

**In the end everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? For me, political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done to it (Rancière, 2003, p. 201)**



theoretically innovative and empirically  
depoliticisation and repoliticisation,  
to the spectacular, *The Post-Political*  
that liberal democracy and consensus  
political possibilities and futures.'

anisme, Paris

## Post-politics of global capitalism radical change

h of liberal democracy. Old ideological battles  
our of freedom and the market. We are told  
d right'; that we are 'all in this together'. Any  
pressed through expert knowledge, consensual  
rnance. Yet the 'end of history' has also been  
with mainstream politics and a rise in nationalist  
v an explosion of popular protests is challenging  
ver of markets in the name of democracy itself.

e of this complex and paradoxical situation by  
al theory of 'the post-political' developed by  
Slavoj Žižek and others. Through a multi-  
assessment of contemporary depoliticisation,  
its urges us to confront the closure of our  
e possibility of emancipatory transformation.

ature on post-politics – its value and limits, its  
ility of creative syntheses with other approaches  
dimensions of contemporary depoliticisation,  
nthropy, ecology, participatory development,  
the regulation of biotechnology  
ential of anti-austerity protests, the Occupy  
uggles in the context of continuing processes of

Political Economy at the University of Manchester.

phy at the University of Manchester. He has previously  
rd University and the 2014 Vincent Wright Visiting  
ce Po, Paris.

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EDITED BY  
JAPHY WILSON AND  
ERIK SWYNGEDOUW

## *The Post-Political and Its Discontents*

EDINBURGH

# The Post-Political and Its Discontents

Spaces of  
Depoliticization,  
Spectres of  
Radical Politics

EDITED BY  
JAPHY WILSON AND  
ERIK SWYNGEDOUW





# **Politicising Urban Politics**

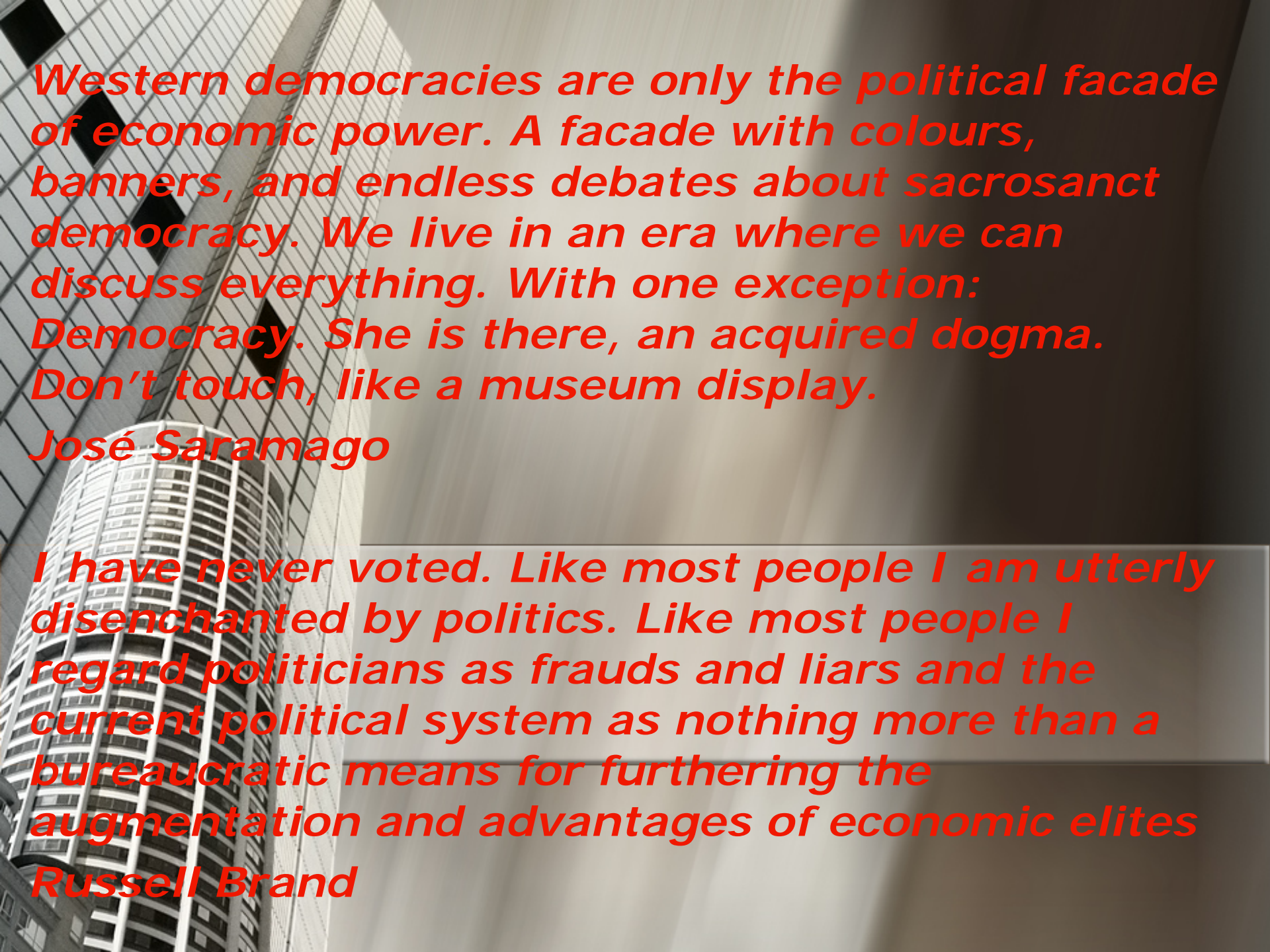
***Discontent, Disagreement, and  
the Struggle for Democracy***

