**Cosmopolitanism as conformity and contestation: the mainstream press and radical politics.**

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**Abstract**

In this paper I consider the concept of cosmopolitanism in relation to two types of communication systems: the mainstream press and alternative networked communications of new social movements. Through the example of the hacking scandal, the paper discusses how the cosmopolitan ethics of the ‘freedom of the press’ have become distorted by a thoroughly commercialized tabloid media, to mean little more than freedom of the market to do as it pleases. This is presented as a form of cosmopolitan capitalism via a communication system that is part of a global economy and one that requires new communication policies in order to preserve and promote democratic values over consumerist ones. The paper then turns to an entirely different form of communications online that seek to establish cosmopolitan solidarity via forms of political democracy that rest on the principle of contestation. The paper suggests that cosmopolitanism invites universalist assumptions that at once deny the particularities of time and space while also being susceptible to the particular hegemonic order of the day and the balances of power in any given context. It is, therefore, always both conformist and contestatory, universal and particular. However, it is through contestation that cosmopolitanism can truly flourish.

**Keywords: democracy, neo-liberalism, hacking, Murdoch, press, new social movements, radical politics.**

**Introduction**

Cosmopolitanism has been interpreted in many ways. In this article I am focussing on two of these: the first rests on a cosmopolitan capitalism that advances the ideal of a borderless neoliberal world beholden only to the free-market and unrestricted access – here referred to as cosmopolitan conformity. The second relates to a cosmopolitanism based on counter power and radical politics that is also transnational – exemplary of cosmopolitan contestation

Both interpretations carry with them a political dilemma that rests on the desire for universalism (Beck, 2006) either through the extension of capital or through the acknowledgement of the common membership of humanity; along with the acknowledgement of difference – both through the legislature of various nation states or the diversity of individual political identities and viewpoints. This paper explores how our political identities are both framed by dominant narratives suggestive of a cosmopolitan conformity through neoliberalism and contested by a cosmopolitan solidarity of contemporary radical politics.

In addressing cosmopolitan conformity the paper considers the recent crisis in the UK in the corporate newspaper industry and the debates that pivot on the concept of ‘freedom of the press’ – a concept, I argue, that presupposes universal understanding while resisting contention. Consequently, it is also a concept that has assumed a level of normativity and in the process has developed a common-sense relationship to liberal democracy. To have one must be to have the other. But in claiming such ethical universalism and cosmopolitan application it denies its contemporary neo-liberal translation. Through a critique of the latest hacking scandal and the responses to it, I suggest that corporate newspapers offer a perfect example of where a deregulated and thoroughly marketised news system ends up. Despite the public outcry and widespread condemnation of the Murdoch oligopoly, the solutions proffered tend (most notably by the news industry) to focus on the ethical constraints of professional journalists rather than wider structural issues relating to plurality of ownership and control and funding of news in the public interest. Thus, even in a situation where we have financial breakdown, moral bankruptcy and public desire for change it is very difficult to break out of neo-liberal conformity in which markets equate to freedom and increased regulation equals creeping authoritarianism. As such, the paper argues that notions of cosmopolitanism are always inflected by the spaces from which they emerge and influenced by the politics they embody and should be critiqued with this in mind.

Then I turn to the uses of the internet in the development of transnational new social movements (NSMs) and a discussion of contemporary radical oppositional politics in the form of the Occupy Movement. Here the paper considers how, in situations where representative democracy is felt to have failed, a politics that infers individual control and is seen to side-step and frequently outwit the state is willingly embraced. But the seductiveness of the counter political possibilities portrayed online also tells a cautionary tale. Rather than augmenting forms of cosmopolitan solidarity the participatory capabilities of the internet may also induce political dissolution through fragmentation. So while the opportunities for a counter networked politics may allow for the possibility of the realisation of co-operation and tantalize with the prospect of participatory democracy, a cosmopolitan solidarity based on a collection of singularities runs the risk of fetishizing expression and participation without being able to deliver the political solutions necessary to reclaim the state and re-imagine democracy.

