradictory, personal beliefs of the populists as embodying liberal-democracy, while the pathology treatment condemns Tea Party discourse as the acting of out of low-minded human impulses. Neither account is able to properly capture the foundational tension between liberal democracy, the American Republic of
Property and a productivist notion of the people.

One clear exception to the liberal humanism that predominates in straight reporting is David Barstow’s ‘Tea Party Lights Fuse For Rebellion on Right’ (2010). Barstow’s 2,000-word, front-page article pursues a similar journalistic method in going to the people of the Tea Party for their stories. However, what emerges is an ominous portrait of human anxiety and paranoia. The article profiles various Tea Party activists from the Northwest, which has the effect of over-emphasizing the importance of militia and white-separatist elements within the Tea Party chain of equivalence. The article begins with Pam Stout of Standpoint Idaho, who had been ‘happily retired and never been politically active’ but ‘worried about hyperinflation, social unrest or even martial law’, she joined the board of her local Tea Party. Barstow explains that the Tea Party movement ‘is about the profound private transformation of people like Mrs Stout, people who not long ago were not especially in politics, yet now say they are bracing for tyranny’. The article takes us inside various Tea Party and militia-themed meetings, providing the reader with the color of wild conspiracies, anti-government paranoia and insurrectionist fervor. In one instance, we are offered the bizarre case of Carolyn L. Whaley (76) who, Constitution in hand, explained ‘she was prepared to lay down her life to protect it from the likes of Mr. Obama. “I would not hesitate,” she said, perfectly calm’. Barstow’s article is a remarkable piece of reporting that captures the pure fetishized antagonism that is at the centre of Tea Party ontology but is only able to offer race as explanation for why they hate the President.

The Tea Party and Race
Barstow’s extensive portrait of Tea Party anguish reinforces the dominant explanation of this political pathology as race. The article makes reference to a Department of Homeland Security report which warned of ‘right-wing radicalization’ and features a civil rights activist who sees in the Tea Party ‘painfully familiar cultural and rhetorical overtones’. And while the Tea Party chain of equivalence does encompass some of the traditional overt aspects of racial prejudice, that is the demonization and intolerance of racial minorities,
the Tea Party largely embody a neo-liberal racism that does not easily fit the explanation; “they hate the president because he is African-American”. Barstow’s report describes some of these contradictory attitudes towards race and civil rights but is at a loss to explain them. One of the leaders profiled is former Sheriff Richard Mack, who has become a fixture of the Tea Party circuit. He is depicted in one meeting: ‘Gazing out at his overwhelmingly white audience, Mr. Mack felt the need to say, “This meeting is not racist”’. Mack goes on to describe his vision of an ‘army of sheriffs’ enforcing the constitution in all walks of life offering the following fantasy:

The setting was Montgomery, Ala., on the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat for a white passenger. Imagine the local sheriff, he said, rather than arresting Ms. Parks, escorting her home, stopping to buy her a meal at an all-white diner.

What this demonstrates is the Tea Party’s complicated relationship to the civil rights legacy and the struggle for racial equality. Proceeding from what has been described by Cornel West as the ‘Santa Clausification’ (Shropshire 2010) of Martin Luther King Jr, the civil rights movement has been constructed by the right as merely the bourgeois demand for equality of condition before the law. Before Glenn Beck’s self-serving attempt to claim the mantle of King, the civil rights movement featured prominently in the Tea Party imagination as a way of denying the fundamental inequity of the nation’s founding as the universality of private property law overcomes any imperfection. The radical exclusion that is deeply embedded in Tea Party discourse is a neo-liberal racism. Neo-liberal can be described as a class racism that imbricates welfare recipients, the urban poor, so-called illegal immigrants and the “liberal elites” who waste tax dollars on these communities. Thus the spectral outsider that is viciously dehumanized by the Tea Party cannot simply be demarcated by traditional cultural markers of race but by this imagined network of parasites leeching the productive class in the attempts to destroy

144 This of course disavows the importance of government in passing the Civil Rights Act 1964, which enforced the equal treatment of citizens in public and private domains.
The most prominent voice in the racism critique of the Tea Party is Charles M. Blow who penned five editorials on the race question between March-November 2010. With the passage of healthcare in March, which saw protests on the capital and claims of racial and homophobic taunts of Democratic congress members, Blow is unsparing in his analysis of Tea Party racism. In a well-worn argument Blow deconstructs the Tea Party lament “We want our country back!” to depict the Tea Party as simply the last gasp of the Southern Strategy in the face of an irreversible multiculturalism. Blow writes:

Even the optics [of healthcare reform] must be irritating. A woman (Nancy Pelosi) pushed the health care bill through the House. The bill’s most visible and vocal proponents included a gay man (Barney Frank) and a Jew (Anthony Weiner). And the black man in the White House signed the bill into law. It’s enough to make a good old boy go crazy (2010a).

Blow suggests that the remnants of Southern white intolerance will soon pass as a necessity of changing demographics: ‘The Tea Party, my friends, is not the future. You may want “your country back,” but you can’t have it. That sound you hear is the relentless, irrepressible march of change’. And while the Tea Party chain does encompass the traditional “states; rights” discourse and aspects of the embattled Southern identity, its racism is far more nuanced and pernicious.

Tea Party racism is not the visceral racism of such alleged outbursts and epithets or the presence of Obama Witch-doctor signs at Tea Party rallies. Rather it is a racism that denies the existence of racism by virtue of an equality of condition before the law and portrays the accusers of racism as the enemy that would destroy the universality of private property law. The Tea Party wildly exploits a liberal inability to formulate equality, racial or otherwise, that goes beyond formalism, inclusion or political correctness. The other key moment in the race critique is of course Glenn Beck’s 8/28
“Restoring Honor” rally which coincided with the anniversary of King’s 1963 March on Washington. Blow and fellow columnist Bob Herbert are merciless in their assessment of Beck as ‘an ignorant, divisive and pathetic figure’, who ‘makes you want to take a shower’ (Herbert 2010) and whose ‘self-aggrandizing threatens to defile’ (Blow 2010b) the legacy of the civil rights movement. The particular violence that Beck and the Tea Party do to the legacy of King, is not simply in instilling a culture of conservative victimization that is entirely incommensurate with the civil rights movement, it is in limiting the definition of the civil rights struggle to anti-government activism and consumer boycotts that force the market (as the universal) to correct. Blow & Herbert can only comprehend Beck as an opportunist, which he is, but cannot perceive in liberalism, as constitutionally enshrined, a fundamental limitation or political demarcation of rights and freedom belonging to a certain people. Thus the Tea Party are not simply those anxious over the loss of cultural hegemony and oppose the inevitable, but rather are an incarnation of the founding ideology of the Republic of Property. My intention is not to belittle the importance of race in Tea Party ontology, however Blow’s multiculturalist end of history, which represents a certain liberal-identity politics triumphalism that accompanied Obama’s election, does not get us any closer to understanding the political as an antagonism sustained across the generations.

Paranoid Style
What frames the Times’ pathology treatment of the Tea Party, beyond critiques of racism, is Richard Hofstader’s seminal essay ‘The Paranoid Style in American Politics’ (1965). Hofstader wrote that the various incarnations of the Paranoid Style (anti-Catholicism, anti-Masonry, anti-communism) are immune to political compromise and are born of anxieties that cannot be assuaged in the course of normal political processes. Thus in addition to a sense of cultural loss and economic precarity, the Tea Partiers can be seen as a reaction to the enfeebled state of the conservative politics after Obama’s election. Frank Rich, the strongest “progressive” voice among the cast of opinion writers, in referencing Hofstader wrote of the Tea Party as a ‘paranoid, wacky cult’ of ‘Jacobins’ and ‘Stalinists’ (2009) that would ultimately prove
the undoing of the Republican Party. This pathology frame vacillates between a mocking of the paranoid and grave concern for the potential of violence. Rich cites Barstow’s report on the Tea Party to raise the specter of 1990s-style anti-government violence as Tea Party ‘ideology plays to the lock and loaded nutcases’ (2010b). The multifarious nature of the Tea Party enemy is understood as a ‘lash[ing] out at any convenient scapegoat’ in the absence of ‘any solid economic recovery’ (Rich 2010c). The passage of healthcare reform and the threats to members of congress was a critical inflection point for the question of the impact of violent rhetoric on the polity. One editorial savaged a Tea Party protest on the capital for ‘fouling the crisp spring air with shouts of violence and loathing’ (Downes 2010). The protest is described as ‘revolting’ and ‘hateful’ with the crowd’s chanting of “Kill the Bill”...throb[ing] in the ears like an infection’. Columnist Maureen Dowd, whose writing tends to strike more literary tones and who functions as the principle purveyor of liberal snark at the Times, identifies the Tea Party as a ‘bloodletting of irrationality’ (2010). The political as a destructive and pathological phenomenon is described as an ‘untamed beast rampaging through American politics...[which] has loosed a kind of ugliness and wildness in the land’ (ibid 2010). This pathologizing of the Tea Party has the effect of reducing the political to an epiphenomenon of base human emotions that must be managed away in technocratic fashion either through a “responsible” tone in politics and the media, or through the alleviation of economic insecurity. However, by this logic, one would expect those in the most dire poverty to rebel and we are still no closer to identifying the fetish at the heart of the Republic of Property, that is the yeoman or productivist middle as the soul of capitalism.

The breakthrough moment in the pathology coverage of the Tea Party that offered an explanation of the sustained rage of the movement is the identification of the Koch brothers as key funders. Following Jane Mayer’s New Yorker profile of the Koch brothers the Tea Party is widely understood as either astro-turf or the manipulation of misguided souls who give ‘populist cover to the billionaires and corporate interests’ (Rich 2010e). Rich begins one opinion piece by deriding the treatment of the movement as authentic, without mentioning his own paper’s role, in stating that: ‘there’s just one
element missing from these snapshots of America’s ostensibly spontaneous and leaderless populist uprising: the sugar daddies who are bankrolling it’ (Rich 2010d). Rich traces the lineage of the Koch Brothers and the fact that their father was a key member of the John Birch Society to cast them as troglodytes who stand against the forces of progress. In what one could describe as a left-populist lament, Rich appropriately castigates Obama for his lack of Rooseveltian fortitude: ‘When wolves of Murdoch’s\textsuperscript{145} ingenuity and the Kochs’ stealth have been at the door of our democracy in the past, Democrats have fought back fiercely…and Obama? So far, sadly, this question answers itself. The pathology of the movement becomes explicable through the rapaciousness of the Koch brothers as a corrupting influence upon the body-politic as their ‘radical agendas…go well beyond, and sometimes counter to the interests of those who serve as spear carriers in the political pageants hawked on Fox’. For Rich the Tea Partiers are simply the duped pawns of the Koch Brothers who ‘must be laughing all the way to the bank knowing that working Americans are aiding and abetting their selfish interests’.

While the role of the Koch brothers in providing a well resourced infrastructure\textsuperscript{146} of think tanks and lobbying groups, is critical in explaining an institutional credibility bestowed upon the movement it does not explain why Tea Partiers really believe with passionate intensity. They are not simply brainwashed and exploited by the Koch brothers. Rather they gain from their resistance a fetishized identity that shields them from the trauma of capitalist crisis and offers a redemptive millenarian narrative of sacrifice and struggle against the enemy. The fetish of the yeoman or the people of the Republic of Property provides a populist ‘cognitive mapping’ that allows the subject to grasp the ‘unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structure as a whole’ (Jameson 1991: 51). That is why there is no necessary humanist awakening or unmasking of the illusory notion of the fetish as it easier to cling

\textsuperscript{145} Rich’s piece also emphasizes Rupert Murdoch’s role in giving the Tea Party ‘free promotion 24/7’.

\textsuperscript{146} Paul Krugman has similarly written of the influence of money in explaining the prominence of the movement as ‘paychecks for the ideologically loyal are an important part of the system’ (2010).
to one’s fetish than to accept a disorientation of the symbolic order. To return to the Thomas Frank question: the fundamentalist pursuit of deregulation and fiscal austerity, clearly serves the interests of the Koch brothers and works against the economic self-interest of most Tea Partiers. However it also secures the fetish and the embattled identity of the Tea Party.

*David Brooks and the Yeoman*

The *NYT* is stuck between a humanist/pathology dichotomy that either uncritically validates the Tea Party as the soul of liberal-democracy or reduces it to base human impulses and paranoia. Neither perspective is able to properly account for the nature of belief and investment in a fetishized people. The single exception to this omission is conservative columnist David Brooks, who talks of the Tea Party as an ‘authentically American revolt led by members of the yeoman enterprising class’ (2010b). Brooks has a long history as a cultural warrior in fomenting the red/blue state divide between a productivist class and a liberal cosmopolitan elite who ‘don’t know what soybeans look like when they’re growing in a field’ (in Frank 2004: 19). While the humanism of Zernike and Bai are accepting of the idiosyncrasies of the movement as part of a big tent liberalism, Brooks is more explicit in identifying the yeomanry as the exclusive people of America.

In one editorial, ‘The Story of an Angry Voter’ (2010b), Brooks offers a remarkable portrait of what the imagined productivist middle looks like, through the fictional character ‘Ben’. Paradoxically this fiction speaks not to the truth of some idealized middle, as Brooks would have it, but to the truth of the fiction or fetish of this people in structuring the Tea Party’s experiences of their economic reality. Brooks tells the story of Ben, laced with culture-war barbs, as a hard worker who graduated from high school in spite of his parents’ divorce and the fact that ‘his friends would cut class to smoke weed’. Ben managed decent grades and attended the University of Phoenix, ‘he would

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147 It should be noted that despite doing much conservative populist myth-making over the last 15 years, Brooks has been critical of the Tea Party’s ‘unrestrained passion and zealotry’ (2010a) and anti-Wall Street sentiment.
have loved to major in history, but he needed a skill so he studied hotel management. Brooks’ exemplum is a tale of toil and its rewards as Ben ‘labored when others didn’t...he sacrificed when others didn’t. He bought a house he could afford when others didn’t’. What underpins the virtue of productivist labor as a ‘satisfying moral way of living’ is not wealth but as Brooks puts it ‘being able to reflect on the fruits of your labor’. What horrifies Brooks’ productivist avatar and spurs him into action, is a political class that put its fingers on the scales distorting the ‘relationship between reward and effort’. The middle are victimized by those in government that ‘spent money they didn’t have...borrowed from the Chinese...[and] taxed those with responsible homes to bail out people who’d bought homes they couldn’t afford’. Brooks departs from Ben’s authentic subject position to lament the waywardness of the political class:

Once there was a group in the political centre that would have understood Ben’s outrage. Moderates like Abraham Lincoln believed in the free labor ideology. Their entire governing system was built around encouraging and rewarding labor.

The reference to Lincoln is instructive here of how Brooks and the Tea Party construct their fetishized notion of capitalism. Lincoln spoke of free labour as a ‘just, generous and prosperous system’ whereby ‘the prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself, then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him’ (1894: 250). Those that perpetually function as wage labour are not an indictment of the system, rather they have ‘a dependent nature which prefers’ wage labour (ibid: 250). At the heart of Lincoln’s free labour, Brooks’ productivism and the Tea Party people is a mythology of original accumulation which divides the world into

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148 The implication is that the liberal elite smoke dope, study history (not a real skill) and attend liberal arts colleges. The University of Phoenix is a remarkable example as it is the nation’s largest for-profit University and has been subject to much liberal ridicule for poor academic standards among other things. Brooks here is spitting in the eye of an imagined smug liberal elite that might mock Ben’s degree.
simply the industrious and the lazy. This notion of capitalism and original accumulation, which Marx derided as a story of ‘insipid childishness’ preached in defense of private property (Marx 1887: 500), is crucial to understand the fetishist disavowal which lies at the heart of Tea Party populism. For Brooks and the Tea Party there is no moral failing or fundamental crisis inscribed in the heart of capitalism, rather it has been corrupted or inhibited by a political class that indulges the lazy and unproductive.

Beyond The Pale
What marked a critical turning point in the treatment of the Tea Party, following its 2010 electoral success, was the shooting of Democratic congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. The allowances that had been made for it by the liberal humanist frame, as a divergent idiosyncratic movement, were revoked as it became necessary for the Times, given its position in the field, to call for the restoration of civil discourse. The solemnity of this exercise and the Times’ authority to do it required a re-articulation of the ideal of the field as above the fray as the Times sought to chasten cable news, the blogosphere and politicians on all sides. Matt Bai writes of a ‘rhetorical recklessness that permeates our political moment’ (2011) as being driven by an irresponsible mediatized politics on both the left and right ‘that so loudly and readily reinforces the dark visions of political extremists, often for profit or political gain’. Bai draws an equivalence between Sarah Palin’s infamous cross-hairs map and the comments of a liberal blogger on the Daily Kos to roundly condemn all sides as complicit in the debasing of a shared liberal political culture. The article offers a sketch of some of the more incendiary Tea Party rhetoric, from Palin to Sharon Angle, in order to condemn what he sees as the self-interested motives of gaining campaign ‘contributions or TV time’. And while there may be a certain instrumentalization of Tea Party discourse by some, Bai’s critique fails to address the question of how to treat those politicians who really do believe and really do represent their constituents in all their illiberality. Bai not only fails to address this fundamental illiberalism but draws a false equivalence between left and right stating that this recklessness began before Obama and the Tea Party with 9/11 Truthers and
what Bai claims ‘were constant intimations during George W. Bush’s presidency that he was a modern Hitler...a man whose very existence threatened the most cherished American ideals’.

However the case that Bush acted against liberal-democratic ideals and the constitution is strong and includes torture, Guantanamo Bay prison camp, rendition, the Valerie Plame affair, the attorney generals scandal and the NSA’s warrantless wiretapping, to name a few. Bai’s spurious equivalence represents the height of unprincipled liberal journalism. It is plainly not ludicrous to suggest that the Bush administration threatened cherished constitutionally enshrined ideals. Obama certainly has extended some of these policies under claims of “executive privilege”, including extrajudicial killings, however a principled liberalism will challenge the illegality of both not merely acquiesce to the demands of political power. All that the liberal field is left with is this smug false equivalence which defends nothing accept the field’s sense of staying above the fray149.

From this concern over normative notions of civility and rational discourse in the public sphere, the pathology framing of the Tea Party extends to mark the movement as beyond the pale. Following the Giffords shooting there were misplaced expectations that Republicans and the Tea Party might govern in a more conciliatory manner. However, following the political brinksmanship that ensued over the debt ceiling the stridency of the Tea Party was widely denounced as placing ideology before the interests of the country. Paul Krugman was severe in his reprimand of the Tea Party calling them ‘hostage-

149 Throughout the body of texts writers at the Times are at great pains to chastise MSNBC and Fox News with equal vigor in order to sanctify the broadsheet within the field. In response to this question of civility the Times opinionator Blog columnist Robert Wright channels John Stewart’s liberal rationalist motif of “Tea Partiers to the right of me, Truthers to the left”. Wright states that irrational political fear-mongering ‘knows no ideology’ (2011) and that Stewart was correct at his “Rally to Restore Sanity” to condemn ‘some on the left’ as ‘the heads of MSNBC have just as much of an obligation to help keep America sane as the heads of Fox News have’.
takers’, ‘extortionists’ and ‘black-mailers’ (2011). Not to be outdone, Joe Nocera in his column titled ‘Tea Party’s War on America’, labeled the Tea Party ‘terrorists’ in ‘suicide vests’ who ‘have waged jihad on the American people’ (2011). Maureen Dowd in trademark verbose fashion leaves no metaphor behind in characterizing a certain Tea Party derangement. ‘Like gargoyles on the Capitol, the adamantine nihilists are determined to blow up the country’s prestige…the Tea Party [is driving] a Thunderbird off the cliff with the president and the speaker of the House strapped in the back…The maniacal Tea Party freshman are trying to burn down the House they were elected to serve in’ (2011a). In a second column just four days later entitled ‘Washington Chainsaw Massacre’ (2011b) the debt ceiling negotiations were likened to a ‘summer horror blockbuster – without the catharsis’. The plot of this ‘slasher flick’ consisted of ‘the president – and the federal government – being chased through dim corridors by a maniacal gang with big knives held high’. Dowd continues with a remarkable rhetorical flourish:

They were like cannibals eating their own party leaders alive. They were like vampires...They were like zombies...They were like metallic beasts in “Alien” flashing mouths of teeth inside other mouths of teeth, bursting out of Boehner’s stomach every time he came to a bouquet of microphones.

While the playfulness in Dowd’s writing is characteristic of her style and the freedoms of the opinion format, this rhetorical excess embodies a critical inability of the liberal field to explain the Tea Party and a genuine horror of how cherished institutions of liberal-democratic government are being debased. At precisely the point where the Tea Party are designated beyond the pale for their defiance of liberal notions of political compromise, the Times resorts to a snarkyness that shields liberals from their inability to understand this problem in real political terms.

One opinion piece which neatly bookends the Times’ narrative of the Tea Party from its initial curiosity, the humanist/pathology dichotomy and finally the designation of the movement as beyond the pale, is Kurt Andersen’s ‘Our
Politics are Sick’. Andersen begins with a quick sketch of the then Republican presidential nominee front-runner Rick Perry and his wild anti-government rhetoric. For Andersen, this is representative of a ‘new and strange epidemic in mainstream politics’ in which politicians ‘believe [sic] their vivid fictions’. This article is a breakthrough in the sense that it identifies that the Tea Party is full of ‘sincere, passionate, hysterical belief’, not merely duped by big money or driven by archaic prejudices. However, this alone does not warrant their treatment as embodying liberal-democracy. Rather they are seen as symptomatic of a ‘national disease’, which is diagnosed by Andersen as an ‘autoimmune disorder’ at the heart of the American Body politic. He continues with the autoimmune metaphor, where the body politic mistakenly identifies its own organic components as ‘dangerous enemies within, and proceed[s] to attack and try to destroy them’. Not betraying the field’s notion of balance he identifies the first outbreak of this pathological distrust of institutions as the 9/11 Truthers\textsuperscript{550}. While for the Tea Party, taxation has become a ‘parasitic pathogen’ and federal departments such the E.P.A. and Federal Reserve are ‘tumors that must be removed’. In explaining the onset of the ‘sociopolitical autoimmune epidemic’ Andersen identifies ‘mega-stresses’ such as 9/11, war and economic precarity. This is compounded by the ‘exposure to chemicals or infections’ in the forms of ‘iffy infopinion, via talk radio and cable news and the Web, seeping into our political bloodstream 24/7’. Where this exceeds the pathology frame is in discarding a self-assured end-of-history diagnosis in the face of prevailing cultural/racial anxieties or the diminution of Tea Partiers as merely pawns of the Koch brothers. Andersen offers a better characterization of the political in all its immutable antagonism, concluding that autoimmune disorders ‘are generally permanent, chronic conditions. Only some are debilitating and most are treatable, but they are all incurable’. The same holds

\textsuperscript{550} As previously quoted, Andersen suggests that this problem is one of ‘mainstream’ politics, thus not exclusive to the right. The repeated use of 9/11 Truth as proof of an equal derangement on the left is a curious example. Firstly not a single prominent politician from the Democratic party has promoted such theories, while equating Obama with socialism, with all of the overdetermined permutations this embodies, is the main plank of the Republican party platform. Additionally if there is one national politician who comes closest to the 9/11 movement it is Republican Ron Paul.
of Tea Party fetishists who cannot simply be rationally persuaded to abandon their fetishized identity because if they ‘feel satisfied in their fetishes, they experience no need to be rid of them’ (Žižek 2009b: 68). That is why any chance of salvaging universality and liberal-democratic notions of the field rests on formulating a political notion of universality. While the autoimmune metaphor gives the reader a sense of the indeterminate nature of the political it is still seen as brought on by an external stress, which leads to the cannibalization of liberal-democracy, rather than residing internally and enshrined as permanent contradiction. Similarly the defense of the Times’ position within the field is colored by a similar liberal denial in characterizing the Times as the bastion of liberal-democracy against the chemicals or infections of cable news.