**Erik Swyngedouw**

**SEED, University of Manchester**

**Centre for Urban Research on Austerity Inaugural  
Conference, De Montfort University, Leicester**

**18-19 November**



*Western democracies are only the political facade of economic power. A facade with colours, banners, and endless debates about sacrosanct democracy. We live in an era where we can discuss everything. With one exception: Democracy. She is there, an acquired dogma. Don't touch, like a museum display.*

*José Saramago*

*I have never voted. Like most people I am utterly disenchanted by politics. Like most people I regard politicians as frauds and liars and the current political system as nothing more than a bureaucratic means for furthering the augmentation and advantages of economic elites*

*Russell Brand*





“There is a shift from the model of the *polis* founded on a centre, that is, a public centre or *agora*, to a new metropolitan spatialisation that is certainly invested in a process of *de-politicisation*” (Agamben, 2006)







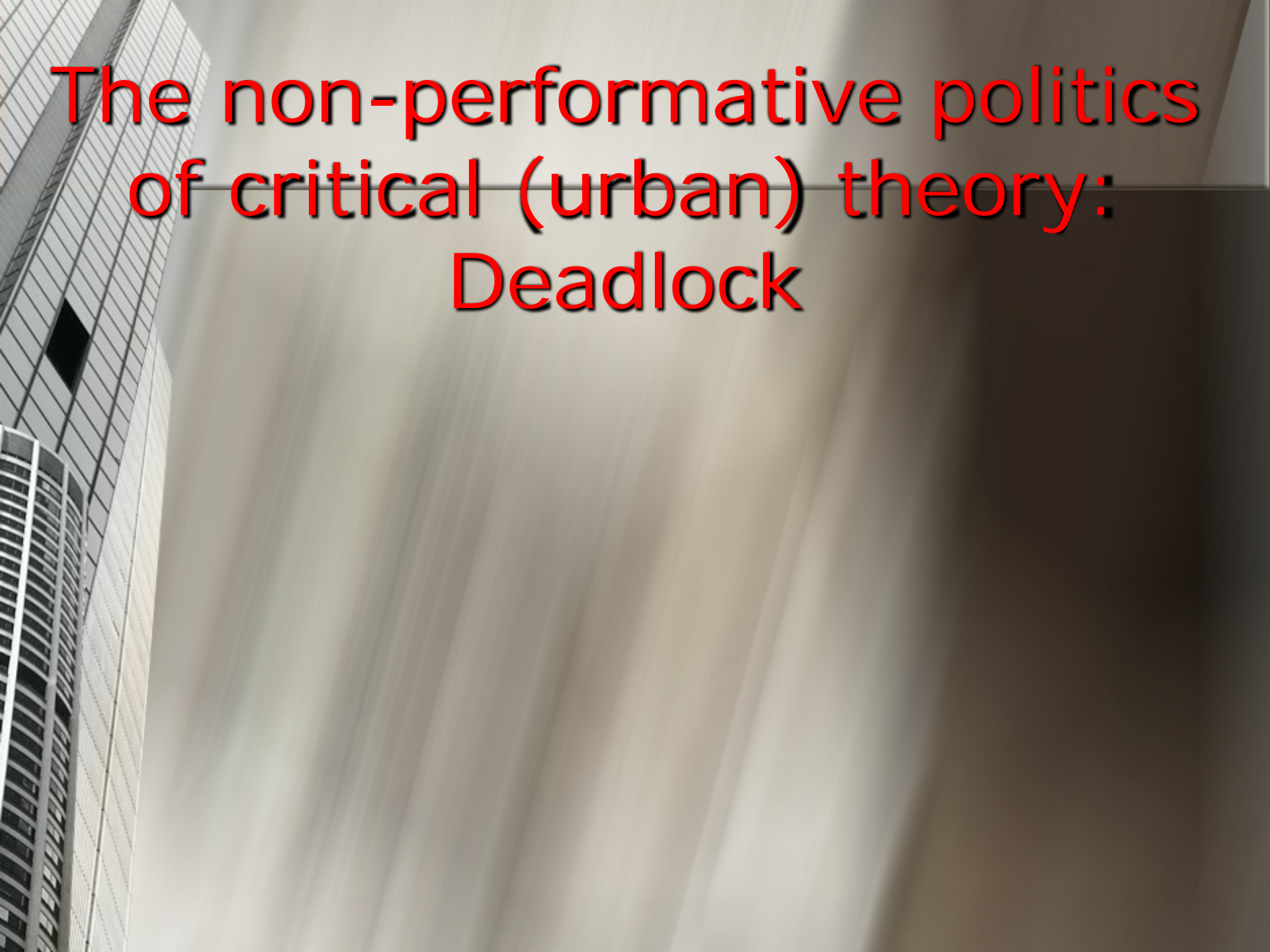
# Official Opening ECB Headquarters Frankfurt, 18 March 2015



