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What's the subject? Brexit and politics as articulation.

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All across the country, people called each other cunts. All across the country, people felt unsafe. All across the country, people were laughing their heads off. All across the country, people felt legitimised. All across the country, people felt bereaved and shocked. All across the country, people felt righteous. All across the country, people felt sick. All across the country, people felt like they counted for nothing. All across the country, people threatened other people all across the country, people told people to leave. All across the country, things got nasty. All across the country, nobody spoke about it. (Smith, 2016: 59/60)

We begin with this extract from Ali Smith's novel *Autumn* because it captures some aspects of the social and political fracturing associated with 'Brexit'. The June 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union (EU) proved to be intensely divisive of families, communities, work-places and nations. It also generated – or gave permission for – an upsurge of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, misogyny and hate crime (see, for example, Home Office figures for recorded crime, 2017 reported in <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hate-crimes-eu-referendum-spike-brexit-terror-attacks-police-home-office-europeans-xenophobia-a8004716.html>). The divisions, then, were not just between Leavers and Remainers. The referendum brought to the surface, condensed and amplified deep-seated fissures – of class, of gender, of race, of age, of place - as well as producing new antagonisms. Here, then,

Brexit acts as a signifier of 'emergent politics': new fractures, new alignments, and new identifications.

For us, though, the extract also suggests ambiguities in the signifier 'people'. Is Smith using it to refer to different categories of person, some feeling sick and some bereaved? Or might it be that particular people experienced a mixture of feelings? What are we – as social analysts – to make of this cascade of 'feelings'? Were they deeply rooted, pre-existing the moment of Brexit, or might some have been elicited, summoned up, by campaigners seeking to mobilize particular identities and silence others? To what extent do they reflect reactions to the result of the referendum or its preconditions? In this paper we explore such questions by challenging conceptions of emergent political formations that assume singular and stable subjects. In doing so, we explore the processes of categorization, representation and articulation that surrounded the referendum campaign and its aftermath. We approach these questions not as social psychologists, but as people working in policy studies, yet heavily influenced by our engagements in cultural studies. Our interests in Brexit and its place in a wider political conjuncture have brought us into encounters with varieties of social psychology around the problem of *political subjects*: how they are imagined, conceptualized and represented in discussions of Brexit and its political aftermath.

Brexit and beyond: emergent politics and unstable subjects?

We have been struck by the way that most discussions of Brexit – in both the media and academic commentary - have treated people as singular and coherent political subjects: Leavers versus Remainers; or ordinary, decent people versus racist, misogynist fiends. We will argue here that such a view of people as coherent political subjects is profoundly unhelpful, both analytically and politically. It underestimates the multiple selves that may be in play, and thereby ignores the diverse desires and disaffections that might have been mobilised in the referendum vote (whether to leave or remain). It projects strangely stable political identities from a single issue and treats them as a set of divided identities that proved to be less than stable or

reliable guides to the next political moment: the UK General Election of 2017. David Edgar has pointed to the political projections built from the Brexit moment (and its echoes elsewhere):

Across the west, the postwar social democratic alliance between a left-behind working class and middle-class social liberals broke down. From Warsaw to Wisconsin, socially conservative anti-immigration populists devised interventionist economic policies, so as not to put off working-class voters they wanted to attract. A new fault line was scored, pitting what was defined as a liberal cosmopolitan elite against the economic interests and conservative instincts of the majority. Values trumped (or Trumped) economics. The best identifier of *Homo Brexitus* was not class or income or age but a positive attitude to the death penalty. Being for public whipping of criminals was a pretty good indicator too. (2017)

He goes on to point out that the 2017 General Election in the UK saw new political configurations, alignments and mobilizations that challenged such *epochal* readings of Brexit as a decisive turning point for political formations in the UK. For us, the double – and divergent – disruptions of Brexit and the 2017 Election demand ways of thinking about political subjectivity that attend to ‘emergent’ politics by approaching the political subjects as plural, dialogic, affective and potentially contradictory. This is, of course, not new ground for psychology: since the publication of *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al, 1984 [1998]), (some) psychologists have been exploring the problem – and possibility – of thinking the subject as multiple, dialogic or even contradictory, albeit from diverse starting points (e.g., Billig, 1996; Hermans, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Roseneil and Frosh, 2007; Stenner, 2015). Nevertheless, much social science remains profoundly – and frustratingly – attached to conceptions of the subject as a coherent and singular individual.