I end by arguing that cosmopolitanism invites universalist assumptions that at once deny the particularities of time and space while also being susceptible to the particular hegemonic order of the day and the balances of power in any given context. It is, therefore, always both conformist and contestatory, universal and particular. However, it is through contestation that cosmopolitanism can truly flourish.

**Conformity: The Hacking Scandal[[1]](#footnote-1)**

As Kristeva (1993, 1988) teaches us, cosmopolitanism is always culturally located and suffused with narratives of the place from which it speaks. Nothing could be more relevant for the narratives of ‘freedom of the press’ that have been so central to the debates surrounding the hacking scandal in the UK in 2011/12. A cosmopolitan approach that appears to embrace the rhetoric and spirit of the concept of ‘freedom’ may appear inclusive of all variety of societal formations but also invariably prioritises one political-economic system over another. Several theorists (e.g. Couldry, 2010; Freedman, 2008; McChesney, 2001) have argued that we are living in neo-liberal times characterised by a foregrounding of national and international policies hinged upon the business domination of all social affairs - a narrative that has abandoned the social for the economic. The ideology of neo-liberalism tells us that productivity is encouraged and innovation unleashed if the state stays out of the picture and lets businesses get on with it. In other words, the less ‘interference’ in the form of regulation, the more liberalised the market, the better the outcome (Harvey, 2007; Giroux, 2004). The twentieth-century state we are told is too bureaucratic, inefficient and repressive. And what is more it is it is introverted and territorialised (Leys, 2001).

Cosmopolitanism carries with it the notion of the borderless, global citizen (Calhoun, 2008) that in some ways sits easily within this neoliberal frame of the free-market and unrestrictive movement even if one refers largely to individuals and the other to financial affairs. To be truly cosmopolitan, one could argue, is to denationalize and gain a level of freedom from ones own national politics whether this is applied to transnational capital or transnational citizenship (Cheah, 2006; Benhabib, 2006). The state is called upon to support cosmopolitan conformity through processes of deregulation that enable the extension of business affairs and corporate presence and transactions. Resonances of this rhetoric are common in debates that surround the ‘freedom of the press’ in the hacking scandal in the UK that have become directly linked to concerns of deregulation, marketisation and the further liberalisation of cross-media ownership rights.

First, some background:

In the summer of 2011 the UK newspaper industry found itself in the midst of a scandal over phone hacking or the illegal accessing of mobile phone messages. The national daily tabloid newspaper, the *News Of the World*, owned by Rupert Murdoch stood accused of illegal, unethical behaviour through the systematic phone hacking of politicians, members of the royal family, celebrities and murder victims and their families. Murdoch subsequently closed down the *News of the World*. James Murdoch suffered a loss of confidence from many on the Board of News Corporation (but held his position as Chairman and Chief Executive) while several ex-editors and journalists are under criminal investigation at the time of writing. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, publicly embarrassed by his employment of Andy Coulson, a former editor of *News of the World* (2003-2007), as Director of Communications who was arrested by the Metropolitan Police Service in July 2011 for allegations of corruption and phone hacking, then called for an inquiry chaired by Lord Justice Leveson to investigate the issue. The inquiry’s remit was to examine the culture, practice and ethics of the media as well as the relationship of the press with the public, police and politicians and to make “recommendations on the future of press regulation and governance consistent with maintaining freedom of the press and ensuring the highest ethical and professional standards”(<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/>).

**Marketisation and deregulation of the press**

So why was phone hacking allowed to happen? It was clearly not just because those who did it knew they could get away with it and editors thought on balance it was a business risk worth taking (i.e. that any subsequent payouts to victims would be easily offset against increases in sales). Indeed many editors denied that they had any knowledge of illegal practice occurring. The problem is much broader and deeper than any slippage in ethical practice would seem to suggest and rests not with the individual journalists but with the system of news production they were part of. The reasons phone hacking took place are complex and involve the increasing entanglement of political and media elites as news coverage has taken on an ever more important role in policy making and elections (Davis 2002); the failure of the Press Complaints Commission (the newspaper industry watchdog) to uphold ethical standards and enable adequate self-regulation of journalists (CCMR, 2011; Couldry, Phillips and Freedman, 2010); alongside the broken business model of newspapers with plummeting circulation and readership figures and the migration of classified advertising to online sites such as Craigslist in the US and Gumtree and eBay in the UK (Fenton, 2010; Levy and Nielsen, 2010). But one thing is clear - the illegal practice of phone hacking did not have the primary motive of the press as fourth estate holding truth to power. Rather, in a thoroughly marketised and deregulated newspaper industry the mission was to gain competitive advantage and increase newspaper sales.