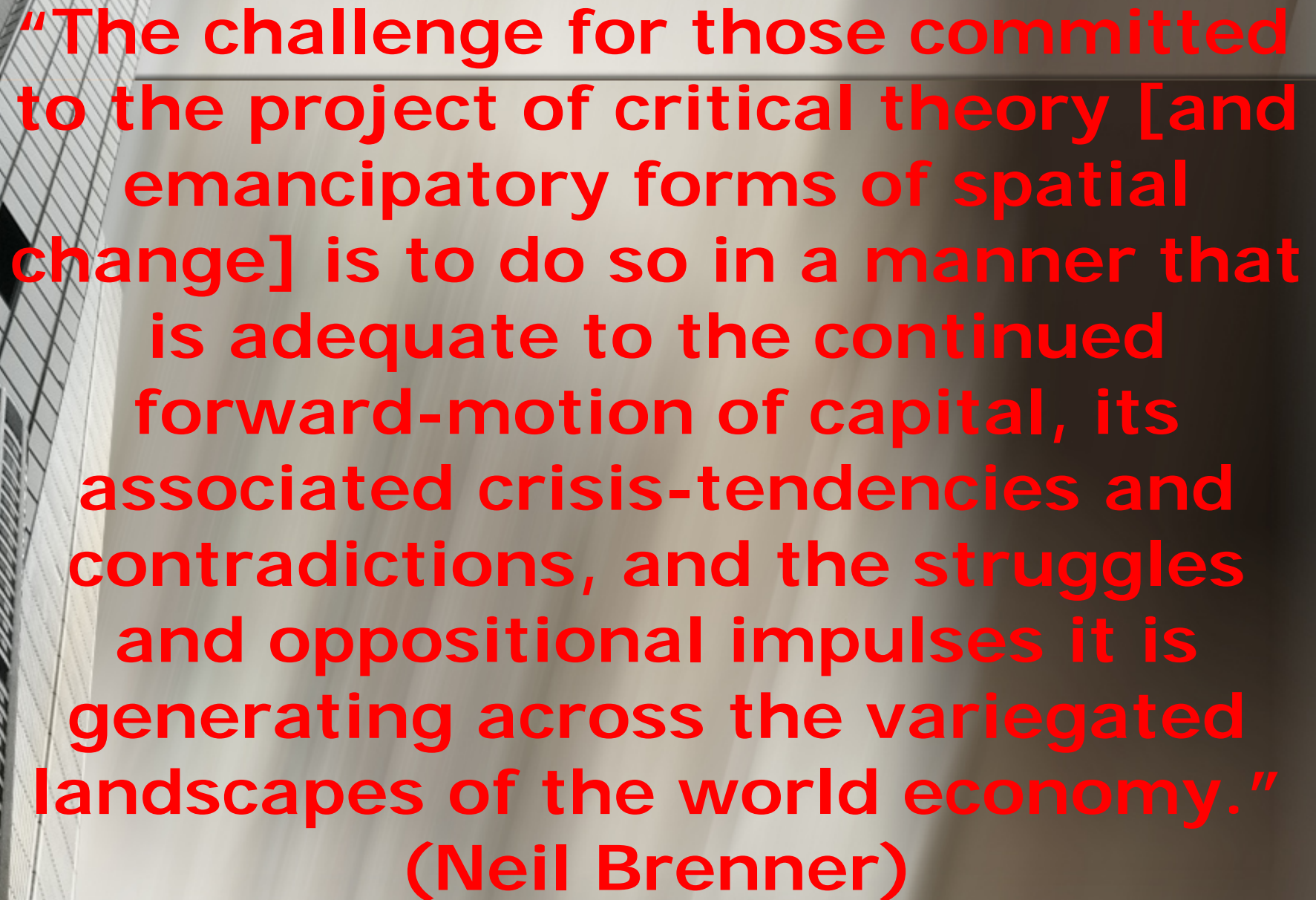
# Politicising the Urban

1. The Deadlock of Urban Critical Theory
  1. Post-Democracy and the Dynamics of De-politicization: the post-politicising disavowal of the political
  2. 'Politics' versus 'The Political' (la politique/le politique)
  3. Insurgent Democracy: from Staging Urban Equality to Producing Egalitarian Spaces
  4. The Re-Awakening of History and the Return of the Political (Le Réveil de l'Histoire (Badiou))?





# The non-performative politics of critical (urban) theory: Deadlock




**"The challenge for those committed to the project of critical theory [and emancipatory forms of spatial change] is to do so in a manner that is adequate to the continued forward-motion of capital, its associated crisis-tendencies and contradictions, and the struggles and oppositional impulses it is generating across the variegated landscapes of the world economy."  
(Neil Brenner)**



# Political non-performativity of (urban) critical theory

- **Actively invited (critical urban theory as hegemonic): Fully accounted for/Fully endorsed**
- **The Negative Dialectic of Critique**
- **Resistance/Critique as the horizon of the possible: Radically Conservative**
- **(Urban) Social Movements as normative 'quilting points'**
- **=> Integral part of process of de- or post-politicization (a process that itself is disavowed)**