In what follows, we begin by examining the ways in which these complex responses were reduced into simplifying – often binary – categories in commentary on the result of the UK’s EU referendum in June 2016. We then argue for the importance of

understanding subjectivity as plural and potentially contradictory before exploring the implications of such a view of the subject for thinking about emergent politics. We suggest that escaping a view of the political subject as singular and coherent is vital for making sense of recent political developments, providing a route to thinking about the centrality of processes of representation, recognition and articulation to the work of politics. It is precisely this question of (political) subjectivity that seems to us to demand a cross-disciplinary conversation.

The limits of categorization

The analysis of Brexit and its aftermath was largely conducted through versions of political demography through which the population of the UK was neatly divided into a series of binary divisions: north/south, rural/urban, working class/middle class, young/old and so on. Some forms of analysis were highly sophisticated: Watkins, for example, combined analysis of fissures and fractures in the UK polity, analysis of the campaigns running up to the referendum, and detailed analysis of the results mapped on to regional, class and age differences (Watkins, 2016). Meanwhile, Dorling (2016) challenged the way in which the result had been blamed on the working class in the north of England (noting that most Leave voters lived in the south, and 59% were middle class). But the majority of commentary focused on singular dynamics, whether the return of 'class', the revenge of the 'left behind' or the dispossession of 'youth'. We think it is important to challenge the dominant models of political demography that create such categorical distinctions between segments of the population, link them to attitudinal clusters or voting dispositions, and treat both the locations and the dispositions as singular. Michael Billig's distinction between categorization and particularization as frames of thinking provides a useful starting point:

By basing theories of thinking upon the importance of categorization, psychologists have tended to construct one-sided theories of thinking. These theories seem to describe prejudiced and bureaucratic styles of thought, and

opposing aspects of thought are correspondingly neglected.... (Billig 1996: 149).

Categorization, suggests Billig, is associated with cognitive psychology and presents what he terms a 'bureaucratic' model of the person (ibid:159). This is not incorrect, he notes, but is incomplete, offering a model of the person in which nuance and complexity are unacknowledged. It simplifies and distorts, and, further, opens up prejudice: 'if thinking is based on distorting categorizations, then the implication is that stereotyping is merely an instance of normal cognitive processes (ibid: 156). To overcome these defects Billig proposes a focus on particularization; what differentiates one perception from another. For us, particularization also points to a view of the particular subject as multiple, traversed by different social relations and inhabiting plural (and contradictory) rather than singular cultural fields (Henriques et al, 1984). Billig also came to draw on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to develop an image of the *dialogic subject*: one who acts through language in ways that hold competing or contrary ideas together in a process of dynamic tension (see also Holland and Lave, 2001). Although Billig's critique of 'categorization' was directed at dominant modes of thinking in psychology, this tendency to categorize is shared more widely across the social sciences. Certainly, political science and sociology have also been shaped by this inclination to produce categoric subjects – and such framings dominated analysis of Brexit and its echoes in other recent political mobilizations (for example, in the USA, Hungary and beyond). In the following section, we consider the limitations of this categorizing approach in discussions of Brexit and consider how opening the analysis to a 'particularizing' view of plural and heteroglossic subjects may make a difference.