The practice of phone hacking was widely condemned. However, a common response from the news industry itself was to direct responsibility for phone hacking towards the law and inadequate policing, claiming that it was not the concern of the media industry but rather a result of failures in criminal investigations and prosecutions. The solution lay therefore with the police and the enactment of the law and not through further regulation of the profession or industry which should remain ‘free’ to do effectively, as it pleases. ‘Freedom’ in this sense becomes a narrative device to sidestep the deeper, systemic problems of the newspaper industry of which these ethical misdemeanours are but one symptom. Freedom of the press stands in for *all* activities of the press regardless of whether they have democratic intent or not. Hence any form of regulation (which is often misconstrued and translated purely as the licensing of journalists), that may encourage news organisations to behave in particular ways, is assumed to be detrimental to democracy. Statutory regulation of any kind in relation to the press becomes nothing more than state censorship. As Paul Dacre, Editor of the *Daily Mail*, speaking at a seminar as part of the Leveson inquiry stated: “I’d like to try to persuade this inquiry that self-regulation – albeit in a considerably beefed up form – is, in a country that regards itself as truly democratic, the only viable way of policing a genuinely free press.” (Leveson seminar, <http://hackinginquiry.org/news/paul-dacres-talk-at-leveson-inquiry-seminar/>).

Claims to the extension of democracy through a ‘free’ media are some of the most cosmopolitan of all claims for it is very difficult to argue against democracy, even when it is democracy from a particular western, neo-liberal perspective. As soon as the value of news to society is invoked, the contribution of news to the public sphere and consequently its relationship to a healthy democracy follows suit. Indeed, freedom of the news media is often seen as a key indicator of democratic life; news as the life-blood of a democracy. In this conception of news the value of news journalism is inscribed in its contribution to vital resources for processes of information gathering, deliberation and action. And in this manner, the relationship between journalism and democracy is frequently understood as causal. The more news we have the more democratic our societies are; the less news we have the less democratic we are, triggering a presumption of an inevitable sequential relationship. But democracy is far more than the quantity of news and many so-called developed democracies have a plethora of news media but a public sphere that is severely impoverished (Aalberg, Aelst and Curran, 2010).

This mythology of naïve pluralism assumes that journalists already operate with full independence and in the interests of democracy. But much (although by no means all) tabloid journalism runs counter to the public interest and has little democratic intent. As Trevor Kavannagh, Associate Editor of the *Sun* noted in his own evidence to Leveson:

“…news is as saleable a commodity as any other. Newspapers are commercial, competitive businesses, not a public service. (6 October 2011: http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/oct/06/trevor-kavanagh-leveson-inquiry-speech.

In the UK it would seem, there is a relationship of sorts between journalism and democracy but a largely dysfunctional one whose breaking points pivot on issues relating to the commercialism and marketisation as well as concentration of ownership and deregulation (see below). Just as journalism can be democratising, so it can also be de-democratising.

Hackgate (as it became known) revealed the mechanisms of a system based on the corruption of power and one that displayed many of the hallmarks of neo-liberal practice. Rupert Murdoch and the news culture he helped to promote was part of this process in the UK that began with the defeat of the print unions at Wapping and continued with the lobby for extensive liberalisation of media ownership regulation to enable an unprecedented global media empire to emerge. And where did we end up? Hackgate enabled the naming and shaming of what many had believed to be the case for years: systematic invasions of privacy that wrecked lives on a daily basis (Cathcart, 2011); lies and deceit of senior newspaper figures; the wily entanglement and extensive associations of media and political elites (Coleman, 2012) (a member of the Cabinet met executives from Rupert Murdoch’s empire once every three days on average since the Coalition was formed);[[2]](#footnote-2) and a highly politicised and corrupt police force (Rebekah Brookes admitted to paying police for information in a House of Commons Select Committee in 2003 but denied it in 2011 (Telegraph, 15 January, 2012) and over a quarter of the police public affairs department were found to be previous employers of the News of the World (Warrell, 2011)).