- **➔ Presumption of relationship between critical analysis and political practice**



# Twenty-Eleven:

Urban insurgency and the  
return of the political in  
post-democratic times?





# Manchester Burning – August 2011









# BLOCKUPY



TRANSNATIONAL ACTIONS  
AGAINST THE ECB-OPENING GALA

18 MARCH 2015  
FRANKFURT/M

**"Seeds of  
Dystopia?"**







## **2. Post-Democracy and the Dynamics of De-politicization: the post-political evacuation of the political**

# Post-Politicization

- NOT about something 'Post'
- A particular figure/dispositive of de-politicization (Rancière)
  - Archae-politics
  - Para-politics
  - Meta-politics
  - Ultra-politics (Žižek/Schmitt)
- A contested and contentious process of post-politicization





# **Post-Politicization as a process of consensualising techno-managerial forms of (urban) governance ....**

- A permanent state of emergency-crisis (economy/migration/environment/security)**
- The economization of politics**
- The de-politicization of the economic-ecological**
- Sustained by expert management**



- **Populist tactics – Biopolitical happiness of the population /electoral apathy/Opinion Poll**

- **Autocratic forms of post-democratic 'glocal' 'governance-beyond-the-state'**

- **The 'tyranny of participation' by 'unauthorized' actors**

- **Mobilising techno-managerial dispositives – social management (of fear/crisis)**