Conclusion
What my analysis of the New York Times’ coverage and narrative of the Tea Party movement has found is a range of discourse and journalistic habitus that fails either to defend the liberal journalistic field or properly explain populism in real political terms. In its initial reaction to the emergence of the Tea Party the Times is largely dismissive of the movement and reduces the populists to irrational cranks riled up by an irresponsible media. The political is often described quite accurately in all its immutable antagonism however whatever good work is done in straight reports is undone by an inability to augment this in feature and opinion pieces. There is no attempt to explain in political terms where this comes from, ie, the American frontier mythology of capital and private property. The political thus becomes something that is reduced to base human emotions and as such must be rationally managed away. In the year leading into the 2010, election the tone of the Times’ treatment shifted as it received extended coverage during this making sense period. Conservative politics beat reporter Kate Zernike and chief political correspondent Matt Bai, do not merely fail to identify the manner in which Tea Party populism represents a pointed challenge to American liberalism, rather they deploy the rhetorical tools of the field to characterize the Tea Party as liberal-democratic people power. Bai’s uncritical portrait of a Tea Party leader as an emancipatory capitalist goes a long way in further perpetuating
the Tea Party’s productivist mythology. The Tea Party is treated with a humanist authenticity that principally validates the contradictory beliefs of followers and does not consider the Tea Party’s inversion of the history of American populism. This humanist treatment celebrates what it sees as a certain eccentricity in the movement comparable to the vibrancy of Obama’s 2008 campaign, a comparison that offers no value judgement of the Tea Party’s illiberalism and fails to grasp the differing conceptions of the political.

While the bulk of the Times’ straight and feature reporting can be characterized by this uncritical humanist treatment, the majority of opinion pieces and editorials frame the Tea Party and the political as pathology. The Tea Party’s vociferous resistance to Obama is predominantly understood as a retrograde politics of racism and inter-generational anxiety. While race is a critical signifier in the Tea Party chain, it is not the racism of intolerance but a neo-liberal racism that identifies welfare recipients and liberal government as parasites pitted against the productive. The critique of the Tea Party, as standing against multiculturalism, does not recognize that the movement’s discourse of universality is not constructed specifically in racial terms and thus may not simply be overcome as a matter of changing demographics. The revelation that the movement received vigorous financial backing from the Koch Brothers fitted the pathology frame perfectly, as it seemed to explain an irrationality that was born of manipulation by narrow self-interests. The Tea Party rank-and-file are dupes in this scenario, enacting the interests of cynical billionaires. What this does not account for is that the Tea Party really do believe in deregulation and austerity, even against their own economic self-interest. This question of what could possibly sustain belief in a set of policies squarely at odds with one’s own interests is left unexamined. The series of political crises that unfolded after the 2010 elections proved beyond a doubt that the Tea Party could not be thought of as good faith political opponents in normative liberal-democratic terms. Following the debt-ceiling showdown the Tea Party is clearly marked beyond the pale. At this moment there is an overcompensation for the Times’ inability to properly explain the nature and origins of the Tea Party’s militant belief and ameliorate the crisis of the liberal polity. What pervades is a snarky liberalism that assumes a certain cultural
superiority which revels in mocking the Tea Party’s lack of sophistication and thus enables the field to disavow its own inadequacies.

To return to the focus of this thesis, the liberal unantagonistic notion of the political that is embodied in the media field and symptomatic of the politics of Obama, fails not merely in defending itself but, in lacking the conceptual terms necessary to deal with populism, bestows upon the Tea Party a liberal-democratic legitimacy. With this frontier between Obama’s Third Way liberalism principally being fought in the mediatized public space, the Times has expended its cultural capital, that is the ability to bring the liberal-democratic public into being, to extend to the Tea Party a humanist authenticity analogous to Obama’s 2008 campaign discourse. The hegemony of authenticity in the media field and in a mediatized politics speaks both to the biopolitical colonization of the social space and the necessary return of the political, in this instance as a populist fetishism. Between Obama’s discourse of “grassroots community organizing”, which served as a crucial signifier of the new commodity fetishism, and the populist lifeworld of “everyday stay-at-home moms” defending the Republic, there is a critical battle for the authentic. What is expressly biopolitical in the frontier is the battle over the spirit or morality of capitalism between the new spirit, which elicits post-capitalist fantasies and the moral transcendence of capital, and the bourgeois autonomy articulated by the Tea Party which places private property as the fount of morality. The ultimate paradox is that the Tea Party representing the very height of a mediatized penetration of the social space, as a movement both consecrated in the media field and that performs free labour for Fox News, presents a blockage to the ideology of biopolitical production. In the ontological necessity to express antagonism, that is fetishizing a frontier notion of capitalism in response to Obama and the new spirit, the Tea Party denounce the post-capitalist social discourse of biopolitical production while fetishizing commodity relations as a reconciled moral order. Beyond the implications of political economy and returning to the questions of the media field, the liberal narrative of the Tea Party and the political, it is clear that a humanist emphasis on authenticity does not ameliorate the irreconcilable tensions between the populists and liberals. There is no shared terrain upon
which to reconcile their differences, either liberalism defends itself in political terms or the values of liberalism become incorporated as some manner of populist exceptionalism. This is precisely what Glenn Beck attempts, as we will see in the coming chapter, in speaking to the crisis in the field and articulating a populist “truth-telling” that claims the universality of the field.
Chapter Seven – The Glenn Beck Spectacle

Introduction

In complete contrast to the New York Times and their quest to maintain the liberal field in the face of the political, is Glenn Beck, who for over two years on Fox News sought to irrevocably condemn the infrastructure of contemporary American political liberalism as against the people. The Democratic Party, mainstream media such as the Times, unions, liberal civil society, non-profit and philanthropic organizations were all tirelessly skewered every night for an hour from 5pm by Beck. This was not the routine partisanship of Fox that merely serves to stoke a tireless outrage; rather Beck offered the promise of defeating the liberal other once and for all through the political awakening of a virtuous community. It is in this way that Beck’s program served as a pure embodiment of both the Tea Party’s political antagonism and its specifically mediatized character. Beck has been essential for the Tea Party in staging “authentic” protest in the form of his 9/12 & 8/28 media events, bridging disparate local chapters of the movement around Fox and his own media empire. The program also served a crucial function in spuriously incriminating the Obama administration through various misquotes, YouTube clips and “research” all laid out on Beck’s chalkboard as proof positive of communist subversion. Beck’s theories featured prominently in Tea Party discourse and continue to be critical in both fetishizing the virtuous people and sustaining the spectral presence of Obama as an overdetermined other.

The media analysis that follows in this chapter is not intended to debunk Beck’s theories or feature his most outrageous claims, rather it is to consider Beck’s construction of the political and a mediatized populist community that threatens traditional notions of the field and liberal-democracy. The 11 episodes selected\(^{151}\) span across Beck’s time at Fox represent critical moments in Tea Party ontology and the construction of the political frontier against Obama. Beck’s discourse does not display the same gradation as the Times, as

\(^{151}\) See figure five on page 169.
the *raison d'être* of the program is singularly the othering of Obama and the liberal-democratic consensus. Over the course of the program’s two and a half years, from January 2009-June 2011, the steady narrative of the liberal outsider threatening the virtuous people and the republic is only varied by the incorporation of different chains of equivalence\(^ {153} \).

At this point it is worth clarifying the difference in my approach in this chapter on Beck as opposed to the previous media analysis. This is not simply based on a question of genre and platform but rather the different work that is involved in imposing meaning on a certain body of texts. My reading and selection of *Times* articles spanned a wide range of different reporters, opinion writers and large number of texts and therefore my framing of the *Times* narrative was comparatively broad and representative of the accepted range of liberal discourse. Beck’s discourse in contrast is highly concentrated, with each frame saturated in populist polemics. Thus my intention in this chapter is not to impose broad narrative frames on Beck’s program. Rather, it is to undertake a close textual analysis that will allow the spectacle of Beck to speak for itself and the radical nature of his mediatized populist community.

My analysis will begin with Beck’s 9/12 project launched early in his time at *Fox* which set the template for the following two years of brutally dehumanizing liberals and building his mediatized populist community. The distinguishing features of Beck’s method in constructing this brand community is the narrative of a movement around his various pseudo-political events\(^ {154} \), but also in the formation of reading groups and local chapters of his 9/12 movement. What marks Beck as a populist *media entrepreneur*\(^ {155} \) is not

\(^ {153} \) As previously mentioned Beck’s post-election hysterical reaction to the Arab Spring ultimately proved one link in the chain too many for Fox.

\(^ {154} \) In addition to 9/12 Project in 2009 and 8/28 in 2010, Beck continues to hold rallies such as the “Restoring Courage” event in Jerusalem in 2011 aimed at showing solidarity with Israel and “Restoring Love” in 2012 described by Beck as “a global movement for freedom for all mankind” (2012b).

\(^ {155} \) In Chapter Four I defined this term as those that utilize their media capital, that is access to the populist people, to make an end run around normal political processes.
simply the “opinion” format of the program but Beck’s portrayal of authenticity and emotional sincerity, which corresponds to the new self-expressive modes of discourse in the field. This logic of self-expression corresponds both to the individuating logic of spectacle in the field and the power of affect in constructing his mediatized community. It is the showcasing of his “deep personal convictions” that allows Beck to construct chains of equivalence around a populist moral clarity that demarcates the outside as those that threaten this fetishized identity and morality. What defines Beck as a media entrepreneur par excellence is that his capital is not simply access to a populist people but an audience that engages in free labour and constructs the very “authenticity” of the program and his media empire as a political movement. This model of free audience labour has a self-referential and reifying effect as Beck constantly projects an immensity to his movement across the mediatized social space based on what is a significant active audience. Beck thus realizes the full populist potential of the mediatized field embodying both the “authenticity” of the media’s biopolitical penetration of the social space and representing the return of antagonism and the political in fetishized, inverted form156.

This mediatized movement logic functions as the structuring principle of the program across its two years on Fox, with the content of the show filled with an unyielding focus on unifying the populist community against the enemy. While the various elements and signifiers that make the chain of Tea Party equivalence may shift at certain points, there is an unremitting formula to the Beck program which can be tracked across his broadcasts. Firstly, and unsurprisingly, is the overdetermined reification of the outsider representing the fundamental negativity of populism, which is constituted by this spectral threat. The enemies of the people, from Obama, George Soros, Acorn, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and Hollywood liberals, represent a symptom of the fetishist who fills this outside with multifarious and contradictory forms of evil. It is this projection and investment in the

156 In the next chapter I will discuss the limits to the mediatized domestication of the political.
outsider that leads to a certain indeterminacy that does not conform to liberal conceptions of the Tea Party as Beck explicitly attempts to appropriate anti-racist and anti-Wall Street signifiers.

A corollary of this overdetermined outsider is the consistent juxtaposition of light and dark, good and evil by Beck in simple moral terms. This does not merely represent the co-dependence of the two in populist ontology, as the enemy is fundamentally embedded in the fetish, but serves as a brutal mechanism of dehumanization. In what I term a populist humanism Beck displays a certain skill in pulling back from the edge of total rhetorical recklessness in his interplay with notions of the liberal field. Beck’s most reliable ploy is to wed his darkest visions to appeals to the values of the field. Beck’s populism clearly stands in opposition to normative notions of the field and more than skirts the limits of the acceptable discourse. However, Beck is careful to claim the universal values of the field, usurping such values from a media elite. Beck’s “truth-telling” and unmasking of power is framed explicitly in terms of rationalism and enlightenment, while he extends to his enemies impassioned pleas to see the light. In this maneuver, Beck calls for a humanist post-politics based on his unobjectionable rendering of the truth. The truly nefarious nature of this populist humanism is that this universal human subject position is exclusively filled with Tea Party populist content, thus those who would reject Beck’s olive branch are dehumanized. This speaks to the ultimate violence upon the field exacted by Beck’s program and the Tea Party movement as the universal becomes closed by a populist exceptionalism.

157 As I have described the discourse of Beck and the Tea Party is political in the reflecting the ontological necessity of antagonism in social signification, identifying the enemy or outsider. However the fetishistic logic at work ultimately means that the populists do not meet the threshold of embodying real ethico-political struggle. Rather than identifying concrete principles and contexts of struggle the Tea Party engage in politics as morality. Politics is a simply matter of restoring morality or as Beck puts it in his various events restoring “Honour”, “Courage” and “Love”.
Glenn Beck’s Workshop

In order to contextualize the coming analysis it is necessary to provide a sketch of the unique format that was the Glenn Beck program. The show itself was a remarkable spectacle, completely unprecedented in the cable news format, and revolved around Beck’s populist lifeworld of inner turmoil\textsuperscript{158}, struggle, redemption, awakening, moral and political clarity. While Fox’s conservative opinion programming largely consists of a tried and true formula of high production values including sharp graphics and a modern studio splashed in red, white and blue, Beck’s show is staged in what I am calling “Glenn Beck’s Workshop”. Beck is rarely desk-bound but traverses a large sound stage into the various sub-sets of his workshop in order to strike the different moods of his complex emotional range\textsuperscript{159}. A consistent theme of Beck’s is the unmasking of liberal power, or the *Wizard of Oz* metaphor of “pulling back the curtain”, which is embodied in his workshop as if to show his audience how he, in all his humility, constructs the program\textsuperscript{160}. In crossing sets he breaks the continuity of the spectacle, often revealing the skeletal structure of sets, the lighting, cameramen and various equipment\textsuperscript{161}. The

\textsuperscript{158} Beck continuously refers to his past struggles with substance abuse calling himself a “recovering dirtbag”.

\textsuperscript{159} This is the critical difference between Beck and Fox News’ other primetime hosts such as Bill O’Reilly and Sean Hannity. These personalities still position themselves in relation to a certain journalistic habitus with a populist inflection. Bill O’Reilly’s routine is that of a grizzled veteran of journalism who offers trenchant analysis, the occasional angry outburst or the shouting down of a liberal guest. Sean Hannity similarly plays the role of combative journalist taking on the liberal establishment.

\textsuperscript{160} Much of the program has a low-budget aesthetic with edited video packages often appearing as though they have been crash edited. On one program that dealt with the Arab Spring, where he entertained wild conspiracies about collusion between Marxists, environmentalists and Islamists, the screen behind him featured in neon green the word “CALIPHATE”, in “courier” font. The graphic was so rudimentary one can only assume that this was an attempt to be authentic or “homemade”.

\textsuperscript{161} Beck’s playfulness within his workshop is boundless. On several occasions performing his routine of dumbfounded disbelief at the scale of liberal treachery Beck will walk straight to the camera. Framed as an extreme close up he will pull a studio light down, shine it in to the camera and whisper to his viewing audience.
masterstroke in this maneuver is his ability to depict his own authentic spaces, often recreating his den, living room or sitting room adorned with antiques and Americana to deliver deeply personal messages about the struggle. Beck is clearly not Brechtian, as his ideology critique of “there’s nobody behind the curtain!”, functions as the highest form of populist fetishization as he portrays a mediatized yet “authentic” populist life world.

The workshop is extremely versatile in accommodating the various formats that the show takes. These range from Beck’s classroom replete with chalkboards, books and “historic documents”, Beck’s study where he will often conduct interviews or, finally, the workshop is transformed into a well-lit open “talk show” studio with a live audience and panel. It is hard to overstate the radical break from convention that was the Glenn Beck program as it ranged from deep apocalypticism to the warmth and serenity of a prayer meeting. This versatility of Beck’s, to be equal parts Howard Beale and Oprah, is essential in embodying a populist holism that both demarcates the outsider and consolidates the populist community. These different modes also demonstrated a certain deftness of touch as Beck could point to these “warmer” moments when questions arose about his crossing of the lines of civility.
However, despite the rhetoric of coming together as Americans it is from Beck’s happy space that the exclusion of the other is often the most radical.

Finally it is worth summarizing Beck’s habitus or personal performative embodiment of populist authenticity. Beck’s shtick is that of the everyman who has awoken from his befuddlement to a crisis-stricken America and is emotionally wracked by the burden of being the messenger for this reality. Beck’s personal presentation is modest, with a shirt, tie and coat jacket accompanied by jeans and sneakers. What is unique in his delivery, and stemming in part from his career as a radio broadcaster, is the range of voices and emotions that Beck embodies in delivering the spectacle of his twenty-minute monologue. Beck is able to maneuver skillfully from fear, anger and sarcasm to warmth, tranquility and intellectualism, all while either gesticulating, smirking, grimacing, crying, pacing or sitting on the edge of his desk striking a relaxed demeanor. This performative embodiment of non-professionalism in the media field is meant to convey an emotional authenticity of someone who is like you and whose derisive comments mirror yours when you yell at the TV news in disgust. Beck’s ability to embody a populist authenticity and a political logic that emanates from the social is premised upon being a media figure completely unlike those whom “you” despise. This claim is based on the affective core of the populist fetish in which Beck’s self-expression of an ineffable moral virtue, embodied in the people of private property, invites the fetishistic projection of others invested this people. It is this authenticity that allows him to sell gold, home security systems, bomb-proof safes, freeze-dried food, survival kits and

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162 Zaitchik (2010) has written that many of Beck’s characters or the voices he assumes are holdovers from his experience in the “morning zoo” genre of radio broadcasting.

163 One of the many breaks with convention is his use of a split screen when airing clips of Obama or other prominent figures. While the shot of the politician’s speech fills a majority of the frame there is an inset box featuring a close up of Beck. During the clip Beck will mock the speaker through his ridiculous grimaces, shakes of his head or the holding of his face in his hands.
other “end-times” commodities as merely an extension of this movement\(^{164}\). From this proximity to the social, Beck mercilessly attacks the political field with the Tea Party coalescing around his show, media empire and Fox thus amplifying the movement’s impact upon the political field.

\[\text{Figure Seven} \quad \text{Beck, G. (2011b) ‘The Glenn Beck Program’, Fox News, January 6.}\]

Lastly before proceeding to my analysis I must acknowledge that little has been written about Glenn Beck in contemporary scholarship. In the popular press Zaitchik’s book ‘Common Nonsense’ and Dana Milbank’s ‘Glenn Beck and the Tea Bagging of America’ are two prominent biographies released at the height of his broad political influence, shortly before the 2010 midterm elections. These books examine the ideological origins of Beck and characterize him as an extremist, charlatan, racist and a danger to the polity. Aside from the popular press and similar books lampooning figures such as Bill O’Reilly, Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh, there has been far too little

\(^{164}\) I have written in Chapter Five that Beck served Fox’s brand strategy in that Beck’s authenticity and close proximity to the social extended to Fox. The eventual conflict between Beck and Fox resides in the fact this authenticity was off-set by increasing flak and that Beck’s survivalist advertising revenue stream flowed disproportionately to Beck’s own media empire and could not make up for shortfalls from the pull out of major sponsors such as Verizon, Lowe’s and Johnson & Johnson.
work done in theorizing Beck and Fox News beyond a propaganda model. Much of the scholarship on Fox News focuses on the effects of misinformation on the polity, as in Jamieson & Capella’s ‘Echo Chamber’ (2008) and others (Morris 2005, DellaVigna & Kaplan 2006), while Media Matters for America continues its tireless work of tracking the network’s deceptions. My work in this chapter is intended to answer a different question which is not simply to identify the effects of irrationality on the public but rather the manner in which Beck and Fox correspond to the logic of the political thus offering an enabling structure of populist mobilization.

The 9/12 Project
Glenn Beck’s unique populist routine was announced to the world a few weeks into his program with a one-hour special launching what he called the 9/12 project, essentially a protest group and book clubculminating in a protest on Washington September 12th (2009a). The project preceded the consolidation of the Tea Party movement and occupied a similar terrain of right wing economic populism. The project was based on “9 principles” and “12 values” that were held as innate and universal and embodied the patriotism and common purpose of the US the day after 9/11. 9/12 groups were set up across the country and formed viewing parties for the broadcast in private homes, bars, at Chuck Norris’ ranch, on military bases and in churches; several of these were featured as live feeds on the show. Throughout his time on Fox, Beck amplified the media field’s deference to the self-determining audience realizing its full populist potential. This cheap temporal-spatial bridging of his 9/12 community was accompanied by a discourse of “its all about you” [the populist people], as Beck would later utter through tears: ‘the real power to change America’s course lies with you, you are the secret, you are the answer’. What is striking about Beck’s brand

165 Beck used the program to plug the rabid anti-communist text The 5,000 Year Leap which soon vaulted to #1 on Amazon.com.
166 These are generally innocuous values such as ‘hard work’, ‘hope’ and ‘humility’ to the more loaded culture war terms such as ‘personal responsibility’ and the principals that ‘America is good…government can not force me to be charitable…the family is sacred. My spouse and I are the ultimate authority, not the government’.
community is a mirroring of the Obama campaign discourse in which this praising of “You” elicits the invitation to project onto Obama or Beck/Fox an aspirational community. This is not to make the Times’ facile point that there exists an equivalency in the “grassroots” politics of the two but rather to establish that in the biopolitical extension into the social the political logics of difference and equivalence return with a vengeance.