At a time when resources are scarce and where there is a pressure to meet multiple deadlines across a whole series of news platforms, it is easy to see how the already constrained autonomy of journalists and their freedom to act ethically towards the collective gains of the profession can be eroded for the competitive gain of the commercial newspaper. Research suggests (Fenton, 2010; Lee-Wright, Phillips and Witschge, 2011) that corporate models are failing journalism because of a priority on the bottom line, on high profit margins and shareholder returns that has resulted in fewer journalists doing more work in less time. This is leading to a greater use of unattributed rewrites of press agency or public relations material and more examples of ‘cutting and pasting’ stories from a range of sources as well as the temptation to use any methods possible in pursuit of an ‘exclusive’.

Freedom of the press has always been associated with the ability of news journalists to do their job free from interference from government (Muhlmann, 2010). Clearly this is crucial for independent news production. But freedom should also mean having the freedom to act in the public interest and not be constantly beholden to commercial gain - to be free from the shackles of corporatization. Freedom of news media and news journalism should be founded on the core service of news as a profession of integrity, transparency and accountability rooted in a relationship with democracy where profit is not the only principle. But the notion of ‘freedom of the press’ has become embroiled in a particular political-economic system. It is a system that tells us that productivity is increased and innovation unleashed if the state stays out of the picture and lets businesses get on with it. Productivity in the market and hence news as a commodity takes precedence over the social and political concerns of news as a mechanism of democratic process. In other words, the less ‘interference’ in the form of regulation, the more liberalised the market, the better the outcome (Jessop, 2002). The industry response to the hacking scandal in the UK largely conformed to this neo-liberal premise. Freedom of the press expressed purely as the need to get the state to butt out and give commercial practice free reign is about nothing more than enabling market dominance to take priority over all other concerns. Freedom of the press expressed in this way is not a precondition or even a consequence of democracy so much as a substitute for it. The cosmopolitan ethic on offer in this rhetoric is not the coming together of journalists for the general promotion of journalism in the public good and for the public interest – as one may find in such organisations as Reporters Without Borders[[3]](#footnote-3). Rather, it is a post-state capitalist logic (Boltanski, 2011) that has become normative.

**Media ownership, freedom of the press and cosmopolitanism**

The cosmopolitan ideal of the notion of the ‘freedom of the press’ epitomised in the likes of Reporters Without Borders is further challenged by concentration of media ownership. Media research tells us that diversity of news provision is more likely to come from a plurality of owners (McChesney, 2000; Bagdikian, 2004; Winseck and Jin, 2011) – although precise cause and effect data is difficult to come by as it is notoriously difficult to prove any relationship. Anxieties over the ownership of the media reside in the media’s agenda setting role. Media owners can have influence over the way their organisations present news and in turn have some bearing on public debate and political opinion (Murdock, 1982; Croteau and Hoynes, 2006). Such influence may come in the form of direct intervention as Rupert Murdoch noted in evidence to a House of Lords select committee in 2007 when he said that he acted like "a traditional proprietor" in regard to the Sun and the News of the World by "exercising control on major issues, such as which party to back in a general election or policy on Europe" (Hosenball and Holton, 2011; House of Lords, 2008). But influence is more likely to come via indirect means through the appointment of like minded editors, stressing the pursuit of particular business approaches such as short term profit over longer term investment, or by prioritising certain types of journalism or journalistic approaches.

In this way owners can influence the journalistic ethos of a news organisation and this can then filter through to the processes of news production (House of Lords, 2008). Ownership matters, particularly if you have an owner with a certain vision, or someone who comes from a particular family ownership tradition or from structural and organisational principles that impose a particular form of editorial direction. Any of these factors can influence the types of journalism that’s valued and promoted and what kinds of stories are followed. In a situation where one owner controls a large proportion of the nations press and/or news media then the opportunities for ‘freedom’ and journalistic independence would appear to be more limited. Yet it is precisely this journalism that we frequently refer to as ‘independent’ and ‘free’.