Thinking beyond binaries

How is this notion of the plural and dialogic subject helpful? We think it provides ways of transcending the categorical 'lock in' of singular/binary ways of thinking. For example, much of the debate about Brexit (and Trump) has centred on the rediscovery of 'class' as a key dynamic, founded on the representation of the

working class as a distinct and unitary category. The effects of de-industrialization and austerity on former working class spaces (the 'heartlands' of the North of England and South Wales in the UK, the so-called 'Rustbelt' in the USA) have been seen as formative processes in fueling a working class sense of being abandoned or forgotten by the political class or the metropolitan/cosmopolitan elite (e.g., McKenzie, 2017, 2018; MacQuarrie, 2017). One of the intriguing aspects of this 'categoric' view of class and politics is that it appears to be shared by large scale, quantitative sociologists and small-scale, qualitative ethnographers, although their views of the political tendency of this subject have diverged. The larger scale rediscovery of class has tended to link working class support for regressive, nationalist and xenophobic politics (in the Vote Leave campaign and Trump's election campaign) to declining class fortunes (e.g., MacQuarrie, 2017 on Rustbelt racism; Gidron and Hall, 2017, on the politics of social status). By contrast, the ethnographic studies have tended to offer more sympathetic accounts of working class fury and frustration that challenge the dismissal of Leave (or Trump) voters as racist or as cultural dupes. For example, Lisa McKenzie has argued that:

Working-class Leavers were derided as turkeys voting for Christmas, but it is the middle-class Remainers who have been running around like headless chickens since the vote. Like Henny Penny, they think the sky is falling in, but whether the sky falls in or not, Brexit has made a difference to working-class people dubbed 'the left behind'. They have become visible for the first time in generations, and to some extent feared. In January 2018 few could deny that the government's Brexit plans are chaotic. But for working-class people all over the UK, the chaos of the NHS, Universal Credit, social cleansing and housing is their priority. And in truth, the UK's middle class has been left relatively unscathed by eight years of austerity. Those who don't fear the shame of the foodbank, or the looming prospect of a job in the warehouse/workhouse for their children – and instead think the crisis is about the colour of passports – should think themselves lucky. (McKenzie: 2018; see also Koch, 2017)

Several problems emerge from this categoric rediscovery of class in the UK, USA and elsewhere. First, there are continuing empirical arguments about class as a social position linked to voting (e.g., Dorling's (2016) claim that it was middle class voters who predominated in the Leave vote in the UK referendum). Second, as we have argued at greater length elsewhere (Clarke and Newman, 2017; Clarke, forthcoming a), most of the class analysis around Brexit has tended to imagine the 'working class' in the shape of the classic Fordist male industrial worker (or his unemployed self) despite the dramatically shifting dynamics of class formation. This problem is nicely articulated in the following extract where a trade union officer responds to an on-line debate about Brexit as a working class vote:

I am a branch officer of unite the union South Yorkshire community branch who campaigned, as did my union, for remain. As i type i am sitting on the fault line of the debate. To the west lies the affluent suburbs of Sheffield where there has been much howling and gnashing about losing the vote. To the east lies the working class parts of the city and the wider de-industrialized county of south Yorkshire which voted, with much anger, to leave. The two sides are glaring at each other through the fractures of English society, or so we are told. On one side the educated, liberal progressives, on the other the people who do not know any better; at least according to the likes of the guardian. This is dangerous myth. Most of our members live precarious lives, some are on the dole, some work in fast food joints, some at local universities. You would be hard pushed to tell the difference between the budding academic and the burger flipper, sometimes they are the same person. (James, 2016)

This helpfully problematizes some assumptions about the 'class divide' around Brexit. It does not undermine class as a vital concept for analyzing changing formations of politics and power; but it does suggest the need for a more nuanced and dynamic approach to contemporary class formations and their relationship to thinking and action. The extract also hints at the possibility of multiple subjects ('sometimes they are one and the same person'). Rather than simply marking 'the return of class', it suggests ways in which class may be entangled with other axes of

difference in the making of *particular* subjects (echoing theories of intersectionality, see for example McCall and Orloff's discussion of intersectionality and inequality in the USA, 2017).