The 9/12 program begins with Beck ‘backstage’ building to the euphoric moment where he and his studio audience realize that ‘they are not alone’. However this elation and awakening is co-dependent upon the spectral threats that loom large on the virtuous people; these are framed by a five-minute video package. The video begins in full crisis mode with footage of insurgent fighters, murder victims and children running in fear to ominous music and Beck’s voice: ‘War, Islamic extremism, Europe on the brink, even pirates now’. Within seconds Beck extends the chains to include the evils of ‘union mandates’ and the second highest corporate tax rate in the world’. Interestingly Beck adds the anti-globalist sentiment that ‘global corporations only see America as a market and you as a consumer’. This neatly embodies the Tea Party’s particular fetishized notion of capitalism, allowing us to infer that they are not simply neo-liberal shock troops paid off by the Koch brothers. For the Tea Party, Americans are not a mere computation of supply and demand, however much they may love “free-markets”, but are the virtuous soul of capitalism as a distinctly American preserve. Beck’s video is characteristic of a “make it stop” populism that imagines all evil as emanating from one source [corruption of capitalism as a morally reconciled order] and calls for a simple moral clarity to slash the Gordian knot of modern politics. Beck offers the moral clarity necessary to overcome the people’s enemies in self-servingly using the harrowing images of 9/11 to reassure his audience of a millenarian moment. Overlaid with images of everyday Americans and families the answer is said to be the simple re-commitment to the ‘eternal principles that allowed America to become the world’s beacon of freedom’,

\[167\] Beck’s wrapping himself in the cloak of 9/11 is rather audacious considering his self-stated ‘hate’ of 9/11 victims families (Shakir 2009).
something that after 9/11 Americans ‘just knew was right’. What is a distinct feature of Beck’s and Tea Party discourse generally is a populist common sense that speaks of “America” and “Capitalism” and invokes the fetishized filling of these signifiers as something that the people innately understand. The effectiveness of these invocations lies of course in the fetish and the affective bonds of the populist community for whom the signifiers “America” and “Capitalism” embody a cultural politics of nationalism, imperialism and religiosity all given cover by such seemingly unobjectionable categories. For Beck it is simply necessary to display an overly wrought affective connection to these signifiers to elicit a community of like-minded fetishists all motivated by their individual fantasies in a collective manner.

Upon the conclusion of the video we cut to Beck, who is backstage fighting back tears. The camera is hand-held as Beck walks through the back of the set urging his viewers to remember who they were on 9/12. The crowd applause is cued just before he makes his way to the brightly-lit set triumphantly declaring that ‘we are not alone’ from his studio audience to Times Square, to those organizing viewing parties in ‘virtually every small town and big city in this great nation’. This manipulated emotional rise from the dark space behind the set to the light of shining faces in the audience, allows Beck’s farcical claims to represent and connect the nation appear more plausible. This is not simply based on the fetishist claims to be the real people of America but the power of affect to shatter the rational lens and validate such a wild claim. At this stage Beck is speaking in front of mural reading ‘We The People’ that is comprised of thousands of thumbnail images of his 9/12 followers. Having detailed the expanse of his mediatized political community and declaring that ‘its not about me...you are the answer’, Beck offers what we can only assume is a scripted moment of “sincerity”. Beck breaks into tears, gathers himself, declares his love for his country and that he ‘fears for it’. He continues in this moment of anxiety, voice quavering, that ‘it seems as though the politicians, the media, the special interests surround us...it sounds intimidating’. Then in a contrived emotional turn that so perfectly embodies the populist dichotomy of community and outsider, Beck menacingly proclaims ‘the truth is...we surround them this is our country’. The affective
emotional layering of this opening sequence of anxiety, anger, joy and subsequently humour, precisely captures the codependency of fear and jouissance at the heart of the fetish. It is the very fear of the enemy that allows the populist to engage in the jouissance of transgressing norms of civility, viciously dehumanizing the enemy and acting out revolutionary fantasies. Beck’s implication is that the country is not for all people and excludes those that Beck implicates as part of the web of politics, media and special interests. Thus Beck’s people is not explicitly limited by race, despite evoking some of the traditional markers of white reactionary politics, but is a category open to those who share in a simple populist morality and the jouissance of ridiculing the enemy.

Beck’s 9/12 community conforms perfectly to new mediatized forms of populism built upon the free labour of media audiences. Beck’s bearing of his soul follows the logic of self-expression and affect that defers to the active user who experiences their consumption of media as a manner of self-determination and social realization. The discourse of self-determination and “You” captures the biopolitical character of contemporary commodification. This is precisely what is at work in the new spirit of commodity fetishism, described in Chapter One, at the heart of new modes of “authentic” consumption. What Beck is producing is an audience commodity of affect that functions as an “authentic” community who build and perform the very spectacle of Beck and Fox, through viewing parties, the ‘We the People’ mural and later in the protest on Washington. This community is bound by the shared investment in the fetish which promises the impossible fullness of society, with the elimination of the enemy, but also embodies the mediatized logics of spectacle, individuation and performativity. It should be clear that this community is built upon an irreducible antagonism, the logics of difference and equivalence, whereby individual self-realization necessitates the spectral presence of the outsider. Thus for Beck there is no light without dark, the love for his country sits beside vicious attacks on those that are not of the people. Following Beck’s emotional climax of demarcating “us” and “them”, in his opening segment, he crosses to one of his live feeds:
I want to go now to Stu [producer]...who is in Hollywood California to report, believe it or not, on a massive gathering that is taking place there in one of the most liberal cities in the country. Stu are you there?

What follows is a shot of “Stu” in an empty conference room who replies: ‘yeah Glenn there’s still no one here, but its really important to know you are not alone [pause] unless you are me [loud audience laughter]’. Beck’s demeanor is markedly calm and even warm as he comments that ‘they must be stuck in traffic’ to more laughs. The content of this joke is obvious, Hollywood liberals are clearly not of the people, but what is remarkable is the warmth of his delivery. This scripted joke, designed to break the seriousness of the program’s opening, is a warm “human” moment but one without the prospect of any reconciliation with the outsider. It is clear that the very human warmth of the fetishist community is based on the jouissance of mocking and dehumanizing the enemy.

The symbolic efficacy of this contrived scenario of authenticity, sincerity and simple moral clarity, necessary to bring this mediatized community into being, cannot be understood without the hegemony of authenticity, born of biopolitical production, in the new media field. What is characteristic of the biopolitical character of contemporary media production is the dissemination of affect. Thus we can read Beck’s crying not merely as a personal foible but as an affective invitation to join him in a fetishistic flight from reality. As the anti-intellectualism of populism rests on the people’s moral certainty Beck effectively supplants the rational in his appeals to a populist lifeworld. It is this very appeal to “You” the audience, and to what “You” know, is right that realizes Beck’s role as the locus of this mediatized community. Beck and his audience correspond precisely to the media field’s demands for self-expression and commodification as defining authenticity. Beck’s claims to an authentic populist lifeworld elicits fetishistic projections about the people’s morality and offers the message that: Beck understands and he knows that you understand. This emotional sincerity and Beck’s mapping of his movement from his studio audience, churches, social media, Chuck Norris’
ranch and all towns and cities across the nation, offers an enabling structuring for a populist morality and community. The biopolitical accumulation logic at work here is of course the harnessing of free and affective labour which marks Fox’s penetration of the social space. Critically important to this incorporation of audience labour are Beck’s aspirational discourses and appeals to “You”, the audience, as the key agent of history and redeemer of America.

What should be clear about the hegemony of authenticity in the new media field, as embodied in a media entrepreneur such as Beck, is the importance of the political logics difference and equivalence. Thus there is a dialectic between the expansion into the social space and resistance. Despite materially embodying the characteristics of biopolitical production, the Tea Party and Beck’s audience stand explicitly against the ideological content of the Third Way and Empire, with Obama and George Soros featuring first and second on the Tea Party’s enemies list. The very liberal cosmopolitanism that defines Empire and the new spirit of commodity fetishism, incorporating anti-capitalist signifiers into the process of commodification, is perceived by the populists as actual anti-capitalism. The Tea Party in this sense represent a populist or fascist blockage to neo-liberal Empire, arising from biopolitical production. Ipso facto this proves that there exists a potential in the media field to substantively resist the real subsumption of labour in biopolitical production. If one is serious about the liberal universalism that is central to the media field then it is necessary to realize the genuine potential for resistance in the mediatized social space in formulating a radical political notion of universality.

Overdetermination and the Outsider
Central to Beck’s consolidation and articulation of the populist community is the consistent reification of the outside and the enemy’s expansive reach. Proving Žižek’s assertion that the basic fetishistic model of populist politics is anti-Semitism (2006a: 556), Obama and the political institutions and culture of liberalism assume the overdetermined position of the jew as a synthesis of all forms of evil. I use here the distinction made by Lyotard between the upper case “Jew” which denotes a concrete religious, political, or philosophical
identity, and the lower case “jew” which defines a phantasmatic enemy and ‘the object of a dismissal’ (1990: 3) inscribed in a fascist politics. Thus the liberal enemy may occupy the same dehumanized position as the jew in Anti-Semitism. In the process of naming Obama “enemy”, the spectral figure of the enemy in Tea Party ontology ‘condenses around itself a plurality of meanings’ (Laclau 2005: 22). The signifiers “progressive”, “liberal” or “socialist” are invested with fetishistic meaning representing a whole web of contradictory forms of evil. Thus Obama and Soros simultaneously represent the lumpenproletariat and the financial and cultural elite, are incompetent yet omnipotent, are atheists with God complexes who control the media and are responsible for an amoral cultural rot. The structuring elements of anti-Semitism are all present, if not explicit in the attacks on Soros, as a cosmopolitan elite class is held to threaten the virtuous community.

As was outlined in Chapter One, the Tea Party’s structuring of this omnipotence and subversive anti-capitalist intent was crystallized by Beck on his program where he delineated his “Cloward-Piven” theory. One of the many novel aspects of Beck as a Fox host was his populist revision of history, specifically the turn of the 20th century and the progressive era of liberal reformism. This revision is key in expounding a supposed trajectory of liberal subversion and irrevocably condemning the vocabulary of liberalism and progressivism as key signifiers of the enemy. As Beck expounds:

> There is something you need to understand, Progressives don’t speak the language you and I do...“Social Justice” and “Transforming America” I would say that means collapsing the

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168 What is remarkable is that despite the often transparent anti-Semitism of Beck and the Tea Party, Israel and conservative Jews occupy the highest position of esteem in the Tea Party. This is more than just the evangelical enthusiasm for Israel as part of an end-times scenario. A hawkish and strident Israel is backed by evangelicals and Tea Partiers as an anti-Islamic bulwark. Additionally this deep solidarity with the state of Israel, evidenced in Beck’s “Restoring Courage” event, allows Tea Partiers to indulge in notions of persecution analogous to the Jews and anti-Semitism.
system as we know it and rebooting it as a progressive utopia. None of the language is the same and that is why people get lost (2009c).

This is exemplary of the fetishistic and affective investment in naming as Beck manages to taint pedestrian political language, while claiming that enemy’s power is based in controlling language. For Beck, the progressive enemy’s omnipotence does not merely encompass this control of language, but thanks to Edward Bernays’ mastery of human sex drives and the subconscious, they even control the way “You” think\(^\text{169}\). Beck’s historicism is essential in presenting a progressive “grandplot” that is \textit{prima facie} incriminating simply by virtue of banal liberal rhetoric. It is this overdetermined language and imagery that animates Beck’s farcical chalkboard expositions such as the “Tree of Revolution” or the timeline of communism in America\(^\text{170}\). By filling the signifiers of “social justice” and “progressivism” with nefarious connotations the scope of the enemy’s web becomes all encompassing. Beck claims that progressives are ‘about to finish the process they started over 100 years ago’ and, having learned from their ‘failed attempts...this latest class of progressives have taken the Cloward-Piven strategy to a whole new level’ (2009c). Specifically Beck holds that this new strategy is the infiltration of government and the understanding that ‘you’ve got to be in the system to collapse it’ (ibid). The implication is that Obama is the culmination of a 100-year project of subversion that has managed to plant an enemy agent in the nation’s highest office.

\(^{169}\) Beck’s morally conservative anti-Freudianism extends to Obama as it is claimed that ‘he has made it clear that he has a commitment, to use behavioral psychology as a major tool of his administration’ (2011d).

\(^{170}\) The ‘Tree of Revolution’ (Beck 2009c) features at the roots Che Guevara, Woodrow Wilson and Saul Alinsky. The trunk of the tree is the “Cloward-Piven Strategy” and the fruits of the tree are Obama, Acorn, the SEIU and the Soros-funded Apollo Foundation. The timeline of Communism (Beck 2010f) in the US features key dates such as 1848 when Marx wrote the \textit{Manifesto}, 1871 and the Paris Commune, and 2000 when super model Gisele wore a bikini featuring the iconic post-modern image of Che Guevara [see figure eight].
In assuming the spectral figure of the overdetermined outsider, the liberal progressive becomes equals parts master of the Machiavellian dark arts and an amoral sensuous rascal. Beck characterizes the Democratic Party in one program, following the passage of healthcare reform, as both ‘dirty spineless weasels’ and ‘ruthless, morally bankrupt and the ends-justify-the-means Saul Alinskyites...[who] will do anything including eat their own’ (2010e). One might expect that spineless and ruthless might be mutually exclusive however such is the nature of the overdetermined enemy. Beck and the Tea Party populists conform neatly to Žižek’s classification of the ‘inauthentic fundamentalist’ (2001: 68) driven by an envy of the other’s jouissance, with the obsessive concerns over the amorality of the enemy functioning as the acting out of their own inner turmoil. It is in this sense that Beck, a recovered substance abuser, decries the enemy as the ‘California hippy Marxist socialist
communist progressive, sticking flowers in the barrel [sic], sitting around smoking dope during college’ (2010e). Beck continues: ‘that’s not the average America. But that is what a lot of people in our government did back in the 1960s and I bet you a lot of them are still doing it. They’ve declared themselves king’ (ibid). This obsession with the enemy’s jouissance, particularly the 1960s cultural liberation, takes a strangely personal note as Beck angrily demands: ‘Tell me Barack Obama what were you doing! What were you doing when you were going to college, who were you hanging out with?’ (ibid). What is remarkable here, aside from the obvious fact that Obama was not part of the 60s counter-culture, is the idea that the enemy are at the same time; dope-smoking libertines and ruthless autocrats. It is this overdetermination of the liberal enemy and Obama that allows the fetishist to invest countless meanings into the outsider as both a political and cultural foe that threatens the very existence of the people and society as a morally reconciled populist order.

The height of this fetishistic overdetermination of the enemy occurs in Beck’s three-part magnum opus on George Soros entitled *The Puppet Master*. Airing in November 2010, these programs featured a grotesque anti-Semitism both in form, an enemy that embodies a multifarious evil, and in content, with Soros described as an ‘economic war criminal who sucks the blood from people’ (Beck 2010j). Soros, Obama and the progressive/liberal conspiracy are critically linked in the Tea Party demarcation of the political frontier as it is believed that Soros’ fortune fuels the liberal “community organizing” infrastructure that brought Obama to power and is aimed at collapsing the system171. The program’s opening credits feature the hand of puppeteers

171 In this series Obama is portrayed as a Manchurian candidate for Soros’ project of a communist “One World Government”. Playing on the bizarre populist scorn for Obama’s use of teleprompters, Beck portrays Obama as Soros’ most prized puppet:

> Have you ever wondered who’s at the other end of his blackberry? No president has ever had that, it was a security risk. Who does he talk to? Who does he need to see texts from? Who is writing the damn speeches in the teleprompter everywhere? (2010h)
pulling strings with the names of Soros’ various philanthropic institutions but also the street sign ‘Wall St’ before the words ‘The Puppet Master’ appear next to an image of Soros [see figures nine & ten]. What is key to Soros assuming the full potential and overdetermined content of the enemy is this indeterminacy of Beck’s anti-Wall Street position. Beck is able to make radical claims about a nexus of finance capital and “shadow government” ruining the livelihoods of everyday people, while maintaining the fetish of a people reconciled in private property. Soros is not held as representative of capitalism as such, but rather represents the perversion that is hedge funds. In characterizing Soros as the puppet master of the world’s shadow government Beck asks rhetorically: ‘Is it a coincidence that everything under the sun when it comes to capitalism is targeted for regulation by congress except for hedge funds?’ (2010j). This is a critical demonstration of how the fetish of private property functions in Tea Party ontology. When financial speculation destroys jobs and economic security, it is the attributable to Soros’ cultural liberalism not his structural position within relations of production.


In full anti-Semitic mode Beck portrays Soros as a vagabond liberal plutocrat driven to sabotage nation-states and capitalism for his own personal and political ends. Thus the first installment of the series details the collapse of regimes, currencies and the theft of elections with Soros ‘coincidentally at the centre of it all’ (2010h). As with anti-Semitic denunciations of finance there is a scattering of half-truths amongst the vilifications. Soros’ role in the East Asian financial crisis of the 1990s clearly had a devastating impact in driving down wages, consumer buying power and resulted in the stripping of national
assets in the region. However Beck’s critique is not launched at Soros for representing a fraction of financial class power but for his personal megalomaniacal rapaciousness. Thus Beck explains: ‘he loves turning countries inside out and upside down. He got hooked on it, he has to feed the addiction’ (2010j). Beck even offers a humanist critique of the destructive character of finance:

These are real people, this is not some game. Real lives are being destroyed for his financial gain and his power...Let me tell you this, it takes a cold, cold heart to have full knowledge that what you are doing to make a buck is literally destroying the lives of people. And now he’s messing with your life...He says America is his next target (2010i).

This populist anti-finance position perfectly embodies the enemy/fetish interrelationship as the enemy’s very source of jouissance, characterized in this case as a ceaseless pathological urge, is the destruction of American frontier private property as fetish. Beck’s condemnation of finance capital’s human toll manages to transpose the structural condition of capitalism’s ‘vampire thirst for the living blood of labour’ (Marx 1887: 172) on to the sociopathy of Soros, who just so happens to be a Hungarian Jew. This is the height of fetishist disavowal as Tea Party discourse, which is thoroughly invested in a fetishized capitalism as a moral and reconciled order, is able to denounce greed and the impact of finance capital on people’s lives. The essential maneuver is of course to attribute any internal failing of capitalism to communist subversion, in the form of hedge funds, which is proved simply by virtue of capitalist crisis. To return to the question of the antagonistic political frontier, Beck and the Tea Party are able to claim certain anti-Wall Street signifiers while disavowing that capitalism is capable of destroying people’s lives.

*Glenn Beck’s Populist Humanism and Authenticity*

The intractable coupling of the populist fetishist and the enemy materializes thematically across the program, not just in the overdetermined filling of the
enemy but in the populist humanism and authenticity of Beck. These moments of sincerity and the calls for post-partisanship function to simultaneously consolidate the morality of the community and give the appearance of pulling back from total rhetorical recklessness, while performing a pernicious dehumanization of the enemy. The dichotomies of light and dark, humanism and vilification represent a holism that does not simply define the outside but the warmth and authenticity of the populist community. This aspect of human warmth, reciprocity and communal bonding speaks to the importance of affect in any hegemonic chain of equivalences. The very basis of this populist community is the shared reverence for the fetish, around which members of the community project aspirational claims and content as a mark of authentic interiority, and as a means to strengthen the populist community.

A striking example of this populist humanism is the conversion of Beck’s workshop into a talk show with a live audience as on the occasion of the one year anniversary of the 9/12 project. On this program the audience and 9/12 members share their experiences from the past year, a year in which Beck claims; ‘You [the populist people] have changed the course of the country’ (2010d). Beck and his studio audience/community perfectly embody a mediatized habitus of individual self-expression, affect and a deep personal commitment to a decentralized movement\textsuperscript{72}, while displaying an absurd uniformity of opinion. Interactions with panelists and the audience only ever reaffirm Beck’s vision, whether through shots of the crowd’s over-enthusiastic nodding, audience members testifying to the power of Beck’s reading list or the chair of the 9/12 project exalting Beck as a prophet\textsuperscript{73}. This contradiction between a movement that espouses the discourse of post-hierarchical politics

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\textsuperscript{72} Beck explains that, ‘there is no central control, that’s what I said when I started this. This has to be controlled by the people’ (2010d).
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\textsuperscript{73} Yvonne Donnelly: ‘We were feeling lost and you said square your shoulders and get back in the game and I snapped to it...I was driving in the car and the tears were rolling down my face and I was like he’s right. Square your shoulders America, get back in the game. And we did’ (2010d).
\end{flushright}
while fetishistically reaffirming an unwavering unitary moral clarity is best encapsulated in the statement of a 9/12 co-chair:

This works because its truly grassroots. Just like capitalism. If you don’t have people at the top giving orders it gives people the freedom to make decisions and use their creativity (ibid).

What is critical here is not simply the ludicrous notion that capitalism is non-hierarchical but that the fetish of capitalism is held to offer a popular, democratic and humanist self-realization which appears inclusive to all. This is a populist humanism in which the community members see in each other innate qualities that are expressly political and antagonistic, such as ‘learning what it is to be American’, but are experienced as universal. In keeping with this populist humanism, the warmth and serenity of the talk show format does not obstruct the reification and vicious dehumanization of the outsider, rather it is perfected. Speaking to the editor of the 9/12 website Beck and his audience share in a joke which precisely demonstrates how the outsider consecrates the very “human” warmth of the community:

Glenn Beck: Michael you just got back from 2 days in Washington DC.
Michael Opelka: I spent 2 days in Washington DC.
Beck: Sorry for that [panel, audience laughs]. Have we hosed you down? It’s a river of slime [more laughing].
Opelka: I don’t know if there is enough antibiotics in the world to cure what I have [speaks over loud laughter] (ibid).

The content of the joke reveals that the humanism of the movement relies upon a discourse of the parasitic outsider, in this case liberal politicians and special interests, described specifically in terms of filth and sickness. This is a perfect illustration that the human warmth of the community is constituted not just by the enemy but through the affective currency of investing in the fetish. Each claim of the fetish’s extraordinary properties (such as the notion that capitalism is grassroots) are not critically scrutinized but are rather
enthusiastically redoubled through personal testimonies validated by tears or other “authentic” forms of affect.

This populist humanism does not apply just to the talk show format but operates in Beck’s darker “truth-telling” format as well. In a 2009 program on Acorn, which featured a misleadingly edited undercover video in which a low-level Acorn employee appeared to endorse child prostitution, Beck’s pleas for a bi-partisan humanist consensus structure the show. Beck begins by announcing that: ‘tonight I want to appeal to your common decency. This isn’t about Republicans and Democrats any more, this is about Americans; who are we? If we can’t unite on this then the country will not stand’ (2009d). The terms are pretty clear; the moral challenge posed by Acorn threatens what Beck perceives as the shared terrain of liberals and conservatives, a rare acknowledgement that such a terrain might exist. The show proceeds with ten minutes of the standard Beck fare on Acorn, its links to the Obama administration and the conspiracy to sabotage the Republic, before presenting “incontrovertible truth” of Acorn’s involvement in child prostitution, murder and fraud. Upon this revelation Beck makes an impassioned plea in humanist terms:

Let me reach out to the rational reasonable Democrats...we agree, you love this country just as much as I do. You love the Constitution and the founding fathers just as much as I do. You love your children just as much as I do. You’re horrified at the prospect of anyone’s child, from any country on planet Earth, being exploited used and abused for some sickening sex trade...This is insanity, this is not about partisan politics [pause] this is about basic human decency... I’m asking you demand a full investigation all the way to the top (2009d).

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174 Acorn was later cleared of any illegality in late 2009 but not before it was stripped of all federal funding by the US congress (James 2009).
This humanist appeal demonstrates precisely what is meant by Beck’s and the Tea Party’s call for unity. Beck and his community are able to conceive their movement in simple moral terms and ask for national unification around an uncontroversial moral repulsion against child prostitution. However this simple unifying message is not as it appears, because it rests upon Beck’s layering of a vast conspiracy that connects Obama’s liberal largesse to child prostitution. This is precisely a populist humanism in that it frames those that would reject the terms of this conspiracy as embodying a boundless evil that accepts child prostitution as part of the means to destroy free market capitalism.