What does this discussion tell us? The market requires norms, habits, and sentiments external to itself to hold it together, to ensure the very political stability that capitalism needs in order to thrive. I would like to suggest that in the context of the hacking debate the phrase ‘freedom of the press’, partly due to its cosmopolitan reach, has become a term that has been emptied of its real meaning by becoming one of what Hardt and Negri (2009, p.120) call “false universals that characterise dominant modern rationality”. But the process of assigning meaning can never be total and will always reveal contradictions. The unregulated free market (if this has ever existed) cannot reproduce the non-commercial institutions and relations - of cohesion, trust, custom, restraint, obligation, morality, authority—that are also present in society and which the pursuit of economic self-interest tends to undermine rather than reinforce. For similar reasons, the relationship between capitalism and democracy (or capitalism and political freedom) should not be taken for granted.

I have argued that a throroughly commercialized press offers a perfect example of where a deregulated and marketised news system ends up. But in exposing a system that is flawed it has also exposed the economic vandalism of neoliberalism that overlooks the interest of publics in favour of consumers of the market. When publics become no more than commercial or electoral fodder then democracy fails. And this is the nub - political and media elites have become so engrossed in each other they have forgotten the publics they serve. They may see us as consumers, as people to buy their goods and vote for them in elections but they have stopped treating us as publics. Enter cosmopolitan contestation.

**Cosmopolitan contestation**

The nature of being political is changing in the context of globalising conditions. We are faced with increasing disengagement from formal institutional politics (Loader, 2007) and lack of trust in representative politics (Park, 2004) alongside and related to a shift from class politics to identity politics, from traditional political parties to new social movements (Kahn and Kellner, 2004, 2007; Bennett, 2005; Hill and Hughes, 1998). For many now, how to engage in political deliberation or activate ones political citizenship has little to do with the secular, bureaucratic structures of the party form. Add to this migration and resettlement on a mass scale and the rise of global oppositional political movements and the transnational protests that accompany them and we have a complexity of factors which combined, signal a paradigmatic shift in our experiences of democracy and citizenship and of their mediation that is directly linked to notions of cosmopolitanism – how can disparate groups and individuals come together across boundaries? How is transnational or even global solidarity developed and maintained?

The internet is at the heart of radical politics in the digital age: it has galvanized local campaigning and facilitated transnational political movements – bringing forth the potential for cosmopolitan solidarity at an unprecedented level. These activities combine collective action and individual subjectivities mixing personal expressions of political allegiance with public debate in an online context that has enabled the spaces of action and debate to expand from local/national configurations and terrestrial media to “global” counter summits and the internet. One of the striking differences between a transnational radical politics and the counter politics of the nation-state is the former’s lack of a common political identity and a rejection of broad unifying meta-narratives of organization such as socialism or communism. This is a form of politics that emphasizes diversity over universality and cannot be identified by a party name or definitive ideology and is often liable to rapid change in form, approach and mission. These forms of oppositional politics may be based in, but spread quickly beyond specific localities; they are usually non-hierarchical, with open protocols, open communication and self generating information and identities that function via networks of activism and activists. Such networks are often staunchly anti-bureaucratic and anti-centralist, suspicious of large organized, formal and institutional politics. Furthermore, the ability of new communication technologies to operate globally and so respond to global economic agendas from a variety of contingent social and political contexts signals a potentially limitless myriad of on-line voices that have the possibility of coalescing at key protest events but emanate from contexts that may be starkly divergent.