Finally, one troubling form of this 'rediscovery of class' has been the distinction between the 'white working class' and its apparent other, the 'cosmopolitan liberal elite' (with its attachment to 'identity politics'). This distinction has been central to both journalistic and academic attempts to explain what has happened. For example, books by Didier Eribon (2017) on the disjunctures between metropolitan liberals and the French working class, and by Arlie Hochschild (2016), J.D. Vance (2016) and Joan Williams (2017) on the US 'white working class' all became touchstones for arguments about the 'failures of the left' (or progressives or liberals – the terms shift disconcertingly). They were recurrently taken as a basis for on-line and journalistic discussions with few interruptions of their (deeply problematic) articulations of race and class. However, Bhambra has recently argued that such views of the 'white working class' act as a 'euphemism for a racialized identity politics that is given legitimacy through this evasion'. In the process, all other workers are made invisible (is there an equivalent black working class?). Bhambra goes on to argue that:

In these circumstances, the assertion that what matters is class necessarily has the form of a pernicious identity politics. The identity politics that are associated with the claims of minorities are claims for *equal* rights. A class analysis focusing on white workers (rather than all workers) effectively argues for the resumption of racialized *privileges*. (2017: S227)

We do not have the space here to further examine these flawed couplings of race and class; we are concerned by the ways in which the moments of Brexit and Trump enabled simplistic conflations of race and class to flourish and circulate more widely (although they have a longer history, of course). They are sustained by representations of political subjects – and political subjectivity – that work with, and reproduce, the idea of the singular and coherent subject. One of the core debates

that uses such binary polarizations of political subjectivity has centred on the role of racism in the Brexit and Trump campaigns. Supporters of both were castigated for their racism, misogyny and homophobia (see McElwee and McDaniel, 2017, for example). Reactions insisted that this focus on racism obscured other reasons why ‘ordinary, decent people’ would support Brexit or Trump. (e.g., Frank, 2016)

The problem is that both sides of these arguments rest on the same flawed model of human subjects, treating them as singular and coherent, such that they must be *either* ‘ordinary, decent people’ or ‘racists’. Instead, we think it is necessary to think of people as occupying multiple positions within social formations in which they are exposed to diverse forms of knowledge and ways of thinking. As a result, they adopt specific ideas and identifications *contingently*. That is to say, people do not occupy a single social location (poor or elite; working class or middle class; male or female, etc.). At the same time, there are more complex explorations of forms of racism and how they are inhabited and negotiated that have emerged at the intersection of sociology and social psychology (e.g., Jefferson, 2017; Potter and Wetherell, 1992; Flemmen and Savage, 2017). As a result, it becomes important to think of subjects who have access to more than one, or even two, ways of thinking (and feeling) socially and politically. We are deeply frustrated by this binary juxtaposition of ordinary, decent people versus racist, misogynist fiends, since we know people who combine both dispositions – and more: people are capable of thinking more than one thing, and are capable of holding strained or contradictory views. Indeed, in societies structured by racialized and gendered divisions, everyone is exposed to, and has the possibility of inhabiting, the ideas and structures of feeling which articulate those divisions. It does not mean they act on them, but the ideas and sentiments circulate widely and offer points of potential identification and attachment. They also, of course, offer points of refusal, resistance and contestation. They may become sedimented, may become fixed points of attachment and identification, or may be challenged and unlocked, but they are certainly available and in circulation. Their presence and persistence point to the question of *politics as articulation* to which we return later. But for us, this feels like fertile transdisciplinary ground where discursive and dialogic forms of social

psychology might encounter Gramscian and Bakhtinian approaches within cultural studies (and elsewhere, see Holland and Lave, 2001, for example).

Questions of representation and recognition

In contrast to the essentialism implied by processes of categorization, we want to draw attention to the importance of political representations: the languages, discourses, symbols and voicings through which people are addressed as political subjects. Here we cannot assume that the subject is a stable bundle of opinions and characteristics, but can rather be seen as emergent, always potentially available to be addressed or summoned through social and cultural practices. One point of origin for such approaches was Althusser's view that 'ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects' (1971: 174). The Brexit campaign certainly offered a number of potent 'hailings' that invited people to recognize themselves as Leave voters. The representations that were generated by both the Leave and Remain campaigns offered subjects resources to think (and argue) with, and points of identification and attachment. However, a distinctive element in the Leave campaign was the possibility of giving voice to *feelings* of frustration, loss and anger: people were offered the opportunity to identify themselves as 'angry subjects'. The referendum represents a democratic form very different from conventional local, national and European elections, not least for the way that it loosens established party affiliations. More specifically, this referendum offered a means of protesting about government, politics and the state of things. As Koch (2017) puts it, the referendum was 'a chance to reject government tout court and to say no to a system of representative democracy that many have come to experience in punitive terms'. As we argue below, it may be important to stress the multiple frustrations that brought people to the moment of saying No – and to note that the same warning about multiplicity applies to Remain voters, who also should not be regarded as a singular and coherent bloc.