As an extension of this populist humanism Beck frequently offers a portrait of his authentic populist lifeworld as a means of consolidating the shared morality of the community and to prove his authenticity and sincerity. While his workshop is littered with what are presented as personal mementos or treasured historical artifacts gifted to him by guests on the show, one piece of his lifeworld functions as a fetish object par excellence, that is his old 1960s wood paneled Zenith television [see figure eleven]. In a broadcast following the passage of healthcare reform the fetish object allows him to portray a warmth and sincerity based on the vilification of liberals. The episode begins with Beck sitting next to the television explaining his post-anger serenity over the bill’s passage while literally stroking and patting the television175. Beck reminisces:

You know we all grew up in an America [pauses] I was sitting down here [points to the ground in front of the television] my mom used to have one of those, I don’t know what you would call them, a rag-tied rug in a big spiral in front of our television set...We all grew up

175 One of Žižek’s famous examples of a fetish object is the pet hamster of a friend who lost his wife (2008b: 299). The friend is able to endure this trauma and talk openly about it so long as he holds and strokes the hamster who was his wife’s favourite pet. For Beck the loss of this imagined childhood and the fact that the populist people do not exist are disavowed through the fetish object of his Zenith as evidenced by both his symbolic and physical attachment to it.
in an America that made sense and you always thought the bad
guys lost in the end (2010e).

Figure Eleven  – Beck, G. (2010e) ‘The Glenn Beck Program’, Fox News,
March 22.

The television functions as Beck’s happy place, a place that ineffably “just
makes sense”, where the good guys win. This piece of lifeworld acts to secure a
safe space of populist commonality from which may be launched a vicious
campaign of dehumanization of the enemy. Beck turns to his chalkboard and a
large plasma screen in a different space in the studio, a space where the
communist threat looms large, to compare the passage of healthcare to Neville
Chamberlain’s appeasement of Hitler, among other incendiary charges.
Having invoked the overdetermined enemy in this dark space Beck returns to
his personal touchstone of the lifeworld in front of the Zenith to deliver a
message of millenarian triumph:

I know you feel defeated today. You feel like “I did everything”, You
did everything you were told to do when you watch a TV like this
[strokes television] and your father used to say, “Channel 4”. [he
flips the switch, you see a test pattern]. I was the remote control as
the kid, I don’t know about you. But you did everything you were supposed to do. And it didn’t work, the bad guys won (ibid).

Beck goes on to explain that the progressives have exposed themselves and that the people have been awoken and will rally to restore the Republic. The juxtaposition of light and dark, and the portrayal of an authentic populist lifeworld, through the fetish object of the television, perfectly embodies the efficacy of the fetish. What is indisputable is how thoroughly contrived this authenticity is, yet it still works to reaffirm a populist morality. In one moment in this happy space Beck even hits the top of the television and the picture, a black and white image of the Glenn Beck logo, is disrupted, to which Beck remarks: ‘Wow look at that, remember when TVs used to do that? (ibid)’. Beck and his audience community are well aware that this television has been wired to simulate a sentimental viewing experience as part of Beck’s spectacle, yet this contrivance does not matter as they are reconciled in their fetish. Even if one considers Beck the media entrepreneur to be simply a cynical manipulator, the logic of difference and equivalence in this maneuver is exemplary of the fetish’s structure of belief and disavowal. The Tea Party populists know very well that this authenticity is a thoroughly contrived spectacle, nevertheless they believe in it as it reifies the affective bonds of the populist community. It is precisely the fetishized moral community, whose mediatized character is nicely embodied in the object of the television, that grants Beck license to perform a brutal vilification of the enemy.

**Glenn Beck and Race**

Glenn Beck and the Tea Party have bedeviled liberals on the question of how exactly racism structures Tea Party ontology. The *New York Times* narrative of white backlash against Obama does not adequately explain the role of civil rights iconography at the centre of the Tea Party. Beck has been a critical figure in this regard, extending to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 60s the same exaltation as he reserves for the founding fathers. On his *Founders’ Friday* shows Beck goes to considerable lengths to celebrate African-American history and figures such as Frederick Douglass, whose image appears in the opening credits of the program. It is quite astonishing
that in a commercial media field that can be defined largely by immediacy and an absence of historical consciousness, Glenn Beck could present himself as the keeper of history and African-American history nonetheless. What is clear is that the right-wing reconciliation with this history is intended to incorporate the struggles for racial equality into the bourgeois principle of equality of condition before the law. Thus Beck and the Tea Party attempt to suspend the political development of Martin Luther King specifically\(^\text{176}\), to a mere legalism and incorporate anti-racist signifiers into their universalist discourse of American private property. This manipulation is emblematic of a neo-liberal racism not simply in the limiting of the meaning of civil rights struggle but in the manner that it enables a savage re-articulation of an anti liberal-welfare discourse. The attempts to unify the founding fathers, the constitution, the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movement as all battles for free-market capitalism against socialist tyranny is a tall order. This of course requires the disavowal of the original status of African-Americans as private property whose torture and exploitation built the capital base of the country. In order to achieve this Beck and his resident charlatan David Barton repeatedly claim that the constitution is an ‘anti-slavery’ document with the three-fifths clause\(^\text{177}\) ingenuously crafted to assure the eventual abolition of slavery (Dhillon 2011). The effect is to disavow the founding violence of the

\(^\text{176}\) Beck granted Chris Wallace of *Fox News Sunday* an exclusive interview immediately after the 8/28 rally. Wallace asked Beck ‘the civil rights was always about and economic agenda’ to which Beck responded ‘that’s a part of it that I don’t agree with’ (2010).

\(^\text{177}\) The three-fifths clause was written in to the US constitution as a means for Southern states to count their slave populations in order to increase their representation in congress. Barton and Beck claim that the Northern states wanted to count slaves as full human beings, not merely three-fifths, as a way to force the eventual overturn of slavery. The opposite is in fact true as Southern states wanted maximum representation and full personhood for slaves while of course denying them all civil and human rights. It is clearly not the case that the three-fifths clause was a brilliant abolitionist maneuver. The original constitution’s lack of the mention of slavery and the description of slavery as ‘Persons...bound to service for a terms of years’ make the document decisively status quo with regards to slavery.
nation and the congenital condition of private property as ‘dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt’ (Marx: 532) while turning the liberal enemy that impinges upon private property into the position of slave-master.

The Tea Party’s contradictory treatment of race cannot be understood without Beck’s populist humanism in which the incorporation of anti-racism is inextricably linked to a neo-liberal racism. This is the racism that sees any opponent of capital or those unable to realize themselves in the market as lesser beings. In the face of the failures of political correctness and liberal paternalism to engender a real substance of equality, incorporating certain anti-racist signifiers into the fetish of the productivist people does offer a radical and antagonistic substance of equality. Thus African-Americans who are invested in the fetish of America are given their full human dignity, while others, depicted as liberals and welfare recipients, are dehumanized. This is precisely the formula of Beck’s program following the passage of healthcare reform. In the midst of Beck’s tirade against liberal treachery, he lambasts House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for calling the bill ‘historic’ and an extension of the civil rights legacy. What follows are a series of iconic images comparing an unflattering picture of Pelosi with various historic moments (Gettysburg Address, Iwo Jima, moon landing) with Beck livid over this perceived disparity. Beck somehow manages to escalate his fury over the question of civil rights as if this is the most egregious outrage. With an image of a lunch-counter sit-in Beck is indignant: ‘How DARE you! Look at this picture! THEY REFUSED TO GET UP!’ (2010e). Beck pauses with a pregnant silence before the picture of Pelosi returns and Beck speaks with a quiet trembling voice: ‘I don’t know how you could be offended by that?’ (ibid). As a self-styled defender of the civil rights legacy Beck is affronted, as it is implied that all Americans should be, at the usurping of this legacy. There is of course no hint of irony that might indicate that this expropriation is exactly what Beck and

178 Beck is extremely agitated during this comparison calling the bill ‘nothing short of an assault on our republic’ (2010e) and later compares it favorably to a series of images which include 9/11, Pearl Harbour and Chamberlain’s appeasement.
the Tea Party are attempting, rather in keeping with the logic of fetishist disavowal one’s own crimes can be displaced onto the enemy.

As the humanism of Beck relies upon a fundamental political exclusion, it is not long before Beck’s civil rights posture reveals its true character. In an aforementioned moment where he describes the inevitable awakening of Americans to the evil of healthcare reform, Beck proceeds to list for his community who ‘you’re up against’ (2010e). The list is illustrative of a neoliberal racism and the imagined network of parasites that structure the Tea Party frontier. Beck elaborates; ‘You’re up against the Marxists…the professors. Oh your tweed suit is really scaring me [sarcasm]. Then your up against the corrupt, they’re easily outed, and the duped, they’re just a bunch of dummies’ (ibid). Beck’s routine then ratchets up an angry populist derision in ridiculing the enemy:

But then the real bulk of the army, the one that they’re really expecting to cast the deciding vote for Barack Obama, they are the people who are just like: “Hey man I just can’t make it on my own, I just really could use a handout right now”. You got to take on that guy, look out. Nobody’s going to win against a army, a legion of those guys [sarcasm] (ibid).

There is a very important racial coding of this character that Beck has brought to life who could be called the “white hippy stoner” and, despite being an object of ridicule, it is important to note the idea that these “goldbrickers” constitute Obama’s army. From this vulgar characterization, Beck instantly switches to a more serious tone: ‘let’s focus on them for a minute because that’s who they’re counting on in the end to pull them through’ (ibid). Beck then plays a piece of audio from October 2009 which features a right wing radio host interviewing African-American residents from Detroit who are lined up to apply for a federal anti-homelessness program. The content of the
clip is not contextualized but left to assume the full phantasmagorical horror of the image of inner-city minorities dependent on welfare:

Reporter: Why are you here?
Women: To get some money.
Reporter: What kind of money?
Women: Obama money.
Reporter: Where’s it coming from?
Women: Obama.
Reporter: Where did Obama get it?
Women: I don’t know his stash. I don’t know. I don’t know where he got it from, but he givin’ [sic] it to us to help us, and we love him.
Women: That’s why we voted for him.
[children chanting: Obama! Obama!] (ibid)

The racism at work here plays on the fear of hordes of inner-city blacks on welfare and Regan’s specter of “Welfare Queens” all enabled by a socialist tyrant whose “stash” is the hard-earned money of the productive populist people. Beck is clearly aware of the line he is crossing and therefore weds this blatant invocation of the racist imaginary with the “white hippy stoner” character that has preceded it. This cast of characters allows Beck to disavow his racism as he claims to despise the hippy stoner just as much as the Welfare Queen. Beck is claiming not to see color, merely the threat of socialism and tyranny brought on by a social dependency that threatens the virtuous people. The ability of Beck to engage in the most vile dehumanization of inner-city minorities can only be enabled by the professed admiration for the civil rights movement and Beck’s lament that Obama’s socialism will mean ‘chains of

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579 In a mediatized age where de-contextualized YouTube clips are often held to have expository “truth” value, this genre of the “welfare-exploitation” video has flourished. Even documentary filmmaker and Democrat Alexandra Pelosi, daughter of Nancy, has engaged in this practice (Coates 2012).
slavery!’ (ibid) for the people. Thus the anti-racist struggle is understood as singularly the battle for free market capitalism against socialism180.

Much has been made of Beck’s audacious claims to ‘reclaim the civil rights movement’ (Media Matters Staff 2010) and his invocations of King at his “non-political” 8/28 “Restoring Honor” rally in Washington. The particular racialization of Obama and his “loyal army” cannot be understood without the populist dichotomization of race between those that are central to mythology of the people and those that threaten the people. Beck would explain on his radio that ‘we were the people that did it [civil rights] in the first place’ (ibid), thus those liberals that engage in an identity politics triumphalism around Obama’s presidency are corrupters of the legacy. Beck attempted to present the event as an apolitical religious revival with participants instructed to leave signs at home, giving the appearance of something akin to King’s beloved community as opposed to the more hostile Tea Party standard fare. From the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on the anniversary of King’s famous speech Beck would declare that the event was ‘something beyond man...[as] America today begins to turn back to God’ (Associated Press 2010). The faith post-partisan coding of his community of course belies the same political frontier as Obama’s faith is characterized by Beck as ‘Marxism disguised as religion’ (Wallace 2010). Therefore restoration of honor and faith in Washington and America denotes the populist’s privileged access to God and the universality of American values181.

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180 One cannot help but notice here the inversion of class struggle. Just as certain forms of Marxism have been criticized for collapsing other identity struggles into the singularity of the class struggle, so to Beck’s fetish of capitalism is deemed to unlock all forms of freedom and emancipation.

181 This convergence of God and property is not new and the Tea Party chain of equivalence has always included the religious right however in a new articulation that passes through economy first. In Chapter Two I discussed how the discourse of property and the expansion of the American frontier has always been steeped in notions Manifest Destiny.
The dehumanization of the other, upon which the moral community is based, is rendered explicitly by Beck in the penultimate broadcast leading into the rally. Appearing on the show is Alveida King, niece of Martin Luther King Jr, in order to revere her uncle while lending Beck the cover to shamelessly analogize the two events. Beck in his darker moments of “truth-telling” has a penchant for predicting his eventual martyrdom and explains in the opening monologue that he will die for the cause of 8/28: ‘I am willing to lose my life, my fortune, but not [restraining tears] my sacred honor’ (2010g). Later in his sentimental interview of Alveida King, Beck frames his movement as courageously overcoming fear and the same threats of violence from an oppressive power structure. Beck explains:

I know some people are afraid because they think “Oh the Black Panthers might show up” and some people think that it’s a big risk to come. Let me tell you something, when you look at your father or your uncle, they sometimes you could see it, they were afraid. They stood with God as their shield...The people that marched with your father and uncle, they knew how to take it dogs, billy clubs, people in America aren’t used to that. And I say to people no matter if people are shouting at you, just link arms and sing a hymn. (2010g).

Beck then explicitly compares his sacrifice to that of the King family:

Beck: When you got on the plane to come here, I had the talk with my kids, what did your family say?
King: Well they ask why aren’t you home, and my daughter says I know they killed your uncle and your daddy, but you make sure you come home (ibid).

Beck and the Tea Party’s appropriation of the civil rights movement does not simply provide the populists cover from accusations of racism but allows them to construct Obama and his army of stoners, welfare queens, professors and the New Black Panther Party as a repressive state apparatus. The elevation of King and the civil rights movement to the status of “re-founders”, that is not
founding fathers but re-founding fathers, cannot proceed without being coupled to the menace of the New Black Panther Party. A marginal extremist, group the Party stands in for the most wild fantasies of black urban unrest and the threat to private property. The Tea Party populists really believe that they are victims of structural violence and oppression, that there is a real enemy to overcome and that they stand for, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr, the arc of the moral universe, that is a people reconciled in private property.

Truth Telling and Rationalism
The mediatized character of Tea Party ontology is not simply manifest in Beck’s performative embodiment of authenticity, the movement discourse of the program or the political logics of difference and equivalence, but critically in Beck’s pedagogical “truth-telling” mode. It is here that the aforementioned components of Beck’s habitus coalesce around his role of ‘parrhesiaste’ (Foucault 2001). Foucault defines this practice of classical rhetoric as a form of plain-speaking or ‘frankness’ in which the parrhesiaste lays out their sincere belief/truth, demonstrating ‘the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger’ (ibid: 16). There is a critical distinction between the modern Cartesian subject of enlightenment who arrives at truth through a self-critical process of ‘evidential experience’ and the Greek notion in which there is no gap between belief and truth as ‘truth-having is guaranteed by the possession of certain moral qualities’ (ibid: 14-15), specifically courage and sincerity. This logic of “truth-telling” and “speaking truth to power”, validated by Beck’s baring of his soul and vulnerabilities for all to see, is precisely the populist epistemology at work here. Despite the validity of Beck’s truth claims resting upon a populist shared moral sensibility in which the people “just know” what is right and moral, Beck is careful to couch this operation in the media field’s terms of rationalism and enlightenment182. In this sense Beck positions himself both inside and beyond the field, attempting to synthesize the two modes of truth having access to the fear, gravity and moral clarity of parrhesia, and the universalist validity claims of rationalism. This habitus of “truth-teller”

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is clearly a product of the field as Beck uses parrhesia to reach past the sterility of field’s notions of truth to express the severity of the political moment. In this way Beck is able to monopolize crisis and antagonism and speak to the legitimacy crisis of the media field. Thus Beck and the Tea Party’s greatest impact upon the liberal-democratic polity is not the ruthless dehumanization of the liberal enemy but rather the articulation of a populist exceptionalism that spurious claims the universal values of the media field and liberal democracy.

In assuming the role of the parrhesiaste in his “eye-opening” expositions, Beck lays out the personal journey that has brought him to this awakening, which in itself serves to validate Beck’s claim to truth. This moment of awakening is painful and Beck shares this pain in order to empathize with his community that the truth may be hard to accept. It should be clear that Beck’s discourse obviously does not qualify as genuine parrhesia in that this “truth” is not hard to accept but represents a fanciful escape from the truth into a fetishized identity. In one of the many episodes where Beck outlines the communist/progressive plot he talks about his own disbelief as a validity test of this unimpeachable truth. The episode features an interview with a revisionist historian whom Beck interviews about his book rehabilitating Joseph McCarthy:

I picked up this book about 2-3 years ago...I put it down and the reason why I put it down is, I don’t want to believe this. I don’t want to believe it. I put it down and went, “I’m not ready to hear that”, “I can’t handle that”. Please America, please read this book (2010f).

This statement embodies the dual character of Beck’s epistemology as it encapsulates both the emotional sincerity that validates the content and the semblance of the rational as Beck suggests this truth is arrived at through rigorous, often painful, study that dislodges one’s worldview. This bifurcation between the moral and the rational has the effect of transforming his audience community into the resistance cell’s study group. Richard Hofstader in his
study of anti-communist populism described an ‘intensely rationalistic’ (1965: 36) logic, built by the pseudo-scholarship of anti-intellectual intellectuals, which protects the populist ‘from having to attend to disturbing considerations that do not fortify his ideas’ (ibid: 38). Beck brings his intellectual apparatus into being, not merely by relying upon mediatized conservative public intellectuals such as Dinesh D'Souza or Niall Ferguson, but in his own mediatized embodiment of the convergence of the media field and academia, most notably in establishing Beck University183.

Beck’s truth-telling episodes begin in a pedagogic manner with a lecture outline and/or a research problematic. Beck will often begin his show by asking his viewers to “DVR this episode and share it with your friends” as if the material that will be covered is too dense to comprehend in one sitting184. The opening of his episode on the Cloward-Piven Strategy begins by summarizing his task as the following:

Hello America, tonight we are going to take on the economy. We have done our homework, our research [points at books behind him] a lot of it over the last year. Tonight we’re just going to focus on the economy, I’m going to close the case on what Barack Obama has said is the fundamental transformation of the country. I believe it is the destruction of our monetary system. We’ve got a lot of work to do so buckle up (2009c).

This façade of research and critical evaluation of course belies a self-referential universe in which the populist mind is closed by the ever-expanding scope of the enemy, a fact validated by Beck’s emotional sincerity.

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183 Beck University was a value added feature on his Insider Extreme website subscription service where users could pay for a lecture series, given by conservatives such as David Barton who, while a best-selling author, holds no post-graduate academic qualifications.

184 At the start of his series on Soros, Beck urged his audience that: ‘We are trying to get through a very difficult problem in a short period of time I ask that you vcr or dvd every episode this week’ (2010h).
In embodying the sincerity of the parrhesiaste Beck will repeatedly disavow the closed logic of his populist community stating: ‘Don’t just listen to me but do your own homework, research yourself, this is far too important (2010h)’. In this instance Beck’s statement is followed by a clip of one of his chalkboard expositions as if this were a primary source. In another episode Beck exhorts ‘do your own homework, you have to figure this out for yourself’ while the chyron flashes in large point font ‘GLENNBECK.COM’ (2010i). This process of reasoning, rationalizing and acquiring knowledge is given a radical emancipatory character by Beck as he claims that his show has: ‘armed you with the most powerful weapon you have, information you need’ (2010i). The spuriousness of this rationalism and the wedding of claims to universal knowledge with the emotional certainty that defines populism means the Tea Party construct themselves as possessing exclusive access to the truth and enlightenment as they, in contrast to the mainstream media, are the only ones who dare ask ‘reasonable questions in unreasonable times’ (Beck 2009d).


The urgency of Beck’s message and the radical and emancipatory properties of knowledge, rationalism and enlightenment are conveyed by Beck in assuming the role of the tortured parrhesiaste. The truth he expounds is validated by his
suffering and his embrace of the consequences this truth might inflict upon him. This anguish, which rests beneath the surface of every broadcast, is crystallized in his series on Soros. In the final segment of his first episode Beck transitions from his chalkboard/professorial context into the intimate setting of his own lifeworld. The set has been transformed to appear as a sitting room [see figure twelve]. There is a large screen that is backlit to appear as a window illuminated by the sun, there are shelves filled with books, a vintage radio, a projector and an American flag. Behind Beck there is an antique rocking horse and next to him is his Zenith with a picture of Soros appearing on the screen. Beckretires to this slice of his inner world to deliver a sincere message of the cost of truth stating; ‘There is a personal story we need to share with you’ (2010h). He proceeds to explain how a representative of Soros reached out to Beck’s producer requesting a meeting. The representative was described as wild and out of control, claiming that Beck was ‘hurting their business and Mr Soros’ (ibid). In a moment of supreme irony Beck feigns concern for the supposed irrationality of these claims. When Beck’s producer stood firm on the validity of Beck’s claims Soros’ representative is described as offering a clear threat:

He looked at my executive and said, “I don’t think you hear me”, “I don’t think you understand. Glenn Beck is hurting Mr Soros and his business” (ibid).

This “incident” looms large over the next two episodes as Beck both offers Soros the prospect of reconciliation\(^\text{185}\) while accepting the consequences for his truth telling as he states resolutely that: ‘as long as I have breath I will always speak what I think is the truth’ (ibid).

\(^{185}\) Beck extends an open invitation to Soros to appear on the program for an interview, a request that clearly cannot be granted because there is nothing to gain for Soros yet it allows Beck’s audience to wonder “What has he got to hide?”.
While resolved to his fate Beck will slip from tranquility to anguish as if simply serving as the medium for the truth, a truth more powerful than his own frail humanity. In the final episode of what he called his ‘three-hour epic’ Beck shifts to unbridled apocalypticism entreated his audience to embrace this painful truth:

Look I know that soon, soon, the gates of hell [headrocking for emphasis] are going to be opened up...It is time to take a stand! You have to take a stand because my children and your children’s freedom is at stake (2010j).

This prophet’s anguish is deployed to portray a certain moral purity that allows the truth to speak through him. Again Beck’s sincerity and sacrifice are used as evidence of the indisputable nature of Beck’s claims, ‘I did this for a reason, not for ratings...I did it because I believe it, I did it because you need to know’ (ibid). Lastly in signing off from the program Beck performs a self-aggrandizing gesture that suggests that this act might be his last stating that: ‘I’d like to be remembered for three things. Question with boldness, hold to truth, speak without fear’ (ibid).