Despite the variability and fluidity at the heart of these forms of radical politics that embrace difference, they are still founded on a level of commonality, even if this does not bear the class/labour configuration of solidarity of old. Participants in these networks are drawn together by common elements in their value systems and political understandings – though this can be capricious and liable to frequent change (della Porta & Diani, 1999; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). This is a politics that makes a virtue out of a solidarity built on the value of difference that goes beyond a simple respect for otherness and involves an inclusive politics of voice. Marchart (2007) has called this a type of ‘post-foundational politics’, while others have claimed that the space of new media enables a broader range of voices and types of material to be communicated to a wider audience without the constraints of needing to comply with or follow a particular political creed or direction other than the expression of an affinity with a particular cause (Tormey, 2006; Terranova, 2004; Dean, Anderson and Lovink, 2006) or acknowledgement of a shared empathy for the consequences of democratic deficit regardless of the contextual differences in how this is experienced. This is a politics that discovers a unifying basis via contention rather than the reverse.

The new politics at play in transnational new social movements fit with the concept of cosmopolitanism as citizenry of the world and relies upon a critical appreciation of time and space. Time provides us with historical context that helps us to trace the development of politics and political identities and how they are contingent upon social and political context – to escape universalist evaluations and to inject an awareness that social change occurs over decades and centuries rather than weeks or years. Space reminds us of concerns of geographical materialism and brings to the fore issues of distance and proximity – the space between us that establishes difference and generates particular and local political concerns and the space that brings us together on common ground with universal concerns. This tension between universality and particularism – what binds us together and establishes mutual respect of human-kind or political solidarity and what distinguishes us either by statutory form or individual identity is the subject of much debate within new social movements.

So cosmopolitanism, whether expressive of conformity or contestation is always framed by the structures that contain it and as such cannot be adequately understood without a conceptual appreciation of power – who has it, in what circumstances and how is it manifest – this brings the state and corporations explicitly into focus. It is precisely what I attempted in the previous section on ‘freedom of the press’. This is the starting point for understanding all social change and political upheaval, even within social movements themselves.

**Occupy**

In 2011 a new social movement was born in response to the economic crisis, the bankers’ bailout and claims of corrupt political and economic systems that benefit a few people to the detriment of the many. The Occupy movement, as it is known, began on September 17, 2011 in Liberty Square in Manhattan’s Financial District where people assembled and then stayed, putting up tents and promising to occupy the space until a process was created to address the problems they identified and solutions were generated appropriate to everyone. As of January 2012 it claimed to have spread to over 100 cities in the United States and over 1,500 cities globally. The movement states that it was inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to “fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future” (<http://www.occupywallst.org/about/>).

What is so striking about the Occupy movement is that it is a peaceful, collective attempt to deal with failed democracies through coming together on protest camps in public places to publicize disaffection and debate the way forward. Developing new forms of democracy is inevitably a painful and difficult task but one that is wholly embraced through the daily assemblies. The occupations are organized using a non-binding consensus-based collective decision-making process known as a "People's Assembly" or “General Assembly”. This is where people gather to deliberate and take decisions based upon a collective agreement or consensus. There is no leader or governing body of the Assembly as it operates with the aim of equality of voice. Individual political autonomy is central to the practice of the assembly where the aim is that many singularities of viewpoints can come together in a consensus that is at once expressive of the differences it embodies.

The Occupy London website describes the commitment to the consensus process as “a living demonstration that each one of us is important. It’s a counter to systems that tell us some people count while others don’t. In consensus, everyone matters. But for consensus to work, we must also be flexible, willing to let go. […] Unity is not unanimity—within consensus there is room for disagreement, for objections, reservations, for people to stand aside and not participate.” (<http://occupyLSX.org/?page_id=1999>)

Occupy London has the following statement on its website (<http://occupyLSX.org/?page_id=575>) which it states was collectively agreed by over 500 people on the steps of St Paul’s on 26 October 2011 and under constant revision:

1. The current system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives; this is where we work towards them.
2. We are of all ethnicities, backgrounds, genders, generations, sexualities dis/abilities and faiths. We stand together with occupations all over the world.
3. We refuse to pay for the banks’ crisis.
4. We do not accept the cuts as either necessary or inevitable. We demand an end to global tax injustice and our democracy representing corporations instead of the people.
5. We want regulators to be genuinely independent of the industries they regulate.
6. We support the strike on the 30th November and the student action on the 9th November, and actions to defend our health services, welfare, education and employment, and to stop wars and arms dealing.
7. We want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world’s resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich.
8. The present economic system pollutes land, sea and air, is causing massive loss of natural species and environments, and is accelerating humanity towards irreversible climate change. We call for a positive, sustainable economic system that benefits present and future generations.[[4]](#footnote-4)
9. We stand in solidarity with the global oppressed and we call for an end to the actions of our government and others in causing this oppression.
10. This is what democracy looks like. Come and join us!