- **Dispute versus dissensus ((almost) everything rendered contentious as a modality of de-politicization – but with clear taboos)**

**→ Fukuyama's truth**



- ... But intensifying outbursts of staging dissent/antagonistic violence

➔ The fragmenting forces of consensus politics

## **IDENTITARIAN**

- The 'ethnic' evil and the lure of identity
- Urban violent/dissensual eruptions (racaille/scum)
- The disavowal of 'the political' (scum/they do not know what they want)

## **UNIVERSALISING**

- The return of the passion for the 'Real' of the common under the banner of equality
- Prefiguring democratic practices of being in common and experimentation with a new constitution
- Scaling: From 'Indignados' and 'Outraged' to PODEMOS and SYRIZA







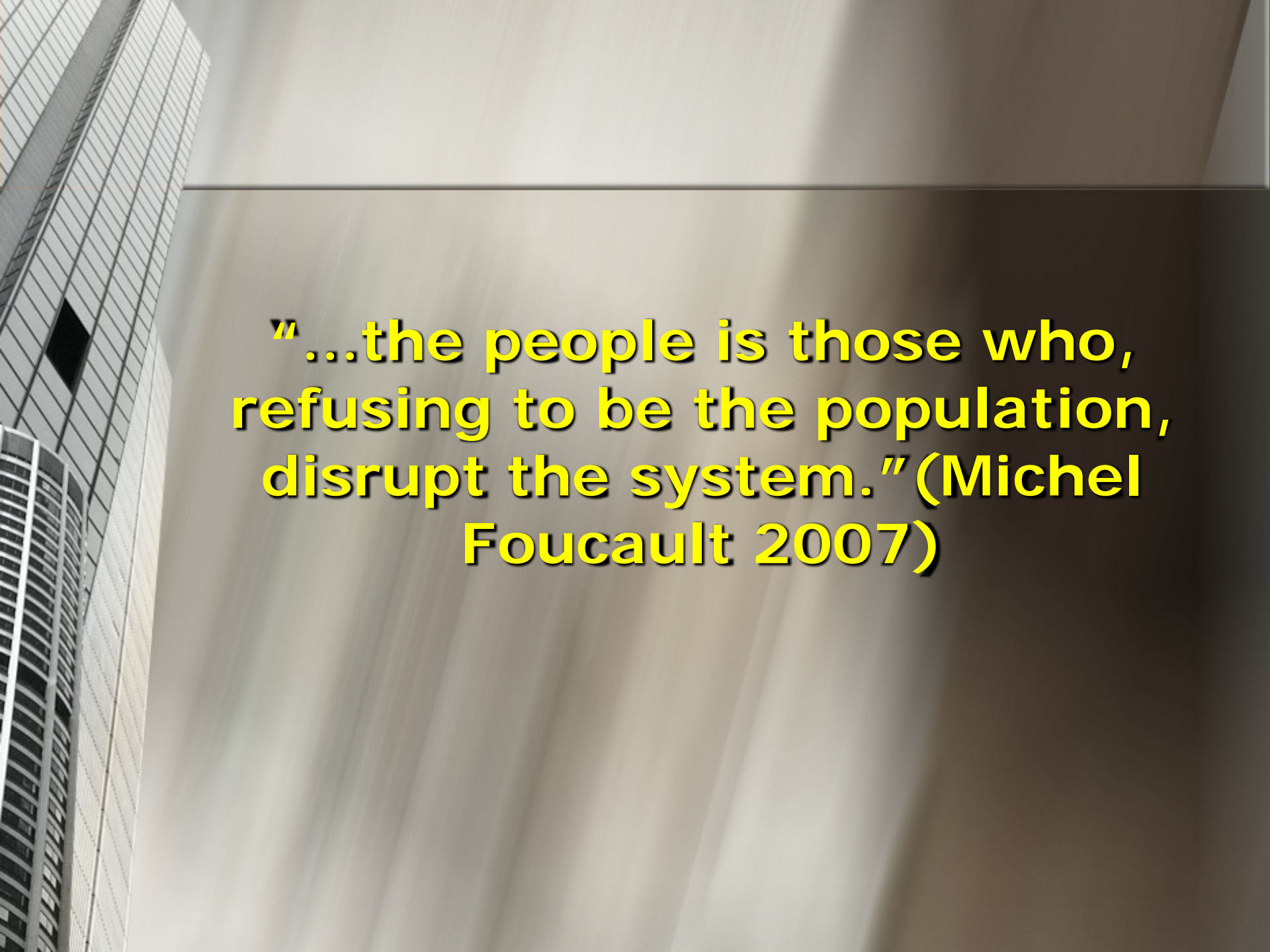
# Insurgent Democracy versus Instituted Post-Democratic Politics