This performative embodiment of parrhesia operating within the space of the media field was unprecedented. Beck is able articulate a truth that extends beyond the constraints of the liberal media field, dismissed by Beck as part of the enemy’s complex, while attempting to reclaim notions of enlightenment and rationalism as constitutive of populist ontology. The role of sincerity and courage in parrhesiatic discourse corresponds to the ineffable populist notion of a shared morality that exists simply because the populist knows it exists. The sincerity and authenticity of Beck’s discourse is validated as truthful by virtue of the fact that the populist believes it to be true. There is a perfectly fetishistic mode of truth and disavowal at work here in which Beck creates the enemy’s all-encompassing power and claims to be in danger as he speaks truth to this power. Beck would claim in his final episode on Soros that his truth is demonstrable simply by the fact that he remains on air and that the power structure can not deny the veracity of his claims: ‘Ask yourself this could I put
on three hours of lies on television against the most powerful man and the most powerful groups in the world? Couldn’t be done (2010j)’. What is truly novel in Beck’s habitus of “truth-teller” is not simply the paranoid delusions that animate his lifeworld but the manner in which this fetishistic notion of truth is masked by the universal truth claims of rationalism and enlightenment. The populist lifeworld has become the measure of truth, which assumes the full character of the media field’s universalist claims. Thus the return of the political in the mediatized social space has taken the form of a populist exceptionalism in which an exclusive people have a monopoly on the universal over and above the enemy that represents an existential threat to this universality.

**Conclusion**

Glenn Beck and his audience community of Tea Partiers represent the height of mediatized politics realizing the full populist potential of the new media field. Beck’s program performs a temporal spatial bridging of a populist public who are alienated and isolated from traditional political institutions by neoliberalism, as evidenced by the distinct anti-globalist, anti-finance rhetoric. The populist’s fetish of a people reconciled in capitalism is not rationally defined by the invisible hand and the common good of individual self-interest but rather by the affective filling of private property with the tropes of Americanism. In connecting the movement Beck is serving as a media entrepreneur of the highest order as the free labour of his audience simultaneously consecrate his authenticity. This lends a populist legitimacy to his pseudo-political events, Fox News, the end-times products he hawks and to his burgeoning media empire of radio, publishing and web-tv. The critical aspect that defines Beck’s authenticity, and the very mediatized nature of the movement, is the discourse of self-realization and the reverence for “You”, the self-determining audience. This discourse is central to the biopolitical expansion into the social space as free labour and the commodification of social relations is experienced as the extension of one’s being. The logics of difference and equivalence that define the irreducibility of the political are applied in an expressly populist manner as the populist’s certainty allows this movement to feed off this moral clarity, fetishism and absolutism.
It is the biopolitical character of Beck and Fox’s audience production that allows them to colonize and centralize organic aspects of right wing populism. However any permanent incorporation of mediatized subjects as merely the brand’s foot soldiers defies the logic of the political. The political is pure antagonism and cannot yield to the imperatives of NewsCorp, the Republican party or Beck. The tensions and contradictions of the mediatized expansion into the social space are apparent in the very content of the movement as they simultaneously embody the biopolitical logics of affect and self commodification in the new media field while resisting precisely, in antagonistic terms, the ideological content of Empire. This is not to claim that the Tea Party are the multitude rather to emphasize that there is no innate commonality that extends simply from Empire’s liberal discourses of cosmopolitanism or a virtual being in common. Rather biopolitical production represents an opening in the media field to different hegemonic articulations, political frontiers and forms of resistance. In this sense the Tea Party represent a proto-fascist resistance to the new spirit of capitalism and Empire, thus a defense of liberal universality and the media field will require a properly political re-conceptualization. The emerging signs of just such a re-articulation will be taken up in the coming chapter on new spaces in the media field.

Beck’s populism is materialized consistently over his two and a half years at Fox not simply in content but in the form of his broadcast. The program was truly unique for its pastiche of different genres and habitus’ of the media field as Beck assumed the role of professor, evangelist, personable talk-show host and parhesiaste. Beck offers himself to his audience as a flawed vessel yet this very authenticity and sincerity lets the populist truth speak through him. In these multifarious roles and expressing a wide emotional range, Beck constructs a populist holism that juxtaposes the savage dehumanization of the enemy with the warmth of the community. The fetishistic investment in the overdetermined enemy is the principal symptom of populist ontology with this nefarious enemy serving as the very basis of the Tea Party people. The singular obsession of Beck’s program was delineating the supposed web of the
Obama-Soros network of subversion, which assumed a phantasmagoric evil of a manifold and contradictory character. In keeping with the fetishistic structure of populist belief, these moments of total darkness structure the very human warmth of the populist community. What was particularly skillful in Beck’s approach were the moments of humanist warmth and calls for post-partisan consensus, which seemed to pull back from total enmity. This humanist ploy in fact merely served to perform a more vicious form of dehumanization. While the darker apocalypticism of Beck might be disregarded as hyperbole these moments of human warmth fundamentally deny the enemy access to basic humanity. It is this logic of the enemy, with whom the populist is obsessed and consumed with envy, that we can understand Beck and the Tea Party’s contradictory treatment of race. Their attempts to claim the legacy of the civil rights movement, reducing it to the singular struggle for the bourgeois equality of condition, allows for the incorporation of anti-racist signifiers and a universalist discourse while deploying a neo-liberal racism that devalues those implicated in the network of the enemy.

Where this populist spectacle begins to effect a real violence upon the values of the media field and the broader liberal polity is in the populist claim to the universal. The sophistication of Beck in surpassing the standard partisanship of Fox is in constructing a populist lifeworld of authenticity and sincerity, which is validated by virtue of a people’s affective investment in this authenticity. This authenticity does not simply represent an embittered retreat into a populist lifeworld but an attempt to claim exclusive access to the truth as Beck assumes the role of the parrhesiaste. Parrhesia is a truth more powerful than the liberal field’s sterile notions of objectivity and Beck is able to present himself as tormented by the power of this truth. This very fact that the truth deracines and exposes one’s self to insecurity is used as a validity claim by Beck as he both constructs the enemy’s omnipotence and fears it. The notion that Beck and the Tea Party represent a brutal form of truth-telling
that embraces the violence this exacts on one’s symbolic universe, is of course laughable. This very truth claim serves as a fetishist disavowal of the contradictions of the American Republic of Property *par excellence*. As a media entrepreneur operating in the media field, Beck’s truth claims are not strictly limited to his access to the populist lifeworld but push past the limits of the field to reclaim values of rationalism and the Enlightenment. The populist *knows* the truth simply by virtue of fetishized belief. However, Beck is explicit in disavowing this logic and framing his audience as a self-determining, rational and enlightened community involved in rigorous scholarship. What the collapsing of these two epistemologies, as a populist fetishism is regarded as a universalist truth claim, realizes is a populist exceptionalism which does not simply exclude and dehumanize liberals but constructs the people and the Tea Party as having exclusive access to the truth and the media field’s values of universality. The coming chapter however will expose the limits of this maneuver as the political defies the disciplines of either Beck or *Fox*. Mediatization and biopolitical production have created a space of possibles in the media field where the logics of difference and equivalence can unleash both pure fetishist antagonism or the affective investment in a critical mediatized habitus.

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186 Beck is very fond of references to *The Matrix* and in one episode even staged a scene with a “red pill” and a “blue pill” (2009b).
Chapter Eight – New Spaces in the Media Field

Introduction
In the analysis of the last two chapters I have established the contours that divide the media field between the liberal cultural capital of *The New York Times* and the populist exceptionalism of Glenn Beck and *Fox News*. What is apparent is the complete failure of liberalism, as instituted in the cultural practice of journalism, to properly explain or confront Tea Party populism. Traditional notions of the field and a liberal-democratic polity are endangered not merely by this inadequacy but in the populist reclamation of values such as tolerance, civility, humanism and rationalism, as terms filled with exclusive populist content. What this chapter sets out to identify are the new spaces in the media field or ‘spaces of possibles’ (Bourdieu 1996b: 234) that emerge with the transformation of the field, specifically with the biopolitical penetration of the social space. The Tea Party as a mediatized community, bridged across physical space by *Fox* and Beck, represent the ontological necessity of antagonism that is the political. And while this populist brand community is exemplary of the media field's biopolitical expansion, the political defies this domestication as merely a commercial imperative. The very perfection of audience commodification and the incorporation of free and affective labour presents a possible opening in the field to resist the ‘dominant principle of domination’ (Bourdieu 1996a: 265).

The media field can presently be defined by a state of flux as notions of its autonomy and cultural capital have become destabilized by the journalistic quest for the authentic people. This invites the populist attempt to claim liberal universality and the fracturing of a unified public around the logics of difference and equivalence. The innovation of *Fox*’s populist commercialism is that it effectively collapses the poles of valorization in the field between economic and cultural capital as *Fox* draws on the authenticity of the social and the political, elevating this popular dimension to the height of its symbolic power. This was expressed in Chapter Five in my diagram of the new media field where three media entities *Fox News*, Glenn Beck (along with his
independent ventures) and *Tea Party Nation* (TPN) were overlapped and connected *Fox* to the mediatized social space in which TPN resides.

What underpins this development is the hegemony of the new audience commodity of immaterial labour and the accompanying discourses of self-determination and authenticity, necessary to secure free labour in constructing the very social networks that perfect audience commodification. This biopolitical penetration by capital has given rise to a new mediatized habitus, existing across the field and social space, that values self-determination, authenticity and communal solidarity in a manner that could potentially exceed the commodification of such lifeworld categories. The cultural logic of mediatization in the broader field of power is that of individuation, self-commodification and the embodiment of spectacle. However the infrastructure of mediatized life is expressly social, outside of the direct control of capital and possesses potential to construct affective bonds in a new hegemonic project. My intention is to establish the limits of the domestication of the political and the potential for a new political articulation of universality, that, while limited cannot be dismissed.

In identifying new spaces in the media field that surpass either a populist commercialism or a moribund liberalism in mediating the Obama/Tea Party frontier, I have selected the social network *TPN* and the web television network *The Young Turks* (TYT). *TPN* is exemplary of the fetishistic and mediatized nature of the Tea Party phenomenon. The social media site is a terrain of pure antagonism where the vilification, dehumanization and ridicule of the enemy functions to create the affective bonds of the community. New media practices of interactivity, memes, mash-ups and culture jamming are able to unleash the pure *jouissance* of investing in the enemy an amorphous and boundless evil. This functions precisely as a fetishistic *jouissance* in sanctioning social transgressions, the fantasy that the people really exist and the retreat into lifeworld, while simultaneously giving users a sense of a critical media habitus. *TPN* exemplifies the fetishist structure of belief in a deadly serious enemy that enables a community of obscene *jouissance*. The fetish does not merely serve as an affective marker of the
community but also functions as a “rational” validity claim in which the fantasy of the enemy is experienced as objective. It is in this way that Fox is excommunicated from the authentic core of the movement as it is unable to function in this mode of pure jouissance and accept fetishist validity claims while retaining any pretense to the values of the field.

TYT represents an attempt to antagonistically reclaim the liberal universality of the media field in conceptualizing journalism as struggle and the audience as activist. The convergence of TYT, as a mediatized community, and Occupy Wall Street (OWS) crystallized a frontier of a liberal universal people in battle against the objective forces of political economy, that is corporations and their political servants. This is a properly critical and political notion of media practice in demarcating a universal subject position while engaging in antagonistic, public struggle in defense of liberal universality. The program defines its mission as truth-telling and rational exposition, in antagonistic terms, while users are affectively invested in a liberal universality. TYT’s critical inflection of journalistic values, and the ability to engender the biopolitical labour of users, is dependent upon channeling the participatory culture and ludic sensibilities of the new media space. Around the TYT network a whole self-referential language of memes and mash-ups cement the affective investment in TYT’s notion of the field. TYT’s formulation of liberal universality is not unproblematic and does not overcome some of the tropes of American populism; however it represents the potential for a political notion of the field to supplant a moribund, unantagonistic liberalism. The critical question is whether new media practices supplement a critical notion of the field, or become a form of jouissance in and of themselves, preventing users from confronting fetishized notions of capitalism and liberal-democracy.

Critical Media Spaces
Before proceeding to my analysis of the selected media it is necessary to clarify the characteristics of this heterogeneous mediatized space that cannot be neatly confined to a single or dichotomous logic. In mapping out the coordinates of this space it becomes possible to approach the question of what manner of critical media might emerge mobilizing a political notion of the
public capable of reclaiming the universality of the media field. The importance of the media field in this thesis is premised upon the relationship between mediatized social life, biopolitical production and the new spirit of capitalism. The ability of new media technologies and social networks to engender a sense of authentic community and self-determination, is critical in inculcating the performative embodiment of spectacle and commodified identity. This is decidedly what is at work in the campaign successes of Obama, that is the ability to elicit the social imaginary of civil society and grassroots democracy while containing the public within an individualized lifestyle politics. Obama realizes what Acherman describes as a ‘collective narcissism’ (2012: 5) with the campaign message of “It’s all about YOU” (see Chapter One) corresponding perfectly to the new spirit’s notion of self-realization and individuation. Discourses of alternative media and the participatory culture of new media have become key ideological supports for the media field and the new spirit. This is embodied both in the field’s deference to the new savvy self-determining media pro-sumer and the hegemony of authenticity in all manner of social life from politics to consumption.

Despite the media field’s role in biopolitical production it is important to retain a dialectic between the expansion of exploitation and the field’s potential to produce new political subjectivities. My intention is to distinguish between a new media pessimism that simply sees the old in the new, as either the minimal widening of permissible discourse (Benson 2006) or the capacity for ‘infinite exploitation’ (Fuchs 2012: 636), and more sanguine notions of new media’s emancipatory potential (Kellner & Kahn 2004). In order to precisely theorize just what potential lies in the field and where the very social forms of exploitation may engender the return of the political, it is necessary to draw on Fuchs’ distinction between ‘alternative’ and ‘critical’ media (2012, Sandoval & Fuchs 2010). In the mediatization of social life and production,

\[187\] In Chapter One I examined how the Obama campaign defined itself as a ‘wiki’ movement responding to the collaborative logic of social media and analogous to the free software movement. In much of Kate Zernike’s reports on the Tea Party in the NYT’s the humanist quest to find the authentic people led her to validate the anti-liberal populists as the embodiment of grass-roots democracy and people power.
categories of alternative, social, new and old media defy neat typologies. Various aspects of alternative media whether blogging, tweeting, citizen journalism, political activism or culture jamming ‘have become part of everyday mainstream media use’ (Anderssen: 757). At the risk of stating the obvious, there is no emancipatory potential simply by virtue of new media practices and user self-determination 188, rather this is contingent upon a critical inflection and appropriation of such practices. For Fuchs the threshold of criticality is not simply alternative media forms but ‘critical content’ aimed at ‘advancing social struggles that transform society towards the realization of co-operative potentials’ (Fuchs: 180-1). Critical media are antagonistic and political in taking ‘the standpoint of oppressed groups or exploited classes and mak[ing] the judgement that structures of oppression and exploitation benefit certain classes at the expense of others and hence should be radically transformed’ (Sandoval & Fuchs: 146). The extent to which alternative media practices are able to resist incorporation within the new spirit, as just another critique of inauthenticity, is dependent upon identifying capitalism as the dominate form of oppression and exploitation. It is this question of re-politicizing economy as a site of struggle that defines critical media as a means to realize a political articulation that might supersede the liberal/populist deadlock.

My use of Bourdieu and description of critical media as a space of possibles denotes both the emergence of critical media in the mediatized social space and the sense that critical media must traverse a wide range of media forms and networks of social relations in order materialize politicized publics in real physical space. The importance of the mediatized social space in the case of

188 This is the liberal pluralist position of Matt Bai’s NYT article ‘D.I.Y. Populism Left and Right’ which saw no critical difference between the liberal activism of MoveOn.org and the anti-liberal Tea Party. Despite the humanist portrayal of a new authentic grass-roots politics online and beyond, both on the left and the right, what this proves is that there is no essential liberal or democratic character to social and alternative media. The liberal pluralist optimism of Bai is also incapable of grasping how the Tea Party’s antagonistic notion of the political threatens the very liberalism that forms the basis of his optimism.
the Tea Party resides in the fact that the signifier “Tea Party” managed to condense signification around an affective investment in this notion of the people. This is a properly political space able to embody the antagonistic character of the social; however this populist iteration is still confined to an acting out of the political that ultimately disavows the political. The Tea Party are a symptom of neo-liberal individuation in a dialectic between Obama’s narcissistic community and the populist’s public display of a retreat into a fetishized lifeworld. Both are anti-publics if we take radical publicness in all its indeterminacy as the normative basis of democracy (see Chapter Two). The critical question of what constitutes a space of possibles in the media field is whether the interaction between critical media users in ‘material social contexts...create[s] new spaces for discourse and coordinated action’ (Bennett 2003: 26). Such a media can be described as ‘rhizomatic’ and relational, able to link ‘different protest groups and movements and connect the local and global, and establish different types of relationships with the market and/or the state’ (Fuchs: 176–7). This is in contrast to a mediatized individuation where one is connected yet isolated, remaining within the confines of a privatized identity politics. Thus the public component of critical media is irreducible as it aspires towards a ‘universalistic solidarity in the civil sphere’ (ibid: 186). This is not to say that a single media will emerge perfectly embodying the universality of the media field, rather this space has the potential for heterogeneous forms of critical media practice, to be bridged across time and space, and condense around a political frontier.

Defining what new media practices and locations within the mediatized field constitute critical media is dependent upon the articulation of a hegemonic chain of equivalences. As Anderssen describes, the new spirit of capitalism ‘creates a post-democratic pseudo public where all kinds of critique may be voiced without any consistent response’ (758). The challenge is to link across critical media spaces and push upwards in claiming the universality of the field and contesting the field of power. Therefore there is not a single critical

189 This is the case with various online petitions and campaigns that aspire only to a presence in virtual civil society. The purest embodiment of this in the US is MoveOn.org.
media habitus but a plurality of critical dispositions. Prominent accounts of alternative media have prized the self-organization, small-scale production and activist journalism of a site such as *IndyMedia* (Atton 2002, Kahn & Kellner), however Fuchs notes *Z Magazine* or *New Left Review* provide critical content while still retaining traditional divisions of labour between writers, editors and publishers (2012). Critical media then need not be strictly anti-capitalist in form or ‘fully opposed to commercial strategies and professionalized marketing’ (Fuchs: 183) as it seeks to realize mass public mobilizations rather than to reinforce the identity of anarchist media cells, as in the case of *IndyMedia*. In this sense normative notions of journalism and professionalism are not entirely useless but may be re-politicized in claiming the universality of the field.

The social and participatory dynamic of mediatization has enabled not simply the notion of the citizen journalist but various forms of satire, humor, culture jamming, memes and mash-ups, which define social and alternative media. The saturation of the social space by media has engendered a post-modern irreverence towards traditional media and institutional authority through inter-textual and hyper self-reflexive modes of representation (Lievrouw 2006). None of these practices on their own bear an essential critical property, rather they represent a range of social media practices which might be incorporated in a critical, political articulation of the public and the field. While alternative and participatory media such as *Indymedia* have sought to socialize and politicize journalistic values within its community, other forms of critical and alternative media have prioritized ‘symbolic resistance’ and culture jamming (Anderssen: 756). The premise of this symbolic resistance is that of ‘undermining the image by way of the image itself’ (Jameson 1991: 409) with various memes and the subversion of images condensing meaning, while being carried by the very ubiquity of the original image. The obvious example is *AdBusters* which nicely captures the dialectic of culture jamming

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190 One could conceive of critical media practices emerging on the corporate social network *Facebook* while reactionary fascist forces might embody the communal, organizational purity of alternative media practices. The critical distinction thus centers on the question of content and the political.
between, on the one hand the efficacy of transmission and the affective encounter between bodies across space (Massumi in Deleuze & Guattari 1987: xvi), or an individuating cynicism and lifestyle politics. *AdBusters* is both the publication that created the Occupy meme and the call to descend on Wall Street, while its politics can be characterized by a concern for neo-liberal notions of ‘individualist authenticity’ which sees ‘the public as its enemy’ (Haiven 2007: 95-6). This is precisely the dialectic of mediatization which connects while individuating, creates affective bonds and the means for a radical return of the public.

These new practices constitute the ludic and economies of jouissance in the mediatized social space. Memes and mash-ups which “go viral” embody irreverent play ‘for its own sake’ (Shifman 2012: 196). The incongruous realignment of images for the purposes of humor, satire and irony, or the juxtaposition of different media texts and formats as a form of creative deconstruction, may actively serve to create the self-referential world and affective bonds of the mediatized community. This bridging of mediatized subjects through memes and mash-ups has no essential critical function and can be seen as predominately reinforcing an individual sense of subcultural

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591 Haiven offers a forceful critique of *AdBusters* and its practice of culture jamming. Its attacks on consumer culture and inauthenticity reflect a ‘neo-liberal public pedagogy that disappears public issues into personal responsibilities’ (104). Beyond this severe limitation Haiven claims that *AdBusters* ‘furnishes its followers with the smug satisfaction of being “outside” or “knowingly critical”’ (92). This represents the extent to which the new spirit may tolerate critique so long as it is contained within an individualized lifestyle consuming public. *AdBusters*’ critique of the inauthenticity of consumer culture accords neatly with the new spirit of commodity fetishism. The challenge is how to reclaim radical notions of publicness.

592 *Jouissance* is enabled by the inability to directly confront the ‘constitutive lack’ in the object of desire (Žižek 1997b: 104), as the object can never fulfill what we desire in it. In the case of the Tea Party there is a fetishist *jouissance* which disavows the fact that the people do not exist. In regards to mash-up or culture jamming as an act of neo-liberal authenticity (Haiven), the very power of the image creates a form of pseudo transgressive *jouissance* which reifies the hegemony of authenticity and the new spirit of commodity fetishism.
literacy and superiority (Shifman: 196). While this describes a networked narcissism, or what Žižek calls a ‘conglomerate of solipsistic individuals’ (2006c: 311) engaged in pseudo transgressions, there is a clear mechanics of connectivity which compresses signification and elicits affective investment. To return to the question of critical media and the political, the articulation of alternative practices and notions of journalism that engender an affective investment in a mediatized community and political frontier is an undeniable potentiality.