They also state that they are working towards an international, global collaboration with a statement that “will unite the occupy movements across the world in their struggle for an alternative that is focused on and originates from people and their environment.” (<http://occupyLSX.org/?page_id=2851>).

What this new wave of transnational protest points to is a resistance to the onslaught of economic practices that have attempted to establish a new paradigm, a whole new way of thinking about the ways in which economic and social life connect. A way of thinking that has tried to cloak itself in rationality, in universality - the notion that it is normal, natural and to be encouraged that the pursuit of profit or private gain supercedes and is in the interest of people or the public. Such neoliberal ideology builds a structure of feeling that people are dispensable, that publics don’t need to be listened to just as we witnessed in the Hacking scandal.

The Occupy movement resonates with the work of Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) who have attempted to broach a politics of the Multitude and become in the process a source of validation and direction for many people involved in online mobilization and transnational political protest. Hardt and Negri (2004) call on us to reclaim the concept of democracy in its radical, utopian sense: the absolute democracy of “the rule of everyone by everyone” (p. 307). The multitude, they argue, is the first and only social subject capable of realizing such a project. They propose a description of the Multitude as “an open network of singularities that links people together on the basis of the common they share and the common they produce” – a union which does not however, in any way subordinate or erase the radical differences among those singularities. Brought together in multinodal forms of resistance, different groups combine and recombine in fluid networks expressive of ‘life in common’ (2004: 202). In other words, they form a multitude. Because of both its plurality and the sharing of life in common controlled by capital it is claimed that the Multitude contains the composition of true democracy.

The Multitude's ability to communicate, form alliances and forge solidarity – often through the very capitalist networks that oppress it – allows it to produce a common body of knowledge and ideas that can serve as a platform for democratic resistance, a union that does not in any way subordinate or erase the radical differences among those disparate groupings. As Oswell (2006:97) states:

…if the people are defined by their identity, relation to sovereignty and represented homogeneity, the multitude in contrast is defined through its absolute heterogeneity and through its being a congregation of singularities.

Hardt and Negri (2004) point to anti-globalization and anti-war protests as exercises in democracy motivated by people's desire to have a say over decisions that impact upon the world in which they live - operating at a transnational level. However, their call for a “new science of democracy” (2004: 348) is difficult to pin down. Exactly how the multitude can stand up and be counted is never set out except that in the production of the common the multitude will become organised. We can see in the Occupy movement the attempts to build the common based on democratic renewal through the Assembly. Through the collective pursuit of the common Negri states that “bio-political reason” will emerge (Negri, 2008a, p.62). Biopolitical reason is a direct challenge to universal truths: “like the universal, the common lays claim to truth, but rather than descending from above, the truth is constructed from below” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p.121).

Both Laclau (2004) and Habermas (1998) are skeptical of the claims made for a minoritarian politics and the Multitude’s ability to deliver a socially meaningful radical politics. Prior to the Occupy Movement, Laclau (2004) called the approach of Hardt and Negri the antithesis of politics – an agency that does not articulate, represent or strategize. A utopia without architecture and universality without meaning. But new forms of architecture take time to evolve and must constantly struggle against the dominant narratives of neo-liberal rationality to make head-way. Nonetheless, there certainly would appear to be a risk of fetishizing expression and participation without being able to deliver the political solutions necessary to reclaim the state and re-imagine democracy (Dean, 2009). But it is also too early to tell and in the development of a common language and approach to rediscovering democracy through the Occupy movement there is at least an attempt to co-operatively generate cosmopolitan solidarity.