There were two other critically important axes of representation at stake in the struggle for consent conducted by the Leave campaign. The first axis was that of

Britain and the *British people*. Leave voters were consistently summoned to see themselves as part of a nation that was composed of ‘ordinary, decent people’. As we have argued in more detail elsewhere (Clarke and Newman, 2017) these ‘people’ were represented as beset and betrayed by three groups: the metropolitan-cosmopolitan liberal elite (out of touch Europhiles, the architects of political correctness, insulated by wealth and social position from the effects of Europeanization); secondly, their cousins, the European elite (embodied in German chancellor Angela Merkel but more frequently represented as the ‘Brussels Bureaucrats’ trampling British liberty underfoot); and finally, the Migrant, enabled by Europe’s free movement rules and consuming scarce resources (jobs, housing, welfare and other public services). This system of representations of the ‘people’ and their others drew on the long, and still unfinished, dynamic of the postcolonial, whose echoes could be heard in images of the British/English people and in the nostalgic evocation of the glories of a ‘Great Britain’ - a profoundly imperial sentiment. This nostalgic mixture and the promised restoration of global greatness are, as Paul Gilroy (2005) has written, part of the affective landscape of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ – the painfully unresolved loss of an imagined past. In the process, nation, race and ethnicity (what Hall, 2017, called the ‘fateful triangle’) were linked together in a shifting but potent version of The People which spoke sharply to racial anxieties, even when denying it was racist. The ‘problem of immigration’ and the figure of the Migrant were central to the campaign, entwined in what Gail Lewis calls a ‘now you see it, now you don’t’ relationship to racism (Lewis, 2000, chapter 2). We can also see here the attempt to embed categories of subject as if they were mutually exclusive. As we noted above, the Leave campaign explicitly voiced this national-popular figure – the British People – as a set of affective conditions: a sense of anger, a feeling of betrayal, a sense of abandonment, and a series of more amorphous fears and anxieties about the future, all clustered around the ‘sense of loss’ (taken up below).

A second axis of representation that was central to the Leave campaign’s populist repertoire involved the imagery of ‘common sense’. The ‘common sense’ of the people that the Leave campaign spoke to – and spoke for – was one that foreclosed

the possibility of argument: indeed the very tools of argument (the language of rationality, evidence, science) themselves became objects of ridicule (Newman and Clarke, 2017). The Leave campaign recurrently attacked ‘experts’ and promoted a view of the ‘sovereignty’ of voters, most famously in Michael Gove’s claim that ‘people in this country have had enough of experts’ (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/10/michael-goves-guide-to-britains-greatest-enemy-the-experts/>) This imagery deploys a binary distinction between expertise (embodied in elites at home and abroad) and the common sense of the people. It was expressed in a relatively demotic style of campaigning: a self-conscious attempt to distinguish itself from ‘political speak’ (the vocabularies and styles adopted by most of the Remain campaign). This distinctive mode of address invoked, and claimed to be at one with, ‘ordinary people’. In addressing their ‘anxieties and fears’, Leave campaigners represented themselves as truth tellers and taboo-breakers, especially around the issue of immigration.