*Tea Party Nation*

TPN perfectly embodies the mediatized character of the Tea Party in drawing together disparate media formats and connecting geographically dispersed members through an affective investment in the fetish of the people. This mediatized community clearly does not function as a form of critical media, rather they represent a populist retreat into lifeworld. Nevertheless the affective bonds forged through the friend/enemy (Schmitt 1996: 29) distinction of the hegemonic frontier, speaks to the return of the political as an excess in the mediatized space, defying not merely the liberal consensus but even *Fox News*. What makes *TPN* a unique subject of analysis is that it is simultaneously a mediatized phenomenon, operating as a for-profit social

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993 Despite the overwhelming praise for *Comedy Central’s* “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report” (Warner 2007, Baym 2005) as forms of satire and culture jamming which through mimicry and incongruity deconstruct the spectacle of mediatized politics, they largely function to reinforce a ‘postmodern irony of cynical knowingness’ (Colletta 2009: 856). Stephen Colbert in particular demonstrates the limits of a satire and a postmodern irony ‘which embraces incoherence and lack of meaning’ (ibid: 856). In the most recent elections Colbert used his show to form a Super PAC, funded by his audience, which ran ludicrous campaign commercials in battle ground states urging voters to “jam” the Republican primary process by voting for Rick “Parry” instead of Perry. Colbert even appeared alongside Herman Cain in an ironic political rally shortly after Cain had withdrawn from the race. It is clear that irony has critical limits as the target of ironic derision in this case, Cain, has no reservations in being satirized and may even feel as though this lends him the appearance of a hip ironic sensibility.
media website, while functioning arguably as the most “authentic” Tea Party grassroots organization. In contrast to the non-profit advocacy groups Tea Party Patriots and Tea Party Express, TPN is independent of the Republican machinery of think tanks, lobbyists and Koch funded groups such as FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity. It is this independence from the Republican infrastructure that separates TPN from the other groups that have been labeled by many left-liberals as corporate backed “astro-turf”.

While TPN cannot be credited to the political and economic power of archetypal figures such as Rupert Murdoch, Dick Armey or the Koch Brothers, its existence is attributable to Judson Phillips a media entrepreneur par excellence. Phillips’ entrepreneurialism is clearly in the Ariana Huffington mold as he functions as simultaneously a businessman, guru, movement leader and pundit. TPN gives Phillips a large footprint on Facebook and Twitter and a loyal audience who follow him across various media including Fox News, MSNBC and conservative web newspaper World News Daily. Presently there are over 51,000 members of TPN and Phillips plays a centralizing role as his posts and daily newsletter receive the overwhelming majority of responses and discussion through user comment threads. The highpoint of Phillips’ importance in the media and political fields came in February 2010 with the National Tea Party organized by TPN. The revenue streams for the social media site appear limited to web advertising for

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194 This is not to characterize TPN as independent of Republican organizing efforts as TPN has shared its mailing list with the party, evidenced by a recent e-mail I received, as a member of TPN, from “Mitt Romney”.

195 Phillips’ claim to authenticity and status as a movement leader extends from his efforts in organizing a Tea Party in February 2009 and again for Tax Day in April. Both were based in Nashville, Tennessee.

196 The event was widely covered and featured Sarah Palin as the keynote speaker. It was subsequently reported that Palin was paid a speakers fee of $100,000, drawing the ire of some Tea Party groups and activists. Phillips was unable to organize a conference in the following year cancelling two weeks out from the event and accruing a $748,000 lawsuit from The Venetian Las Vegas Casino Resort (The Daily Caller 2012).
conservative books, DVDs and radio as well end-times commodities and cookie generated advertising that is user specific. The site’s pitch to advertisers is not just framed in terms of market demographics but as companies participating in a revolutionary enterprise, while users do not appear to begrudge their cookies being sold on as there is a fundamental moral virtue to the market.

*TPN* functions as a staging post for various regional chapters and issues based campaigns, and allows members to accumulate a following in the community. In addition to blogs and discussion boards users may put up their own videos, photos and mash-ups, as well as re-posting conservative media content. What predominates in the sharing of content is a dichotomy between a human warmth and affective investment in the friend community, set against the ritualistic vilification of the enemy. *TPN* users will engage in the same self-narrativizing as one might expect on other social media sites, with photos of themselves, their families and pets. The intimate sharing of themselves functions to bridge members through this affective encounter as a community mobilized against the enemy. One user’s response to another’s family photos reads, “beautiful family definitely worth fighting for”\(^{197}\), confirming that the very human connection is predicated upon the dehumanization of the enemy and the notion that family and community *really* face an existential threat. From this shared terrain of warmth and affective investment in the populist community, users may proceed to engage in the unrestrained jouissance of dehumanizing the enemy. It is in this way that *TPN* users create chains of equivalence around their fetishized community with Obama functioning as the enemy and marker of difference that threatens and consolidates their antagonistic community.

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\(^{197}\) In this chapter all social media content will be reproduced as it appears, including spelling, grammar mistakes and original emphasis. All user names will be shortened to initials in order preserve anonymity.
New Media Practices and Jouissance

New, social and alternative media practices function on TPN to perfect a populist fetishism and overdetermination of the enemy. The open forums of the network provide users the freedom to engage in unhinged attacks on Obama with this dehumanization serving as a common currency among members. As a space of jouissance and play these attacks take innumerable creative forms while never belying a fetishized structure of belief where jouissance and sincere apocalypticism converge. Obama is both belittled as the object of extreme ridicule and perceived as an omnipotent political operator that threatens the community with tyranny. It is in this way that playful TPN memes, mash-ups and puns function as a form of jouissance licensed by the symbolic universe structured by the fetish. This jouissance and violation of social norms is precisely what constitutes and reifies the populist community while allowing users to disavow their transgressions as simply play. This speaks to Adorno and Horkheimer’s notion of fascism not merely as a reactionary conservative politics but as a carnivalesque transgression ‘permit[ing] what is usually forbidden’ (1997: 184).

The most common currency of dehumanizatoin on the network are the inexhaustible puns and derisive monikers bestowed on the enemy by users as the community’s vulgate. This consolidates both a communal jouissance and expands the categories of the enemy’s evil. These names include: “Barack

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98 Huizinga defines play as unserious and engaged in for its own pleasure (1970). TPN users however shift seamlessly between the playful irreverence of memes and mash-ups to taking their own wild conspiracies seriously. Such new media practices transform play in to jouissance which is deadly serious in sustaining a fetishist disavowal.

99 In one instance the author of an Obama-as-Hitler video mash-up responds to critics on YouTube, linked to by TPN, defending his transgression as play: ‘The problem for you Socialist / Progressive/ Marxist / Commie-lib Lapdogs of Satan is that you have absolutely no sense of humor’ (XAngel228). The structure is clear, socialists cannot take the joke of being called socialists, because they are socialists. The fact that they are socialists is serious matter, yet it is this serious matter which enables a fetishist jouissance.
HUSSIEN O-bomber”, “Ovomit”, “Oh Bummer”, “Obozo”, “Barry Shabazz”, “Damien Obama Spawn of Marxist Hell”, “The Kenyan Sock-Puppet”, “The Destroyer”, to name just a few. The routine name-calling from users does not merely identify the enemy, but it is an expression of a human reciprocity and warmth that is built precisely upon the dehumanization of the other. This humor “works” for the populist as it embodies the enemy’s multifarious role as an object of derision and stupidity (Obozoo, Oh Bummer, Ovomit), a marker of cultural difference (HUSSIEN, Shabazz, Kenyan Sock-Puppet) and an embodiment of evil (Destroyer, Damien Obama Spawn of Marxist Hell).

Figures Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen & Sixteen - Tea Party Nation

Photo Gallery (2010) available at:

Culture jamming is a widely practiced phenomenon on TPN and perfectly embodies the investment in Obama as the overdetermined enemy. The appropriation and inversion of campaign posters [figures thirteen & fourteen] in essence “jams” the smooth communication of Obama’s highly sophisticated new spirit and aspirational discourse. The Tea Party correctly perceive in Obama a vacuity that liberals fill with emancipatory notions of “Hope” and “Change”. While in an inverted sense correctly identifying that “Hope” and “Change” belie something else200, TPN users invest in a rapacious other who is responsible for the loss and theft of their jouissance (Žižek 1997: 43). This is the formula of the inauthentic fundamentalist who obsessed with what the other is doing, dances around the ‘void’ or ‘missing object’ (there is no people) which sustains jouissance (ibid: 43). The most salient meme in the TPN space,

200 Namely the culmination of neo-liberalism with a human face (see Chapter One).
Obama as “The Joker”, is exemplary of this structure of belief as the Joker is a figure of obscene *jouissance* whose enjoyment is at the expense of “the people’s” public order and morality. The figure of the Joker speaks to the Tea Party as a deeply anti-public populist community and their politics of the virtuous middle which imagines itself squeezed between a socialist elite and the lumpenproletariat. In theorizing Obama as ingeniously collapsing the system he is the Joker\(^{201}\) who has:

no ideological agenda except to overturn order and incite chaos...[and as such] subjects can fold any number of possible motives into the figure, projecting their respective political anxieties into it as explanations of Obama’s unknown desires (Acherman 2012: 9).

This obsession over the mystery of Obama explains the bizarre critique of Obama’s use of a teleprompter [as seen in figure 3], as all modern politicians do. The Joker meme serves to jam Obama’s aspirational message and sustains a gap between the man and the message, a gap which is filled by the Tea Party with a ‘conspiratorial drive for “truth” [which] lacks any teleology other than reproducing its own conspiracy theorizing’ (ibid: 18) as a source of *jouissance*.

The clear limits of memes and mash-ups as critical media practice in their own right is dramatically underscored in a *TPN* appropriation of the “Hitler Downfall” meme. This mash-up genre takes the penultimate scene of the film *Downfall* where Hitler, played by Bruno Ganz, performs a wild apoplectic outburst in the final hours of his life. The humor is derived by replacing the film’s subtitles with contemporary content such as Hitler’s reaction to *Twitter* going down, being expelled from *Xbox* live or finding out that there is no camera in the new *iPod Touch* (Rohrer 2010). This meme is characteristic of a

\(^{201}\) Glenn Beck’s theories of strategic collapse, the Joker meme, OWS and public disorder (Aurora “Joker” shooting), came together full circle with the latest Batman film *The Dark Knight Rises*. In the film urban rabble (Occupiers) attack the stock market and the bourgeoisie led by the Villain, Bane. Beck would claim tongue-in-cheek that he deserved a royalty check because the plot seemed lifted from his book, *The Coming Insurrection* (Holt 2012).
new cultural irreverence in which Hitler is not simply a symbol of modernity’s greatest atrocity, to be considered in solemnity, but is simply a “dick”\textsuperscript{202}. Where this Tea Party mash-up diverges from this playful irreverence is in taking the Hitler content seriously as the very basis for their transgressive \textit{jouissance}. In this video entitled ‘Hitler Finds out GOP has Retaken the House’ (XAngel228, 2010) we find Hitler in his war room being informed by top advisors that his/Obama’s agenda has been defeated by the Tea Party. The character of Hitler/Obama unleashes a tirade: ‘We rammed through healthcare, we were going to have cap and trade. WE WERE GOING TO HAVE IT ALL! WE WERE ON THE VERGE OF COMPLETE SOCIALISM!’ (ibid [see figure seventeen]) The subtitles are even coordinated to match political references that might be discernible to a non-German speaking audience as Hitler/Obama states that: ‘SEIU was going to be the new SS...We were so close to finishing the vision of \textit{Stalin}’ (ibid). What is important here is how the content of the humor is indistinguishable from the wild conspiracies of Glenn Beck, which he delivers as a deadly serious message. Satire is a genre of the Enlightenment and rationalism which presupposes that a subtle incongruity might humorously reveal a truth that enables a public to correct their faults (Colletta: 861). What the appropriation of the \textit{Downfall} meme reveals is how in the fetishist self-referential structure of belief, \textit{jouissance} and a pseudo-rationalistic conspiratorial pursuit of the “truth”, collapse in to one another\textsuperscript{203}. Not only does this defy any rationalism or critical media practice, the efficacy of this meme and others is in creating fetishist validity claims which affectively cement the pseudo rationalism of the community.

\textsuperscript{202} One prominent example is the web comic “Hipster Hitler” where Hitler is an insufferable hipster. This send-up is emblematic of a post-modern irony which embraces a total lack of meaning. Hipster Hitler is both ridiculed as Hitler and a Hipster through irony, which “ironically”, is the defining sensibility of hipsterdom.

\textsuperscript{203} In the Chapter Seven I explained how, as Hofstader (1965) describes, a fetishistic politics attempts to appropriate the rational and universal through constructing networks of pseudo-scholarship and conspiracy. Thus the fetishist can experience their jouissance as a rational objective truth.
Within the interactions of *TPN* users there is a circular and self-reinforcing logic of exposition and evaluation where the proof of Obama’s evil is provided by fetishist validity claims. Following one blog post by Phillips which details the Obama administration’s support for the IMF as part of a “one-world government plot”, there emerges a discussion between users which neatly captures the dynamic of communal solidarity through the fetishistic investment in this omnipotent evil. The correspondence is as follows:

**DL:** I just read that the USA is going to give $400,000,000,000,000 to the IMF to bailout the EU. So we are going to help them sustain their failing socialist policies while we spend our way into oblivion?

**WML:** YES DL! It is true! And on top of that, they’re wanting to send them another $400 Billion! This is what the $2,000,000,000,000.00\(^\text{204}\) trip with 3000 people accompanying Obama was doing, at least in part - promising to send more bailout money and "buying friends". This was an ingenious move by Obama & company and I say that because of how this illegal alien in the White House measures his success. He’s not trying to create prosperity - he’s combating it! At what point do we just physically

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\(^{204}\) This is in reference to Michelle Obama’s junket to Spain in August 2010 which set off wild claims that this cost US taxpayers over $2 billion.
remove them from office and be done with their Marxist agenda of destroying this country? This upsets me to the point of getting physically sick. I've had it with this. How about you?

DL: I am physically ill. I just can't take anymore today. I am ready to revolt. (Phillips 2010a)

What immediately stands out are the truly ridiculous numbers cited by the users, and it would simple enough to infer that this merely speaks to an ignorance amongst TPN members. While there is no shortage of ignorance across TPN these absurd numbers precisely embody the phantasmatic dimension of the enemy. The boundless treachery of the enemy is given an “objective” material measure which is offered as proof positive of this evil. It is at this point where one can observe the sublime in fetishist jouissance. While in spite of the fact that as Žižek identifies, there is ‘no empirical object, no representation...can adequately present the Thing [ie the lack which creates jouissance]’ (1989: 229) these users attempt to give their sublime loathing expression with a figure such as $400 trillion. Yet the very impossibility to confront and represent this, the lack in the object of desire, reveals the ‘true dimension of the Thing’ and the experience of the sublime as both a form of ‘pleasure and displeasure’ (ibid: 229). This representation of the sublime functions as a fetishist validity claim and communal currency in which users experience a pleasure and solidarity in being of the people. It is in this way that one can understand the enthusiastic reception to such an outrageous claim: ‘YES DL! It is true!’ Simultaneously, this solidarity is cemented by a displeasure and the affects of a shared repulsion towards the enemy. The fact that both feel ‘physically sick’ or ‘ill’ functions as a form of sincerity and truth claim as the fetishist can disavow that their fantasy is symptomatic of an internal turmoil, rather their body is objectively rejecting a monstrous evil.

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205 Glenn Beck is very fond of similar images of bodily affect routinely claiming that his truth will ‘make your head explode and make blood shoot out of your eyes’ (Beck 2012a)
TPN and Fox

TPN is a mediatized community par excellence, bypassing traditional vehicles of political mobilization to construct a frontier around the social logics of equivalence and difference in the mediatized social space. While one can describe the Tea Party as a name or signifier effectively centralized and dispersed by Fox, as a means for the broadcaster to accrue a cultural capital of authenticity, the very affective and political logic at work in the incorporation of audience labour surpasses the confines of a populist commercialism. Fox and Beck may indulge the populist’s phantasmatic notion of the enemy, through certain inferences, but it cannot capture the pure excessive jouissance of users on TPN. Beck’s skillful maneuvering from apocalypticism to a populist humanism, as embodied in an event such as 8/28\textsuperscript{206}, does not provide the same ecstatic pleasure of a more militant acting out of revolutionary iconography\textsuperscript{207}. While the Tea Party/Fox relationship has been

\textsuperscript{206}This frustration with the contrast of 9/12’s anger with 8/28’s serenity is nicely captured in the following post: ‘I think he’s trying to do something different and more “positive”, but no offense to the organization it supports, I’m not going to DC to sing “Kumbaya”!!!’ (DG 2010).

\textsuperscript{207}TPN is a space full of violent insurrectionary rhetoric and imagery. In one comment thread JC writes of Obama:

Why fight these battles one by one? It's like trying to kill a rattle snake with a BB Gun. Why not just cut the head of the snake off since he has no birth certificate, multiple alias's and citizenships, phony SS#, phony draft registration. Why not go for the Jugular and end all this crap at once? (Phillips 2011a).

In identifying this rhetoric I do not wish to ascribe a deterministic causality between such language and any impending violence. The very enunciation of such a fantasy scenario may produce the desired effect for the fetishist who imagines themselves as a persecuted people. Any violent passage a l’acte may threaten this identity as they are ultimately unable to kill the enemy inside themselves. However this is not to discount the symbolic violence of this rhetoric upon the liberal polity and with this a heightened potential for forms of political violence.
strained by the various political machinations of the network\textsuperscript{208}, Fox could never fulfill the Tea Party demands for ideological purity while in any way retaining a specious journalistic capital. The fetishistic validity claims in the dialogue of \textit{TPN} users, in which the enemy is incriminated simply by virtue of being the enemy, does not in anyway resemble the media field and Fox’s pretense to operate within the standards of the field. It is the inability of Fox to explicitly accept this logic that accounts for a clearly discernible rift between TPN users and Fox\textsuperscript{209}.

This rift does not merely result from Beck’s departure from the network but is even attributable to Beck’s relative moderation. One user [TS] explains that: ‘I can’t fathom why he [Beck] laughs and makes fun of those of us who believe that there is a chance that Obama shouldn’t be in the White House due to his suspect birth certificate and the natural born citizen clause. I don’t follow Glenn near as much as I used to as I feel really let down by him’ (Phillips 2011b). While Fox certainly did not fail to entertain birtherism (Newbold 2012), absent was the certitude that defines the fetishist validity claim. It is Fox’s pretense to journalistic values, however spurious, and an inability to accept fetishist validity claims prima facie that preclude it from the authentic core of the movement. As one user explains:

\textbf{I HAVE YET TO HEAR FOX TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT THAT KENYA BOY, NOT ONE NEWS PERSON HAS EVER SAID THAT THE BANDIT IN THE WH IS FOREIGN BORN AND THEREFORE NOT QUALIFIED TO BE PRESIDENT, BUT BECAUSE OF THEIR LACK OF THAT TRUTH I NO LONGER WATCH FOX (Phillips 2011c).}

\textsuperscript{208} It has been reported that Fox News chief executive Roger Ailes dropped Beck from primetime because he felt that Beck, along with Sarah Palin (who he called an “idiot”) and the Tea Party, were overshadowing Fox’s brand (Sherman 2011).

\textsuperscript{209} More recently Tea Party groups associated with the “Benghazi Truth” movement have staged a boycott of Fox for ‘turning to the left’ after the 2012 election (Rayfield 2013).
Judson Phillips bemoans the lack of an adversarial media in the US stating that ‘Fox is not conservative, but merely fair and balanced’ (ibid). Phillips would later revoke this status stating that Fox was ‘no longer “fair and balanced”’ (Phillips 2012) because of the network’s supposed bias towards establishment Republicans over the Tea Party. What is clear here is that the political and social logic of TPN, as an organic mediatized community, far surpasses the confines of Fox’s appropriation of free and affective labour. TPN users defy any moderation to the strategic considerations of Fox or the Republican party as their symbolic universe is structured by the fetish/enemy dichotomy. The fetishistic validity claims of TPN dialogue are ultimately irreconcilable with Fox’s relative moderation, necessary to retain any semblance of operating within the field. It is the affective dimension of the Tea Party name and the social labour of TPN users which creates a community outside the auspices of Fox. Just as Fox embodies biopolitical audience production, while opposing the ideological content of Empire, TPN users who represent “the people” so coveted by Fox, reject the proscriptive demands of audience commodification. Fox’s antagonistic discourse is not enough to subsume the core of the movement to simply a brand community.

This thesis has counterposed two tendencies in the media field, between a liberal notion of cultural capital in decline and a populist commercialism that extends the media field into the social space. TPN however has to be seen as a space of possibles with users rejecting the real subsumption of their communal bonds that are forged in the media field. They are a product of the mediatized social space in the sense that new media practices of memes, mash-ups, interactivity and self-expressive modes of discourse embody and condense the political and fetishistic logic of the Tea Party. This return of the political represents an excess to the new spirit’s post-politics, while precisely embodying new media practices which are associated with the new spirit’s emancipatory potential. This is clearly not a space of critical media possibilities rather it intensifies a hegemonic signification and articulation in the mediatized social space that represents a negative, symptomal logic of the political. To the extent that TPN is rhizomatic it is in enabling the occasional public acting out of an anti-public politics and a mobilization of isolation that
seeks a retreat into a fetishized lifeworld. TPN in this sense represents an affective matrix which offers no notion of struggle or mobilization outside of reifying the fetish and perpetuating a sense of victimization. The incumbent task is then to consider how a properly political conception of universality, that rejects the final ontological closure of fetishism, may be realized in the media field.

The Young Turks
While the emergence of The Young Turks (TYT) network and program is not directly correlated to Occupy Wall Street, in a manner analogous to TPN and the Tea Party, TYT represents a convergence of new and old media practices, recalibrated by the political and antagonism, and as such stands for a new critical space of possibilities. TYT is a unique mediatized phenomenon in that it connects and bridges a virtual public engaged in real ethico-political struggle, articulates a political notion of the field and universality, and embodies biopolitical forms of audience labour. The very ability of TYT to

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210 This is based in republican notions of civic virtue, described in Chapter Two, where all moral, civic and political virtue are based in private property and the private realm. It is in this way that one can understand how certain notions of patriarchy, faith and culture acquire a universal status in right wing populism historically. It is a common refrain on TPN that the right to vote be tied to private property, as one user explains:

One of our big mistakes as a country was when we allowed everyone the vote. That may sound cruel, but for the entire time we were colonies, and for many years after we were a nation, first the colonies and then the states refused to give the vote to anyone who did not own property’ (Phillips 2010).

211 This has included public protests, fund raising for left-liberal progressives such Russ Feingold and Alan Grayson, political action committees (PACs) and online petitions. This mode of politics is rather conventional reformism and by no means revolutionary. It is however atypical of contemporary civil society politics on the left in that this action is geared towards the state and party politics, for better or worse. This is a form of politics and notion of the public that transcends the individuating logic of neo-liberalism where politics merely corresponds to an idiosyncratic market identity.
encompass both critical media practice and biopolitical labour rests in its rhizomatic character. TYT is positioned between the field and the mediatized social space as both an online news channel and the more standard cable news format on Current TV. The form of the TYT network itself is unique both in terms of programming and the relationship to its mediatized community. While the TYT news hour is the flagship program, fronted by founder Cenk Uygur, the network itself is comprised of a whole range of special interest programming from TYT Sports, TYT University, TYT Comedy and TYT Community where members post their own political and cultural commentaries. What underpins all this programming is a literacy of mediatization and the way in which the media field symbolically structures the public and politics. Thus the deconstruction of media narratives, through the analysis of clips and news, features as the defining practice in all formats. This is a critical media practice and habitus, engaged in by TYT journalists and members, that positions itself against the traditional field while retaining a political notion of rational exposition, truth telling and universality.