**Conclusion: Cosmopolitan Solidarity**

Neo-liberalism has lost sight of the many publics that we are part of. In its world of free markets and pursuit of wealth over all else, it forgot, or maybe thought it simply didn’t matter, that people are politics. The phone hacking saga has exposed a system of news that is deeply flawed. Freedom of the press seen as indelibly linked to the free-market and the only means to ensure governments can’t interfere in, dictate the terms and thwart the practice of journalism, denies the influence and power of a corporate culture that wreaks its own havoc and sets its own agenda often more blatantly than any democratic government would ever dare. Freedom of the press seen as cosmopolitan capitalism encourages a critical appraisal of the terms of the debate that draw on universalist assumptions but are located in a particular context that seeks to prioritize one political-economic system over another.

When we look at the Occupy movement, the new student protest movement, the public sector strikes and demonstrations, the Arab Spring - when we see tens of thousands of people demonstrating, marching, protesting we see the forgotten publics who want to be seen as more than consumers in a marketplace. When publics are abandoned, when their voices no longer matter and their identities are demolished through economic inequality, non-recognition or misrecognition in the media, when they count only as consumers, they lose faith in the political institutions that are supposed to represent them and the “false universals that characterise dominant modern rationality” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p.120) no longer ring true. Then we see a political system that is entangled with a neoliberal practice - forms of power and rationality that have cut the public out of the picture at very turn of the page – we see what the hacking scandal has exposed.

Cosmopolitanism contestation seeks to bring publics into being. Demonstrations in streets, marches, protests, occupations and sit-ins signal the coming together of people, the assembling of a body politic who want to re-imagine what democracy could be. The question then becomes, how can multiple publics achieve a sufficient consensus in order to make possible the exercise of power and citizen participation? How can these assemblies defined by their multitude, premised on their difference come together and forge what Dussel (2008) calls a “critical democracy” – a democracy based on the real participation of all publics as equals in a new political order – a genuine political cosmopolitanism.

But as Norval (2007: 102) reminds us we must avoid ‘assum[ing] the existence of a framework of politics in which in principle every voice could be heard, without giving attention to the very structuring of those frameworks and the ways in which the visibility of subjects is structured’. Cosmopolitanism by its very premise always runs the risk of universalism blanching it of meaning. In this brief analysis of the way in which ‘freedom of the press’ has presumed universal meaning and conformed to a cosmopolitan capitalism I have tried to reveal how a particular section of a thoroughly marketised press has directly structured the visibility of subjects and is still very much with us. In the analysis of new social movements I have tried to illustrate how cosmopolitan contestation brings us closer to critical democracy. Critical democracy requires the real and material participation of the oppressed and excluded; the real and material recognition of difference along with the space for contestation and an understanding and response to its meaning.

Cosmopolitanism is a concept that can be applied to many universalist ideas – human rights, democracy, freedom – but these ideas are always susceptible to the hegemonic order of the day and as such are always context-bound, related to power and particular to time and space. In other words, they will always exhibit conformist traits. However, to be truly cosmopolitan (if one can distil an essence of cosmopolitanism), to build solidarities that are far reaching and egalitarian then contestation must take precedence. If we are to believe in a “cosmopolitanism to come” (Douzinas, 2007:5) then we must begin with challenging the cosmopolitanism(s) of the present.

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1. This paper was written in 2011/12 when the hacking scandal in the UK hit the headlines and the public inquiry led by Lord Justice Leveson was in full swing. Because of this, it can only be seen as a snapshot critique based on evidence given to the enquiry at the time. Events and evidence that emerged from February 2012 onwards, could not been taken into account. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 20 Cabinet ministers met senior Murdoch executives 130 times in the first 14 months of office. See the full list on Number 10s website: http://www.number10.gov.uk/transparency/who-ministers-are-meeting/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Reporters Without Borders claims to be “the largest press freedom organization in the world, with over 120 correspondents across the globe.” (<http://en.rsf.org/rsf-usa-23-11-2009,35024.html>). It works to expose limits on press freedom and support journalists who are being persecuted. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paragraph 8 was added to the statement following a proposal being passed by the Occupy London General Assembly on 19 November 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)