Barcelona  
**En Com**



**"...the people is those who,  
refusing to be the population,  
disrupt the system." (Michel  
Foucault 2007)**



# 3. 'Politics' versus 'The Political'

## 'Democratic' Institutional Regimes versus the Democratic Political

### a) **The Political Paradox (Ricoeur; Arendt):**

le politique (The political) – la politique (politics/the police)

### b) **Re-Thinking/Re-treating the Political**

- The Philosopher's stone (Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, Derrida: the post-Heideggerians and post-foundational political thought)
- The Lacanian 'Real' (The political as dimension of antagonism (Mouffe/Rancière/ Žižek/Badiou))
- Anti-Philosophy and The Universality of the Idea of Communism (Žižek/Badiou)

## **c) The Democratic Political**

- The empty place of power (Lefort)
- The presumption of equality: the capacity of each and all to act politically (Rancière)
- Egaliberte (Balibar) as contingent foundation
- affirmation of society's absent ground (Post-Foundational Political Theory)
- The democratic against democracy (Abensour): the political versus politics/the police
- The democratic as immanent



## 4. Politicising the Urban: Staging Ega-libertarian Spaces

The political as a retro-actively revealed moment of eruption, an event, opening a procedure that disrupts any given socio-spatial order, one that addresses a 'wrong' in the name of a contingent axiomatic presumption of equality of each and everyone.

This 'wrong' is a condition in which the presumption of equality is perverted through the institution of an oligarchic police order. The political appears in the act of performatively staging equality, a procedure that simultaneously makes visible the 'wrong' of the given situation, transgresses the fantasy of the big 'Other', demands the impossible, and inaugurates the potential instituting of a new ordering.


# Insurgent Urban Political Acting

- Insurgent Democracy: democracy against the state (Abensour) or 'At a distance from the State' (A politics of subtraction).
- No foundational place, location, or subject: a process of common subjectivation (The emergence of political subjects).
- Specific, concrete, particular, but stands for as the metaphorical condensation of the universal: spatialization of the particular: (mediates particularising – universalising processes)
- Revolves around the tropes of emergence, insurrection, spatializing equality, and performative acting as a located intervention, interruption and re-staging – interruption in 'the order of the sensible', a reframing of common-sense.
- Operates in and through the metaphorical and material production of its own spatiality.




# 5. The Re-Awakening of History?

- **A. Planetary Urbanization and Localized Insurgencies: pre-political events**
  - **Localization**
  - **Contraction**
  - **Intensification**

- 
- **From the particular to the universal**
  - **Transforming and transgressing the symbolic order: mobilising a positive dialectic (vs. resistance).**
  - **There is no 'Master' -- Refusal as a political act**
  - **Disconnecting social theory from political praxis – recognizing the (relative) autonomy of the political**
  - **Stages and Practices the impossible, yet immediately realizable**
  - **Syriza? Podemos? Right to the City? Citizen's Collectives?**



- 
- **Radical Imaginaries (Castoriadis / Kaika): the resurrection of the obscene/censored thought of equality, solidarity, living in egalibertarian common (in a democratically produced commons)**
  - **Traversing the fantasies of the elites: us or catastrophe (and its perverse doubling – the permanency of emergency)**