What makes TYT unique is its membership of pay subscribers who are conceptualized as the TYT Army, perform the affective labour of conferring upon TYT the authenticity of a movement, while serving themselves up as a willing paying audience that experience no fundamental gap between this role of audience commodity and movement participant. The TYT Army are not a traditional audience commodity defined by exploitation in that their labour is entirely voluntary, even paid for, and they do not have their eyeballs hired out to third party advertisers as there are no advertisements associated with the online subscriber service. Uygur’s very status within the media field owes to this free labour of the Army both as an audience and as activists. As a form

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212 In Chapter Five I outlined the subscription structure for TYT with various payment options earning different TYT Army rankings from corporeal to lieutenant.
213 Viewing clips on TYT’s YouTube channel will prompt site generated ads.
214 The key moment for Uygur, in terms of establishing his critical media capital, was his contract dispute with MSNBC, outlined in Chapter Five. The TYT Army in that instance was his own media capital which drove up his ratings and undermined
of critical media TYT does not embody a participatory, organizational purity but rather retains a traditional division of labour between Uygur as a journalist, and de-facto movement leader, while users are afforded the ability to comment on the site, are shouted out on the program and may be selected for editorial conference meetings\textsuperscript{215}.

The critical principle at stake which bonds the community is the demarcation of the political frontier between the people of democracy and the forces of corporate power whether in finance, politics or the media field. This confrontation is based on reclaiming the ideals of rational exposition, truth-telling\textsuperscript{216} and universality in the media field, from these fundamentally corrupting forces. This is a political notion of universality and the field in the sense that there is a demarcation between who these ideals belong to, citizens, and who they preclude, corporations and their servants. What distinguishes TYT from other anti-corporate media (Democracy Now, The Nation, AdBusters) is the affective investment, not just in struggle, but in rationalism and a critical mediatized habitus as a ludic pursuit. Within the TYT community a whole self-referential lexicon of memes and mash-ups has emerged to cement the affective bonds of users in a critical mediatized habitus. These will be discussed shortly.

Before proceeding to my analysis it is important to emphasize that TYT is conceived as a space of possibilities and a form of critical media that signals the potential to transcend the Third Way/populist frontier. Measured by Fuchs’ (2010) normative criteria of critical media, TYT provide critical content that takes the standpoint of the oppressed, encourages critical reception practices, ‘advances social struggles’ (ibid: 181) against forms of exploitation

\textsuperscript{MSNBC’s} rationale for Uygur’s demotion from primetime as anything other than bowing to corporate and political pressure.

\textsuperscript{215} One of the current hosts of TYT, John Iadarola, is a former member of the TYT Army who solicited the network in order to become host of TYT University.

\textsuperscript{216} This is not the truth telling of parrhesia which is highly subjective and based on the sincerity of the enunciator (Foucault 2001) rather the inflection of journalistic notions of rationalism through the political.
and bridges media users around social struggles. In spite of these critical qualities *TYT* is far from a fully fledged revolutionary enterprise, it merely approaches the question of economy and the political, something negated by left-liberals in the present frontier. Mystifications of capitalism, America, liberal democracy and the middle class persist within the *TYT* constellation. Specifically, a capitalism of entrepreneurs against corporations, that “works” for the middle class and is moderated by democratic institutions remains a touchstone ideal for Uygur. Thus this is well within the confines of a liberal reformism and a populist republicanism (Goebel 1997) that sees a corporate corruption of capitalism as the central antagonism, not capitalism as such. The fetish at work here is liberal-democracy ‘as the sole framework for any possible change’ (Žižek 2012: 87) and a disavowal of the lost social-democratic “good life”. The inadequacy is not *TYT’s* so much as it symptomatic of the left generally. However, it is important not to discount the significance of a left reclamation of the antagonistic terrain, placing economy central to the community’s ontology, while being wedded to a politics of universality that keeps the horizon of the political open to confront the question of liberal democracy and political economy.

*Occupy and the Political Frontier*

While *TYT* was not involved in the planning of OWS, as in the case of *AdBusters*, or designated the “official” media of Occupy, *TYT* and their army converged on OWS as a moment that defined their purpose. For the week of October 17-21 2011, *TYT* broadcast its “politics hour” live from Zucotti Park

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217 Uygur describes himself as pro-capitalist in his anti-corporatism: ‘In order for capitalism to work, [corporations] must not be allowed to succeed. We must guard capitalism jealously’ (2009).

218 The politics hour consists largely of in-depth commentary on media clips or the primary in-depth reporting from various outlets, mainstream and alternative, in order to analyze and criticize contemporary mediatized politics. This is what I describe as a critical mediatized habitus that deconstructs contemporary politics and is made possible by the mediatization of politics. One no longer needs a newsroom archive to be able to pull the comments of a politician for media analysis as there exists a superfluous volume of media texts.
as a one-camera shoot, without a set and Uygur standing up in the park [see below]. Coming down to the park is not an attempted journalistic pilgrimage to the authentic place of the people (Couldry 2003: 93) but a move of full solidarity with the occupation as Uygur and his army become participants. Uygur describes in the opening monologue of his first broadcast from the park his ‘tremendous respect’ for the occupation, asking the viewer ‘do you have any idea how much dedication this takes?...these guys have been here for a month, that’s amazing’ (TYT Network 2011a). In elucidating the intersection of objectives between OWS and TYT, Uygur explains that:

we’re tired of being ripped off by Wall St, we’re tired of our politicians being bought and giving all the advantages to the few, and these guys here are trying to fight that, so I love it man (ibid).

The iconography of war and struggle feature prominently throughout the week. Uygur characterizes the Occupiers not by the conventional media frame of student radicals but as ‘the young [who] always fight the wars and here they’re fighting the war on behalf of the middle class and all those workers’ (ibid).

![Figure Eighteen - TYT Network (2011c) The Young Turks, October 21, 2011.](image)

This moment defines a convergence of critical media practices as TYT outlines an antagonistic conflict between class interests, through rational and critical
media content, and stands with those struggling against finance and corporate capital. This is a properly political notion of journalism in which the authenticity of the people is not determined by any fetishized or liberal humanist ideal but by antagonistic, public struggle against an enemy who threatens a universal solidarity.

The critical inflection of journalistic practice as struggle against exploitation and audience as activist community, culminates in Uygur’s address at the Occupy Wall Street General Assembly. This address was not featured live on the show but was posted on TYT’s YouTube channel and consists of Uygur addressing the crowd through the chorus known as the “human mic”. It is in this venue that Uygur chose to launch “Wolf-PAC” the political action committee created to mobilize citizens around a constitutional amendment that denies corporations the legal rights of persons. At this point the enemy is not identified merely to be critiqued, but becomes the focus of concrete ethico-political struggle. Uygur declares in his address that it is time to ‘fight the machines’ and amass an ‘army to fight for an amendment to declare, corporations are not people’ (The Young Turks Staff 2011). This a moment that speaks to the potential of a mediatized community to materialize real public notions of struggle as Uygur makes the call to ‘occupy the states’ (ibid) until local government representatives demand a constitutional convention. It is both rhizomatically enabled by new and social media while resisting the

219 Throughout the week Uygur was erudite in covering stories underreported in the mainstream media which demonstrate a constitutive power imbalance exercised by finance capital over workers and citizens. One story was a report from Bloomberg News which revealed that Bank of American and JP Morgan had moved their high-risk derivatives bets to the side of their bank that holds depositors money and is guaranteed by taxpayers through the government’s Federal Deposit and Insurance Corporation. Bank of America is reported to have $75 trillion in derivatives bets and JP Morgan $79 trillion (TYT Network 2011b) to which the taxpayer is potentially exposed.

220 In the following day’s broadcast Uygur informs the audience of their success in raising $3,000 online and that:
politics and the performative embodiment of spectacle. This delineation of struggle and group solidarity is political in that it relies upon the logics of difference and equivalence. The image of Wolf-PAC(k) precisely embodies this in a manner which defies liberal consensual notions of the political, suggesting a common purpose, identity and unity around the attack and the battle-cry of ‘we are coming for them!’ (The Young Turks Staff 2011). This antagonism and struggle also forms the basis of the community’s warmth as Uygur declares: ‘I love all of you that came from so far and endured so much’ (ibid).

What is undoubtedly problematic in this formulation of the political frontier is the status of the liberal-democratic remedy. While democracy is conceptualized in political terms as public, antagonistic and belonging to a certain people or community, there is a faith in American liberal-democracy that is decidedly non-dialectical and reconstitutes tropes of American exceptionalism. A dialectical appropriation of the liberal-democratic avenue might acknowledge the enshrined contradictions of legal political forms while undermining their hegemonic basis through their very claims to universality. This is akin to Žižek’s notion of the particular ‘realistic’ (2012: 84) demand that while framed within the hegemonic notion of universality, completely destabilizes it. However this appropriation of Americanism should not be seen as a fetishistic retreat, rather it importantly reclaims the antagonistic terrain from the populists while investing in this object new content (antagonistic critical public) that undermines the hegemonic basis of the fetish.

221 While the stated objectives of the Tea Party’s townhall protests or Glenn Beck’s 9/12 rally were stopping healthcare and “reclaiming” the country, these mobilizations were principally mediatized spectacles that acted out of a fetishized antagonism and served to consecrate an embattled and victimized identity.
In a manner atypical of other critical media and the left more broadly, the iconography of America is central to the *TYT* brand\(^\text{222}\). The normal studio green-screen backdrop of the program is composed of stars and stripes, however the stripes themselves wave as individual ribbons while the various components of the flag are weathered and torn as if damaged by battle [see below].

*Figure Nineteen* - The Young Turks (2011b) “Cenk: ‘We were supposed to get change,’ not Defence Authorization Act stripping civil liberties”, *Current TV*, December 14.

The implication is that America is under-threat from corporate interests and that the *TYT Army* will carry the battered flag. On the second day of the broadcast from Zucotti Park Uygur plays a viral YouTube video that typifies this left appropriation of war heroism. The clip is of a Marine sergeant and New York resident Shamar Thomas who has come to protest with Occupy and protect them from police brutality. Upon witnessing police brutality Thomas

\(^{222}\) This is a clear attempt to reclaim from *Fox* the universality of liberal-democracy that *Fox* claims in its populist exceptionalism. *Fox* is routinely castigated on *TYT*, not with a smug or derisive liberalism symptomatic of the *NYT*, but in real political terms. In response to one *Fox Business* segment where a contributor argues that OWS protestors are violating the rights of tax payers by placing a burden upon them to fund police and the court system, Uygur attacks *Fox* as ‘deeply Un-American’, opposed to free speech, protest and the constitution (*TYT Network* 2011a).
makes an impassioned plea to the police: ‘this is not a warzone, these are unarmed people, it doesn’t make you tough to hurt these people...I fought to protect these people’ (TYT Network 2011b). Uygur comments: ‘I love his outburst...when he points to his outfit as a marine and he says “this don’t lie”’. What makes Thomas exemplary for Uygur is that he served in the army to protect freedom of speech and cherished liberal-democratic values. And while the gap between the rhetoric of American exceptionalism and the reality of imperialist wars is immense\textsuperscript{223}, the principle of sacrifice and idealism is celebrated. The appropriation of patriotism as analogous to anti-corporate activism represents an attempt to articulate a political notion of this liberal-democratic universality, not in populist cultural terms but in the objective terms of political economy\textsuperscript{224}. What is significant in the anti-corporate, anti-finance appropriation of Americanism is the dialectical character of this appropriation, even if it is not understood in this way, that undermines the hegemonic basis of the fetish. This is the critical importance of a political and political economic articulation of liberal-democracy. Finance capital and corporate monopoly are the face of neo-liberal capitalism and as such this is a resistance to the material and hegemonic basis of American liberal-democracy. The way this mediatized movement speaks to a contingent critical possibility is the potential for liberal-democracy to be formulated upon an entirely new political substance of equality. Failing this (neo)liberal-democracy will continue to function as a fetish for the left.

\textsuperscript{223}This fact is not lost on Uygur as TYT owes its emergence and popularity to the anti-war push of the left under Bush. The show has offered consistently strong, principled critiques of American wars and the civil liberties records of both Bush and Obama. In response to the Defense Authorization Act 2011, Uygur stated that Obama’s civil liberties record is worse than Bush’s (The Young Turks 2011b).

\textsuperscript{224}The enemy does not function as a culturalized overdetermined phantasm, rather the enemy are those who are deemed to embody the objective interests of corporations. This formulation is far from unproblematic. Tea Party fetishists are not simply in the Koch Brothers pocket but really do believe in the objective interests of certain corporate interests, particularly oil companies.
Critical Media and Affect

Central to TYT’s efficacy in bridging a critical mediatized public are forms of new and participatory media practices that engender the affective investment of users in a critical mediatized habitus. This refers not only to a critical literacy of mediatization but a political agency in and through new media. Around the TYT community a whole self-referential lexicon of memes, mash-ups and popular images have emerged solidifying a ludic reciprocity, affect and communal jouissance. This is a habitus born of media literacy in which members mark themselves as critical media users affectively invested in rational exposition and truth-telling. While on TPN, memes and mash-ups served to jam the image of Obama and open up a space of fetishistic investment in an overdetermined enemy, here memes and mash-ups function as a supplement, critically inflecting austere journalistic notions of rational exposition. New media practices of memes and culture jamming not only supplement but sublimate, transforming the unpleasant political “truth” into a source of pleasure and means to cope with the ethico-political consequences of this truth.

TYT is uniquely positioned in the media field, between traditional news media and the interactive social media space of memes, mash-ups and viral videos. The network’s success, in reaching over a billion YouTube views, owes to its drawing on the interactive and ludic element of this space to elicit an affective investment in its critical media pursuit. This is a central imperative of biopolitical audience labour in that TYT’s very ability to authentically represent this social and potentially critical space is cemented by the active and voluntary labour of the Army<sup>225</sup>. The foundation of this biopolitical labour is a shared lexicon of memes between TYT hosts and the Army that appears

<sup>225</sup> One of the forms of explicitly soliciting the free labour of members is the ‘Turk-telling Tuesday’ campaign (The Young Turks 2011a). Before TYT’s deal with Current TV the show’s marketing strategy consisted solely of TYT Army members telling as many friends, acquaintances and strangers as possible about the program on Tuesdays. In one video posted on Facebook Uygur offers his gratitude to members for Turk-telling while not betraying the affective core of the community with invocation of a TYT meme [see p. 289]: ‘if you see Randy Gonzalez make sure you tell him’ (ibid).
across broadcasts, user comment threads, the TYT Facebook page and other social media sites. These include Uygur-isms\(^{226}\), pop culture quotes such as “release the Kraken” and assorted references to viral videos. Additionally the studio program features a soundboard\(^{227}\) that Uygur uses to play audio clips for comic effect, during the politics hour, that function as insider references for the community.

The affect of these memes is the simultaneous condensing of communication between members of the community on the basis of media literacy and a communal *jouissance*. The soundboard and various quotes “sum up” a political situation in a manner which is humorous, jams the original intent of the politician or journalist and reaffirms an affective investment in a critical mediatized habitus. An exemplary *TYT* meme is based on the Phil Davison viral video in which Davison, a Republican candidate for local office in Ohio, delivers an impassioned if unhinged speech. The video has been sampled for numerous sound clips, the most prominent of which is the statement ‘Tell your friends, tell your neighbors, tell Randy Gonzalez, I’m coming’ (TYT Network 2010). “Tell Randy Gonzalez we’re coming” has become a battle cry for the *TYT Army* that both embodies the antagonistic character of the mediatized community while simultaneously preserving the ludic irreverence of the social media milieu. As such the investment in the community is both critical and affective, based upon a humor that reflects the participatory openness of meme and mash-up culture.

Where this transcends the irreverence of new media genres is in the incorporation of memes as a critical media practice and supplementation of rationalist exposition. The most salient issue covered during the week of *TYT*’s broadcasts from Zucotti Park is the relationship between Wall St, the media, elected officials and specifically President Obama. In one instance Uygur draws on a report from *Politico* to outline the nature of this relationship in

\(^{226}\) Uygur-isms include the Turkish curse ‘Wa Siktir!’, the sarcastic ‘of cooouourse!’, to ‘all right everybody calm down’ where Uygur will mock his own over-exuberance in reaction to a news story (TYT Network 2012).

\(^{227}\) The TYT soundboard is available as an *iPhone* app.
contemporary mediatized politics, which is structured through a system of political donations and lobbyist talking points. Uygur explains how financial lobbyists are coaching Democrats through the challenge of OWS to “embrace a shared sense of frustration and resentment, while keeping some distance [from protestors]” (ibid). He then features a quote from Obama who invokes Martin Luther King saying “he would remind us that the unemployed worker can rightly challenge the excesses of Wall Street without demonizing all who work there” (ibid). For Uygur this quote typifies Obama’s ‘soft-pedaling’ of the truth for the sake Wall Street and selling out the legacy of left struggle. Uygur asks: ‘Why does Obama care about their concerns? “Its about the money Lebowski”. He’s already raised $3.9 million from the financial industry’ (ibid). Similarly, in an interview with RT News, Uygur outlines the administration’s acquiescence to Wall Street and its failure to regulate derivatives and proceeds to conclude with the following:

If Obama had a wrestling nickname it would be “The Establishment”, if he had started as a good guy “The Change” he would have become this heel “The Establishment” because in reality every fibre in his being says “Let me do whatever the Washington power brokers tell me to do” (ibid).

Uygur’s exposition is based on a clear rational delineation of Obama and the broader political class’ relationship to finance capital, yet the truth in both instances is asserted by the invocation of a TYT meme. Wrestling metaphors are a common occurrence on TYT playing on Uygur’s self-professed childhood obsession with professional wrestling. TYT’s Current TV program features a weekly “Elbow From the Sky” segment in which a cartoon of a prominent politician, in wrestling trunks, is slammed on the canvas by an elbow from the sky. Similar to the Randy Gonzalez meme, wrestling captures both the community’s antagonistic and ludic character. Wrestling is characterized by its over the top machismo and violence, while in the context of post-modern mash-up culture it is the ultimate in ludicrous camp.
financial class power\textsuperscript{229}. Coupling this truth with the ludic functions as a means to accept and experience an affective communal solidarity in this truth.

At this point it is necessary to clarify the critical limits of this practice and the manner in which this contradictory affective investment in a critical and rational mediatized habitus is sustained by the political and symptomal logic of sublimation. In the first instance sublimation functions in the Freudian sense of transforming the ‘object and aim’ (Freud: 256) of drives into constructive outcomes. Thus the rational pursuit of truth and its unpleasant ethico-political implications are sublimated by humor allowing the community to cope with the radical nature of this truth and protecting them from assuming ‘the full ontological weight of [their] world-experience’ (Žižek 1997: 60). Sublimation for Lacan is far more radical than this nominalism as it pertains to the constitutive lack in the object of desire which is sublimated by the elevation of objet petit a ‘to the dignity of the Thing’ (1992: 112). To return to Laclau and the political logic of affective investment, this is precisely the mechanics of hegemony whereby a particular signifier and objet petit a stands in for the impossible fullness of society. Thus the Tea Party in their inability to confront the nature of the Thing (social totality of capitalism) invest in a fetishized notion of the people (partial object) as the dignity of the Thing. I speak of TYT as space of critical possibilities in the sense that it creates an opening to confront the fetishized notions of the social totality of capitalism, and its constitutive elements (ie liberal-democracy), by articulating a political notion of liberal universality in objective terms of political economy. The affective investment in this critical habitus is crucial as the mechanism of communal solidarity and hegemonic linkage, but it is also fraught with its own fetishistic potential. As Lacan states ‘sublimate as much as you like; you will have to pay for it with something and that something is called jouissance’ (332). Therefore the mechanism of coping with the radical truth, sublimation and humor, produces its own economy of jouissance which may ultimately become the end in itself transforming the coping mechanism into full

\textsuperscript{229}This is a truth rendered in more acerbic terms by Cornel West who has stated that Obama has functioned as ‘a black mascot of Wall Street oligarchs and a black puppet of corporate plutocrats’ (Johnson 2011).
fetishistic identification with *jouissance*. In keeping with the dialectic of mediatization, *TYT* may either bridge individuals across the mediatized social space into a critical antagonistic public engaged in struggle, or function as a collection of individuals reveling in the *jouissance* of a new media cultural superiority of critical knowingness.

**Conclusion**

My analysis of the space of possibles in the media field, as exemplified by the social networking site *TPN* and the online news network *TYT*, has found the saliency of the political in the mediatized social space. Both entities rely upon bridging a community in the mediatized social space through the political logics of difference/equivalence, affect and antagonism, and both represent a potential blockage to the process of mediatization as simply the biopolitical colonization of the social. New media practices of memes, mash-ups and interactivity engender economies of *jouissance* and affect in consolidating the community around the friend/enemy distinction of the political. While *TPN* resists explicitly the ideological content of *Empire*, liberal universality and the new spirit of capitalism, this culminates in a fetishistic retreat into lifeworld. Tea Party mobilizations embody a radical anti-publicness, as the return of the spirit of the Republic of Property, and in this sense they represent the inverse symptom of the new spirit lifestyle’s politics of individuation. *TPN* typifies the ability of new media practices in the mediatized social space to intensify a fetishistic *jouissance* and affective investment in commensurate notions of the people and their enemy. Tea Party memes and the culture jamming of Obama, as the Joker or Hitler, consecrates more than just the community’s transgressive *jouissance* but a sincere apocalypticism and belief in the enemy’s diabolical omnipotence. This investment operates not only as a claim to be of the community but functions as a fetishist truth claim in which the community appropriates the universal. It is this pure unrestrained *jouissance* of *TPN* users which ultimately brought the Tea Party into conflict with *Fox News*. *Fox* could never indulge the wildest phantasies of the Tea Party, and retain any pretense to its absurd slogan of “Fair & Balanced”. Thus *Fox* itself becomes the target of populist ire as insufficiently committed to the authentic core of the movement. In this sense the Tea Party can no longer be thought of
as simply those who preform a biopolitical labor for Fox, in connecting the network to an authentic social space and locking-in a loyal audience that experience no difference between viewership and movement participation. What Fox’s temporal-spatial bridging of the movement has wrought is a return of the political and antagonism in the mediatized social space which is seeking to fill the space of the universal with a fetishized populist exceptionalism.