There is a critical distinction to be made here, too. While the Leave campaign laid claim to popular ‘common sense’, the *analysis* of ‘common sense’ needs to treat it as multiple and contradictory field rather than singular and coherent one. For example, Billig points to the ‘dilemmatic’ qualities of common sense (1998: 222), noting that ‘the common sense of an audience is not unitary but composed of different aspects’ (1998: 234). In this there are echoes of Gramsci’s view that common sense is a ‘collective noun’ – and is composed of a variety of ‘traces’ (1975: 324-5; see also Crehan, 2016). Brexit marked a ‘return of the repressed’ as Vote Leave found ways to talk about the problems and dangers of difference, otherness and foreignness. Processes of representation – including the notorious Vote Leave poster depicting a long queue of Syrians seeking refuge (in unacknowledged Slovenia) – did not necessarily produce *new* racisms, but certainly enabled racist sentiments to be safely spoken, with an associated spiraling of hate crime and racist abuse. Such shifts are shared with other experiences of insurgent nationalist-populist politics, elsewhere in Europe, the USA and India, for example.

Much has been made of 'Brexit' (and similar political disruptions) as an expression of popular anger, rage or frustration (see, inter alia, Mishra, 2016; McKenzie, 2017; McQuarrie, 2017). If we take a view of the plural subject seriously, this would lead to treating Brexit not simply as a vote born out of frustration or anger, but instead examining anger as a *multiple* rather than a generic condition. We might then explore the *diverse* frustrations that came to be bundled together in the act of voting Leave. Such frustrations might include a feeling of economic abandonment (the effect of spatially specific de-industrialization and dis-investment) and a sense of cultural dislocation, (expressed as the loss of 'our way of life', and frequently linked to immigration). There were feelings of political disaffection, with people expressing a deepening scepticism or cynicism about politics, politicians and the 'political classes' - all viewed as increasingly detached from the lives of 'ordinary people'. Brexit also involved forms of nationalist rage, which articulated a variety of anti-immigration, anti-European and post-imperial sentiments. Although these diverse frustrations were voiced through a unifying 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1978) that centred on a 'sense of loss', the losses condensed here were diverse, associated with economic and political, social and cultural, material and affective losses, including the loss of material and psychic 'privilege'. These diverse feelings were nevertheless articulated through a common point of expression and found a potent promise of redress in the Leave campaign's claim that the people could 'take back control' (see also Clarke, forthcoming b). Although the dominant narratives about Brexit drew on conceptions of the 'irrational' subject motivated by anger, rage and disaffection, these remain strangely singular subjects. In contrast, we want to emphasise conceptions of the political subject as plural, complex and potentially contradictory (Barvosa, 2008; Henriques, et al 1998; Wetherell, 2012; Roseneil and Frosh 2012).

Let us be clear: our insistence on the plural subject and the contingency of political mobilizations does not mean that subjects and subjectivities are constantly in flux. Rather, we need to think about how individually and collectively people are a mixture of deeply sedimented dispositions, beliefs, feelings and attachments and ones that are more contingently mobile, flexible or open to the construction of new

connections. The Leave campaign's appeal to 'tradition' may have worked with some deeply sedimented elements, including those of nation and race, but that does not mean that those are the only dispositions in play, nor that the connections that were forged politically – the specific *articulations* – are either necessary or stable.

Politics as articulation

Viewing politics as a practice of articulation means considering how plural, heteroglossic, subjects are addressed – spoken to and for – by political actors (parties, projects, leaders, etc.) aiming to mobilise particular subjects and inviting them to recognise themselves in imagined and projected unities (the people, the nation, etc.). Such articulations are *selective*, in terms of which elements of 'common sense' are being evoked and which parts of the public are being addressed and invited to recognise themselves as 'the People'. This practice of articulation is what Stuart Hall, following Gramsci, saw as the critical link between common sense, politics and hegemony and is a conception of political practice that demands an understanding of the plural, if not contradictory, subject. It certainly insists that political subjectivity involves unstable equilibria between identification, ambivalence and refusal (with shifting intensities). It connects directly with Gramsci's argument that hegemonic projects work selectively to suture the connections between some parts of common sense and the leading group's line of development. Articulation, then, is about the building of a bloc: an alliance of social groups, or even fractions of social groups, that can be bound together *as if* it is a unity and, ideally, as a naturally occurring and coherent unity.