## **B. From the pre-political to the re-awakening of history**

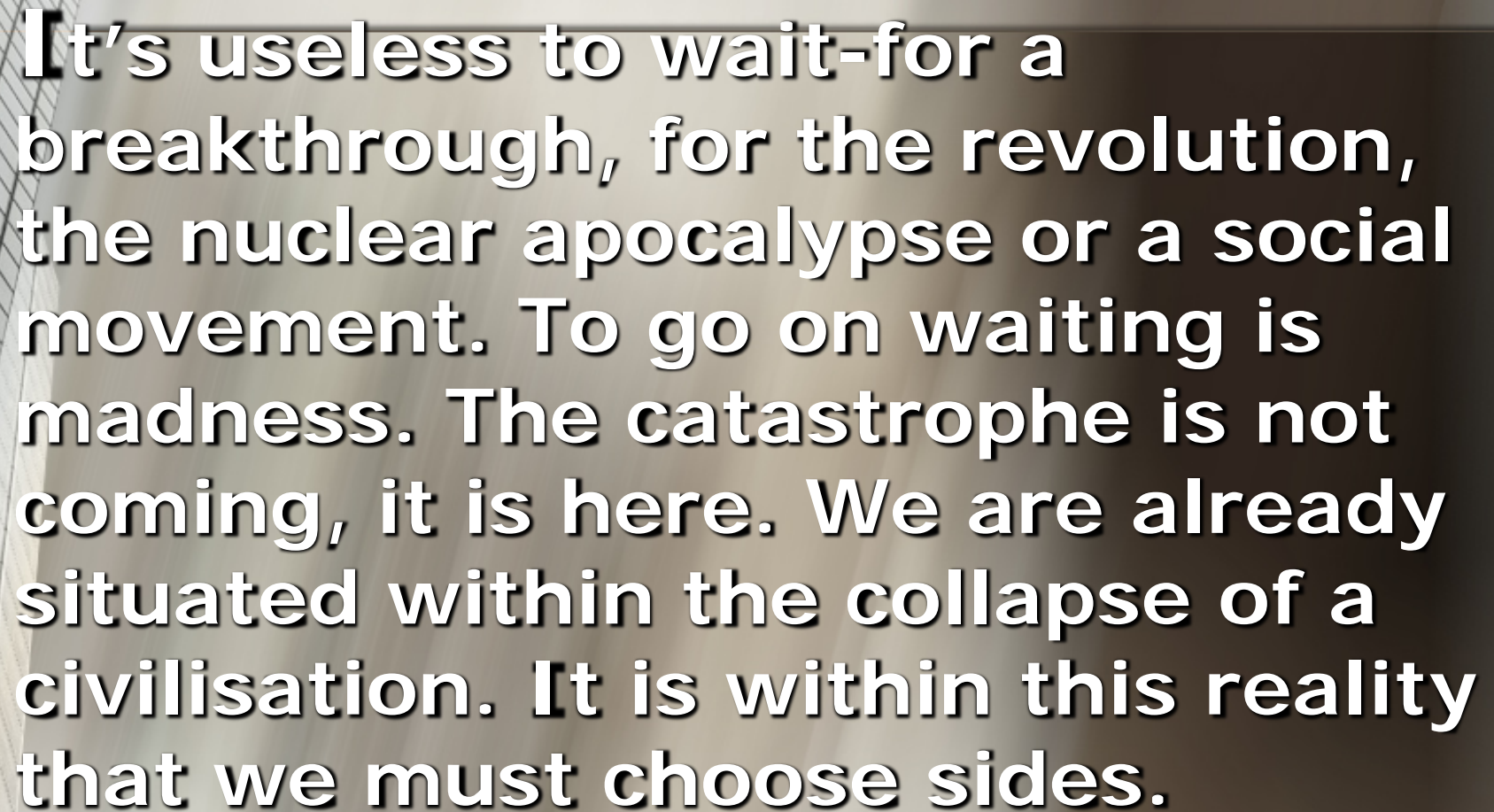
- Spatializing the urban event, planetary urbanization and the universalization of equality
- Re-visiting the political names of emancipatory struggle (subject, means, terrain)





## C. Confronting 'the Day After': From 'indignant Squares' to the right to planetary urbanization

- 'Seeds of Dystopia' vs. 'the real of the possible'
- Sustaining the process – a political procedure (organization, heterogeneous political subjectivities, terrain)
- Confronting violence
- Designing Egalibertarian Spaces



**It's useless to wait-for a breakthrough, for the revolution, the nuclear apocalypse or a social movement. To go on waiting is madness. The catastrophe is not coming, it is here. We are already situated within the collapse of a civilisation. It is within this reality that we must choose sides.**

**The Invisible Committee**