TYT stands for a critical and political appropriation of the field in transcending the anti-public politics of both the Tea Party and the new spirit’s individuating lifestyle politics. TYT in its convergence with OWS epitomizes critical media practice in identifying antagonism in the social space and offering a notion of journalism as full solidarity and mobilization with the exploited. Its notion of liberal-universality does not privilege a specific cultural content rather delineates a political frontier of a people against the objective forces of political economy, as embodied in corporations. While TYT’s anti-corporatism retains some significant mystifications of capitalism and liberal-democracy there is a critical space opened, potentially supplanting the Tea Party/Third Way frontier, with the identification of a people struggling at the site of political economy. Despite the fact that its notion of ethico-mobilization is well within the confines of ‘the long march through the political institutions’ (Mouffe 2012) of liberal-democracy, there is the potential to identify a new substance of equality upon which a political notion of liberal-democracy could emerge. The efficacy of TYT in bridging a radical notion of the public owes to its position between the field and social space, and its supplementation of traditional journalistic notions of rationalism with the postmodern irreverent, ludic culture of new media. Users affectively invest in TYT, and a critical mediatized habitus, through the circulation of memes and mash-ups which define a playful yet antagonistic community. The necessary incorporation of humor and an irreverent new media culture speaks to the dialectic of mediatization. In this case memes enable a condensation of communication, able to materialize new publics both virtually and in physical public space, yet this carries with it the potential for a networked narcissism and individuation. Humor may sublimate, enabling the critical media user to
affectively invest in radical truth-telling, or if the truth of the object or fetish (capitalism, liberal-democracy) cannot be confronted humor becomes an escape and form of *jouissance* pursued for its own sake protecting the symbolic universe of the subject.
Conclusion – Obama and the Tea Party Beyond 2012

This thesis has set out to establish the contours of the liberal/populist entanglement as constituted in the precise moment of neo-liberal crisis and manifest specifically in the media field. This particular study of Obama, the Tea Party and the media field raises defining challenges for normative conceptions of liberal-democracy while offering a unique critical exchange between the fields of critical theory and political economy of the media. I have identified the persistent contradictions of liberalism, as constitutionally enshrined in the US, and embodied in its present neo-liberal iteration, which engender the return of the political. The static frontier of a liberal post-politics and its populist excess threatens liberalism even as Obama’s Third Way consensus has been strengthened by his re-election in 2012. The Tea Party populists are not merely the dregs of an eclipsed political era, but in monopolizing the antagonistic terrain of the post-financial crisis juncture they have proved remarkably adept at resisting actually existing neo-liberalism. This efficacy can be understood in the Tea Party’s embodying of the ontological necessity of antagonism, the demarcation of economy as the site of the political and the movement’s uniquely mediatized identity. The discursive articulation and construction of a Tea Party chain of equivalence, almost exclusively in the media field, speaks to the importance of the media field as the social symbolic space of neo-liberalism. Therefore, the mediation of this frontier matters not simply at the level of representation within the field, but as a fundamental challenge to a critical political and cultural institution of liberalism.

What I found in undertaking an extensive media analysis across the field is the split between a liberalism that is unable to properly account for antagonism and the political, and a populist exceptionalism that attempts to claim liberal universality. The NYT master liberal narrative embodies the tensions and contradictions of the media field and contemporary liberal-democracy, in the face of the populist excess. The new spirit’s privatized identity politics has meant both a reverence for the “authentic” and the
elevation of the elusive people as the new centre of gravity in the media field. Thus the Tea Party, in all their illiberality, are presented as the embodiment of liberal-democratic people power whose contradictory and fiercely antagonistic positions are not challenged or deemed to threaten the liberal-democratic consensus. Following the 2010 elections, the Tea Party defied liberal expectations of a political normalization creating political deadlock. At this point the liberal narrative proved incapable of explaining the nature of Tea Party antagonism, and the fetish of the yeoman and thus the Times retreats into liberal derision as a form of fetishist disavowal. For American liberals it is easier to seek shelter in a smug cultural superiority than to confront liberalism’s internal contradictions. This symbolizes a deep crisis of American journalism and the broader liberal political culture as principles of rational consensus and a unified public prove entirely irrelevant.

*The Times*’ liberal derision not only sustains the present antagonism and culture war, but also cedes the universality of liberalism and the field to the populists. In disavowing the political basis of liberal universality, and in the absence of an antagonistic defence of liberalism, *Fox News*, Glenn Beck and the Tea Party articulate their own populist exceptionalism, which lays claim to liberal universality and the legacy of the nation’s founding. The innovation of *Fox*, through Beck’s program and the Tea Party, is the ability to engender the free labour of audiences and media users as an authentic revolutionary enterprise. Thus Beck’s audience functioned as a movement mobilizing for Tea Party rallies, purchasing featured end-times products as an extension of preparedness for the struggle, and consuming his program and *Fox* as forms of revolutionary enlightenment. Beck addresses the crisis of the media field and the sterility of its notions of truth as incapable of grasping the radical nature of the present moment. It is in this way that the political and antagonism, even in this inverted form, reveal a symptom of liberal-democracy. Beck departs from this radical critique of liberalism to stage a fanciful escape into a fetishized populist lifeworld, sustained by a pretense to the universal. This fetishized lifeworld and Beck’s embodiment of populist authenticity serve as the basis for his “rationalism” and “truth-telling”, properties that are deemed exclusive to the populist community. *Fox* and Beck
represent a credible threat to the liberal field in the sense that they articulate crisis and antagonism while supplementing the field's notion of universality with the fetishistic investment in the overdetermined enemy that threatens the virtuous people, who occupy the place of the universal.

What I have identified in this impasse is the shifting terrain of the field. The liberal high modernism of the field is superseded by the new reverence for the authentic people, idealized so long as they are in their place as a privatized public. To step back from my media analysis this new orientation of the media field is symptomatic of the process of mediatization as I uniquely conceptualize it in this thesis. This is not simply the subsumption of different fields, particularly politics, to a media logic of spectacle but rather the critical importance of the media field in inculcating the new spirit and a biopolitical logic of production. The media field is essential in pulling all others to the economic pole in the broader field of power and as such is fundamentally transforming the nature of economy. The media field is the bridge into the social space that unlocks biopolitical labour while instilling a logic of online personal brand management, authentic self-expression and social self-realization in the performance of free labour for capital. While the Times is caught between the old and the new, Fox, in its relationship to the Tea Party, and in embodying new forms of audience labour, typifies the new of biopolitical production. As the space of neo-liberal publicness, the media field becomes a critical site of the political permeated by logics of difference and equivalence and able to bridge media users across time and space. The political defies its sequestration to simply the accumulation logic of the field, whether as free labour or mark of authenticity for Fox and Beck.

The critical exchange between theories of the political and biopolitical production, that this thesis frames, offers a means to conceptualize rupture and a potential for radical politics in the media field. My formulation breaks from the pessimism of political economy approaches to the media (Fuchs 2012 & Van Djik 2009) without resort to sanguine teleological notions of the digital multitudes or the compromise with populist fetishism. There are no guarantees, but simply the potential for a political articulation that stages a
left-liberal reclamation of the universal with the construction of new chains of equivalences, around a political frontier, in the media field. My selection of two specific locations from the mediatized social space, *Tea Party Nation* (TPN) and *The Young Turks* (TYT), demonstrate the indeterminate potential of the political as either a populist fetishism or a new politics of universality. *TPN* functions as a space of pure unbounded *jouissance* where the ludic, affective and self-expressive aspects of new media practice unleash a conspiratorial drive for its own sake, in defiance of *Fox*. In contrast, *TYT* offers a political and critical notion of journalism as struggle against the corporate enemy and solidarity with the people of democracy. What is original in *TYT*'s formulation of the field is the reclamation of journalistic values of rational exposition through its notion of the political frontier and the invocation of memes, mash-ups and ludic new media cultures. *TYT* users become affectively invested in a critical mediatized habitus that has the potential to either condense signification and bridge new antagonistic publics, or descend into its own private economy of *jouissance*.

In my research I have attempted to place political theory within a concrete political context, a move that runs the danger of events eclipsing neat conceptualizations. This thesis has used the example of Barack Obama and the Tea Party as embodiments of liberalism and its populist excess. This is a frontier which exists beyond the particularity of individual actors. Obama’s resounding re-election against his Republican challenger Mitt Romney has reaffirmed the ascendance of the new spirit of capitalism and discourses of an authentic grass-roots mobilization. Following Obama’s re-election the critical left-liberal institution *The Nation* magazine declared the result ‘a progressive surge’ (The Editors 2012) and a decisive ‘victory for diverse grassroots movements’ (Flanders 2012). Obama’s re-election echoed the multiculturalist triumphalism of 2008 as it was proclaimed that white patriarchal authority and the 1% had been defeated by the new power coalition of Latinos, African-Americans, women and the LGBT community. There is no denying the importance of Obama’s victory against reactionary cultural forces and indeed his most important accomplishments have been around such identity politics struggles. These include the signing of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Play Act 2009
and the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” in the armed forces. Obama’s record on immigration is mixed at best having surpassed Bush’s two terms in the number of deportations in just his first (Khimm 2012), while also signing an executive order to end the deportation of the so-called “DREAMers” who immigrated as minors. Obama clearly benefitted from the anti-immigration fervour of the Republican primary process and Mitt Romney’s policy of “self-deportation”. It is with regards to the African-American community where the limitations of the politics of recognition are the starkest. Despite the aspirational importance of Obama to the community and their electoral loyalty230, his administration has failed to address record African-American unemployment and the home foreclosure crisis which has disproportionately effected African-Americans, among other issues. It is this reality that is belied by prevailing discourses of a new multicultural progressive grass-roots coalition that has drawn the incendiary intervention of radical leftist academic Cornel West. Speaking two days after the election in defiance of this narrative West declared Obama to be a ‘Rockerfeller Republican in blackface’ (West 2012). The implication is that Obama’s identity politics disarm the left and give neo-liberal austerity and the consolidation of financial class power a progressive appearance.

The post-election political context attests to the persistence of the Obama/Tea Party divide. West’s attacks are too focused on Obama as an individual actor. Instead Obama should be seen as a cipher of the new spirit of capitalism, able to coral critical signifiers and identity struggles around the logic of Empire and neo-liberal universality. Obama’s defeat of cartoonish conservative billionaire villains such as Sheldon Adelson and the Koch brothers, is not a victory for progressives against the 1%231, rather they are an outlier faction of

230 Not only did 93% of African-Americans vote for Obama but the rate of voter turnout in the black community was higher than eligible white voters for the first time in US history (Lauter 2012).
231 My use of this Occupy meme is not meant to reflect the simple division of the social space between the 1% and everybody else, rather the 1% denotes the most powerful capitalist class faction. It is interesting to note how this class antagonism between finance/corporate capital and the working class, students and portions of
the 1%. The hegemonic character of the 1% are those identified by Žižek in jest as liberal communists (2006b), such as Bill Gates, George Soros and Warren Buffet, who speak in pseudo-critical terms of the ravages of the market and the need for broad social inclusion. It is in this way that multiculturalism and identity politics represent a new post-politics and neo-liberal end of history. The so-called progressive surge that forms the basis of Obama’s grass-roots momentum is not a movement that constructs counter-hegemonic institutions or that makes forceful demands of both parties. Rather the prevalence of movement discourse served to monopolize aspirations and political energies singularly for Obama’s re-election and the Third Way consensus. Despite the efficacy of this manoeuvre the problem of the political still remains, not simply as the challenge of delegating competing demands and the contest for power, but as the excess of liberal post-politics. Obama’s re-election was to the overwhelming relief of liberals; however a massive section of the population remains militantly opposed to the president and are bracing for “socialist tyranny”. There is no prospect for a post-political resolution to the crises of American liberal political institutions and no inevitable consolidation of the left simply by virtue of the new multicultural coalition. Even if the long-term electoral prospects of the Republican party are abysmal the populist right may well continue to overshadow American political discourse. This crisis speaks to the efficacy of a militant antagonistic minority who are mobilized precisely against the new spirit’s ideological recalibration of capitalism as an authentic, multicultural post-capitalist realization of civil society. The Tea Party specifically reject these ideological contortions and the depoliticization of economy in defending their fetish of a people reconciled in private property.

Chapter One provided an outline of just this process as the figure of Obama was able to respond to the moral deficits of neo-liberalism and offer a Third the middle class is articulated simply in consensual majoritarian terms. This proved an effective populist strategy for inculcating the meme of the 99% versus the 1%. However if Occupy is to push beyond the traditional American populist politics of the middle than this delineation will have to be specified in political terms. The 1% are not simply parasitic and surplus to requirement, as some populists might have it, they are the pure embodiment of capitalism.
Way instrumentalization of markets for social-democratic outcomes. Obama served as a figure of affective investment able to elicit in the individuated subject of neo-liberalism aspirations of social and collective realization while restraining this “movement” to his candidacy as a form of lifestyle consumption. Obama’s new spirit politics represents the perfection of commodity fetishism which invokes innate human qualities, an ideal of social relations and a critique of the inauthenticity of commodity relations. Aside from political analysis this, chapter offers a more thorough working out of Boltanski & Chiapello’s new spirit of capitalism and Žižek’s identification of the new commodity fetishism. Specifically as this pertains to the humanist assumptions of Boltanski & Chiapello and the very humanist disavowal that is built into the new commodity fetishism. It is in this way that the new spirit and biopolitical production converge as the ideal of social and human communicative relations, engendered and elicited in the new spirit, become the stuff of production as free and affective labour. Obama’s followers epitomize new mediatized forms of political identity as they perform free labour, not merely in volunteering for the campaign, but offering their affective aspirations as hallmarks of the movement’s authenticity. In this way the vicissitudes of neo-liberalism are effaced and depoliticized by Empire’s discourses of liberal universality and multiculturalism. The Tea Party have emerged to resist these terms of Empire and liberal universality while paradoxically embodying the potential of biopolitical production to engender the return of the political.

In Chapter Two I describe the manner in which neo-liberal post-politics and the disavowal of the political engenders its return. Despite discourses of universality, liberal-democracy belongs to a certain people who are constituted by a shared substance of equality. The founding political frontier of the US constitution established what Hardt & Negri term a Republic of Property, whose universal equality of condition was premised upon the man or people of property. The fundamental antagonism supposed is the conflict between ‘those who hold and those who are without property’ (Madison 2008). In consolidating this political basis, politics and public life are structured around private property as the fount of morality and a republican civic virtue.
Thomas Jefferson’s notion of the yeoman is a critical concept for understanding the persistent widespread identification with a frontier ideal of private property, which is counterposed to the urban working class (ie “those who are without property”). What is notable here, is on the one hand, a concrete regime of political economy that seeks the legal and ideological forms to sustain itself and, on the other, that these forms take own a life of their own. Thus the liberal universality of the Republic of Property has served as an aspirational horizon for the expansion of rights from the original man of property, while the republican spirit and identification with private property has come to oppose capitalism as it exists today. The new spirit’s discourse of a post-capitalist morality and the Third Way’s technocratic depoliticization of economy have destabilized traditional notions of republican civic virtue. The rejection of bourgeois autonomy and a crass commodity fetishism has provoked the return of those who identify with this conception of the people. Paradoxically the people return as the Tea Party, unmoored from their proper place of restraint, while embodying an anti-public politics. In addition they fight in defence of capitalism and the Republic of Property while opposing really existing neo-liberalism. It is thus demonstrable that any practicable notion of universality demands exclusion and an antagonistic formulation of the people with economy central to its ontology.

Having outlined the contemporary juncture of neo-liberalism and the return of the man of property, Chapter Three proceeds to theorize the symptomal and discursive logic of populism and the political. The people of the Tea Party operate within the hegemonic logic of signification and affective investment. This notion of the people, filled by ideals of frontier private property, religion, culture, patriarchy and patriotism, functions as objet petit a structuring a hegemonic chain of equivalence through an affective investment in both this people and an antagonistic political frontier. In populist ontology objet petit a is irreducibly coupled to a fetishist jouissance as the affective investment in the people requires an overdetermined enemy. Populism entertains the fantasy of the organic fullness of society in which a universal people may enact the end of politics once the enemy of the people is eliminated. This enemy functions as a phantasm assuming a multifarious evil that is structurally
necessary for the fetishist to enjoy their full transgressive *jouissance*. Populism is symptomal in the sense that the fetish shields the subject from the constitutive lack in the object of desire, namely that the people reconciled in private property as a divine moral order do not exist. Tea Party populism is political in the sense of embodying the ontological necessity of antagonism while it speaks to the centrality of economy in an inverted manner. The experience of a socialist plot to destroy the fetish of free market capitalism demonstrates the close proximity to this trauma or constitutive lack in the fetish of the Tea Party people. Between the irrational perception of communist conspiracy and the Third Way’s disavowal of antagonism at the site of economy, which precisely engenders the backlash, we see how economy structures the frontier by its very subtraction.

This thesis contributes a theorization of American populism that is unique in its historical and theoretical interdisciplinary approach. In much of the academic field populism is treated as a certain style of political discourse as opposed to a political logic that reflects the antagonistic character of the social. For many critical and academics commentators (Kazin 1995) populism represents a certain *je ne sais quoi* of an essentially American rebellious political character. What I have identified in the original revolutionary formulation of republican virtue, and the figure of the yeoman, is a certain indissoluble frontier between private property and its enemies, that spans the history of American populist iterations. My position here, developed over Chapters Two and Three is in clear contrast to the anti-political economy of Laclau & Mouffe. The political is both understood in the ontological sense of the social necessity of antagonism, but also as the ontic residue of a material regime of property. For Laclau & Mouffe the political is contingent, reflecting the indeterminacy of the social and cannot be spoken of in terms of fundamental contradiction arising from a particular site of the social. Laclau holds that the political is born of the Real of heterogeneity that always returns to shatter the binarism of a political frontier. Yet in this instance there is a static frontier which is structured by the site of economy, both in its absence and as the very principle for a politics of heterogeneity. The populists gesture towards the political in the ritualizing of antagonism necessary to sustain their
fetish of a people realized in private property, while the Third Way completely disavows antagonism and reduces economy to a site merely requiring technocratic oversight. One cannot help but notice here how the diminution of economy corresponds precisely to the domestication of heterogeneity in Third Way discourse. As Žižek has put it: “global capitalism, with its dynamics of ‘deterritorialization’...has created the conditions for the demise of ‘essentialist’ politics and the proliferation of new multiple political subjectivities” (2000: 319). Economy is doubly inscribed in the social space, as both a site of production and regulation, and in the sense of Empire, as a force which overdetermines the mediation of the various fields of social life (ie civil society, politics, economy). It is in this way that one can understand the primacy of economy in the political while still talking about the various sites of the social. The direct confrontation with what is immovable in this frontier, what James Madison called the most “durable source of factions”, namely the “unequal distribution of property” (2008: 42), is what might allow for the construction of a hegemonic project that could form substantive links through the different sites of the social and as such supersede the deadlock of the Third Way and its populist opposition.

From the theorization of liberal-democracy, populism and the political I turn in Chapter Four specifically to the media field in order to identify its central importance to the current political moment. The Obama/Tea Party entanglement cannot be understood without reference to mediatization and the profound transformation of social, political and economic life this entails. Mediatization denotes both the increased importance of the media field across the social space and field of power, and the transformation of its normative liberal-democratic orientation. With the diminution of traditional political vehicles, from trade unions to political parties, the media field has become the critical social symbolic site of neo-liberalism. As a constitutive factor of contemporary social life media bear the capacity to bridge users across space and time while simultaneously perfecting a neo-liberal logic of individuation. Obama supporters can thought of as the new omnicompetent citizens of virtual civil society, engaged in voluntarist forms of activism (from charity, consumer boycotts to online petitions) that define the new spirit’s privatized
lifestyle politics. This is not a counter-hegemonic notion of politics but one that aspires to compete in the mediatized public space with media users reflexively conditioned by the demands of spectacle, performative embodiment, self-expression and affect. The affective investment in Obama serves to fulfil discourses of new media democracy, interactivity and individual self-realization while the campaign harnesses the aspirational component of this affective investment.

This represents the new spirit’s convergence with biopolitical production, that is the ability to incorporate social and political life in the sphere of production. The hegemonic discourse of the media field has shifted from a paternalistic liberalism to democratic self-determination and a celebration of the authentic. Media practices are shaped by the deference towards the new self-determining media user and the authentic people as the big Other that validates media practice, as opposed to normative liberal-democratic principles. This fundamental shift in discourse is essential for inculcating a broader transformation of economic subjectivity, not just in terms of market self-realization but also in the voluntary surrender of free and affective labour. Contemporary life lived through media is a form of biopolitical labour and the precondition for the hegemony of immaterial labour. Media in this sense connect the social factory where subjects experience a dissolution between the boundaries of work and play, and where collaborative and affective labour are brought into the sphere of production. The accumulation model of the media field is based precisely on the free labour of users who construct social networks as an extension of their being, simultaneously perfecting the precision of the audience commodity. Fox’s boosterism of the Tea Party is merely a populist iteration of the logic of lauding the self-determining user in order to secure the free labour of media users. Tea Partiers preform the very spectacle that creates Fox’s populist authenticity while consuming Fox with an idealistic fervour across media platforms and divulging consumer taste preferences.

At this point we reach what is perhaps the most important contribution of this thesis to the field, namely the means to conceptualize the return of the
political in the media field. This thesis begins by expanding upon the works of Laclau, Mouffe & Žižek in theorizing the political as contingent and a rupture that exceeds the hegemonic frontier. While recognizing the mechanics of hegemony, that is discourse, affective investment, difference and equivalence, I have followed Žižek in resisting the populist temptation. In this sense the political is retained as a potentially affirmative moment of revolutionary possibilities not simply the negative act of declaring a fetishized people universal. What this identification of populism as a politics of jouissance establishes is just what is at stake with the loss of the universal horizon of liberalism. While liberal universality has meant pernicious forms of exclusion, the populist move of decrying liberal universality as false and restoring the people in its place does not meet the threshold of radical politics. It becomes imperative to formulate a political notion of universality with a shared substance of equality.

From the position of economy as the Real that overdetermines the mediation between the various sites of the social, I turn to Hardt & Negri to provide the means to theorize the media field as essential in the transformation of economy. This is an insight left underdeveloped and it is essential for bridging the field of critical theory and political economy of the media. The logics of contemporary media production and accumulation have to be understood as the socialization of production where new social relations are built by audience labour in the service of capital, in order to perfect audience commodification and engender mediatized ideals of the social. What discourses of user autonomy and new media democracy have wrought is both the capture of free audience labour and a very real user agency that opens the field up to the logics of difference and equivalence. As the media space penetrates the social there is the potential for both the commodification of social relations and the return of antagonism. Thus the omnicompetent citizen of virtual civil society and the Tea Party populist are symptomatic of the same phenomenon with Tea Party participants embodying the form of biopolitical audience production while explicitly resisting its ideological content. There is a contradiction born of the necessary relinquishing of control in media production that does not yield the digital multitudes in any teleological sense.
but opens up the space to return of the political. Whatever critical possibilities exist they must emerge through a contingent process of hegemonic articulation where networked community members identify the outside to be resisted and affectively invest in an antagonistic notion of a people or political subjectivity. Despite inherent critical possibilities there is a dialectical tension in mediatization between a networked narcissism of individuation and the political. This thesis is staked on the importance of mediatization for political economy of the media and critical theory, in order to conceptualize the mediatized social space as one of affects with a political and radical potential.
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