Such a view of the work of politics as articulation might enable us to escape from the view that subjects are little more than 'willing dupes', vulnerable to the manipulative will of the powerful. Indeed, elsewhere we have argued against such deterministic readings of political subjectivity, using a Bakhtinian understanding of the dialogic dynamic to trace the contingency of how ideology works (or does not work). Writing about a study of consumerization of public services, we noted that people's discussions of the idea of the 'consumer' were marked by forms of scepticism,

distance and denial. Their responses recognised and reflected upon the dominant discourses and ‘spoke back’ to them – and we argued that they were part of a ‘politics of articulation rather than a politics of subjection’ (Clarke et al., 2007: 140-42).

In such a view, we can see populist projects like the Leave movement as involving the *selective* voicing of elements of common sense (and the silencing or refusal of others) by way of narratives, propositions, claims and promises that appear to represent a coherent programme grounded in the ‘good sense’ of ordinary people. The term ‘selective’ is crucial here: when commentators claim that the Leave campaign, Trump and other populist-nationalist political projects reflect, or give voice to, popular frustrations and disaffection (e.g., Judis, 2016), they ignore the selective and constitutive quality of political representation. People in the UK doubtless felt angry and frustrated by a range of things, but only some of them got ‘voiced’ in the Leave campaign, and their ventriloqual voicing constructed potent registers of recognition (and exclusion).

Conclusion: emergent politics and emergent political subjects

In this concluding section, we aim to tease out the implications of our analysis for understanding the prospects and possibilities of emergent political forms and forces. The apparent demise of ‘politics as usual’ is a well-trodden line of analysis in theses on the ‘post-political’ condition, in which parties have lost membership and legitimacy, technocratic politics dominate and where politics within the nation state has little capacity to change economic or social conditions (e.g., Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015; Glaser, 2018). However, Brexit appears to challenge such a view of the ‘post-political’. What is at stake, we ask, in trying to understand political subjectivity as both in retreat (with increasing disenchantment from parties and governments) *and* as resurgent (angrily unstable)?

For many, Brexit marked a shattering shift in the nature of politics and in forms of political subjectivity. It brought the ‘left behind’, the ‘disenfranchised’ and the ‘silent

majority' to voice; and it broke what appeared to be well-established trends of political disenchantment and de-mobilization. The 'chance to say No' (Koch, 2017) rearranged the political landscape, animated new political discourses and revived groups of apparently dormant political actors. It was both a significant disruption of 'politics as usual' in the UK and has been seen by many as part of a larger set of disruptions visible in the rise of Trump, other European populist-nationalist movements and Hindu nationalism in Modi's India (Bjork-James and Maskovsky, forthcoming). Yet we think it is dangerous to treat these emergent politics as marking an epochal shift in which new political subjects have become solidified into new political blocs (on the difference between 'epochal' and 'actual historical analysis', see Williams, 1977).

Indeed, our reason for beginning with the double disruption of Brexit and the 2017 UK General Election was to highlight the challenge of addressing emergent politics and emergent political subjects. Brexit certainly disrupted 'politics as usual', forging new possibilities of political subjectivity. By contrast, in England especially, the 2017 General Election saw a return to an older pattern of two-party voting, where an anti-austerity, pro-public services, pro-social Labour Party mobilized a new alliance, creating a bloc that articulated *other* popular disaffections, frustrations and anger, and targeted other causes for these disaffections. Here the disruption was of a different order, challenging to dominant wisdom that there is no alternative to Austerity and reasserting the possibilities of a public realm. Whilst the Leave/Remain division persists in British political life (as Brexit pursues its long drawn out governmental trajectory), it is not clear that it can provide a solid foundation for a new politics; any more than the revitalization of Labour under Corbyn is guaranteed to do so. These, after all, are shifting political projects, trying to articulate political programmes and identifications that mobilize (and de-mobilize) selectively. We are certain, though, that it requires a conception of the political subject as plural, contradictory and engaged through practices of political articulation to make sense of such changes. It is for this reason that we welcome the chance to engage in trans-disciplinary conversations about the subject in this analytically and politically richer register. Being able to draw on diverse resources – from discursive social psychology

to Bakhtinian anthropology or Gramscian cultural studies – has enabled us to think again about political subjectivity as a complex and emergent formation.

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