

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION - DETAILED SECTION ABSTRACTS

Panel I: Immanence, Assemblages and Becoming: Non-representational Accounts of the Political

Since modernity, representational and cognitive models of knowledge and reality have prevailed in the account of socio-political problems and phenomena. This tendency expresses an enduring legacy of Cartesian dualism and Kantian transcendentalism, which have dominated the development of political theory and philosophy. Ontologically, these narratives entail an understanding of socio-political reality as composed of autonomous, unitary and self-determining beings governed by rational principles and linear causality. Epistemologically, they have privileged cognitive, rational, contemplative or interpretative methodologies over creativity, performativity and experimentation in processes of knowledge production.

In the last decades, however, an increasing catalogue of alternative perspectives calling for a series of radical “turns” (affective, practice, material, ontological, to mention only a few) has started to knock more and more heavily on the doors of academic and intellectual debates. These diverse perspectives put emphasis on the immanent, emergent and performative character of reality, deemed not reducible to linear understandings or teleological narratives. Rejecting assumptions of traditional nature-culture, mind-body and subject-world binaries, they privilege immanence over categorical distinctions; becoming over being; affects over reasons; embodied and embedded experience over cognitive accounts of existence and, ultimately, a radical overcoming of any divisions between theory and action, thought and practice. What is at stake under the emergence of these new theoretical pressures is a radical reworking of the very idea of the political, under the felt necessity of acknowledging its multiple affective, precognitive, technological, molecular and non-representational registers. Only a multifarious and open account that moves beyond representational schemes is deemed compatible with the fluid, complex and self-organising character of socio-political processes. Rather than as an impediment, these alternative perspectives claim to enhance new productive potentials and foster a better openness of political thought to the unfolding of today’s world.

In such backdrop, the panel aims to provide a platform of open-ended discussion of the potentialities and challenges offered by non-representational, post-dualist and precognitive approaches to the account of political processes, which are shaping new alternative ontological and epistemological claims in political theory. Possible contributions could comprise (but not be limited to) the following areas and themes:

- * Theories of political affects and emotions in political and social processes on individual, collective and global scales.
- *The role of embodiment and of corporeal experience in shaping political subjectivities, identities and problems.
- *The contribution of network and assemblage theories and flat ontologies focusing on heterogeneous practices of associations, translation and entanglements (particularly in overcoming boundaries of human/non-human).
- *The account of materiality and the role that matter plays in rethinking agency in a post-anthropocentric sense, both in global phenomena and in everyday practices.
- *The potentialities opened by notions of performance and performativity in the study of political behaviours and forms of expressions.
- *The emphasis on ethics and on ethical dispositions in reworking forms of relational bonding of cultivation and care towards the self, the other and the world towards sustainable futures.

Panel II: The Power of Immanence: Non-representational Agency in Global Affairs

Modern politics is characterized by pervasive modes of representation and attempts to mediated and capture the immanent forces of democratic agency. In the domestic realm parliaments and governments act on behalf of ‘the people’ from whom they receive their mandate in the first place. International affairs works through a variety of representational channels and privileges inter-governmental and diplomatic exchange over alternative, non-representational courses of political action. And even transnational activism relies on NGOs and high-profile individuals that must speak on behalf of an otherwise indeterminate global civil society.

Such modes of representation are widely accepted traits that seem to naturally underpin modern politics. Yet, far from being accidental or coincidental, they constitute an inherent feature of dialectical Enlightenment philosophy. In that respect Hardt & Negri remark that modernity is not only characterized by the discovery of an immanent, democratic momentum, but is also ridden by omnipresent and recurring attempts to capture these very forces by means of mobilizing transcendental and representational political mechanisms. This logic of political modernity, namely the synchronous liberation and incarceration of republican force, downplays the role of non-representational agency in global affairs and prevents immanent power from unfolding its full democratic potential. The panel aims at pushing beyond this ubiquitous Enlightenment-reflex of mediated agency and attempts to explore the possibility of non-representational forces in world politics. Panelists are invited (but not limited) to deliver presentations touching upon one or several of the following thematic complexes:

- * theoretical and conceptual considerations surrounding debates of non-representational agency in global affairs
- * normative and ethical implications of immanent agency and non-representational global politics
- * forms, shapes, and appearances of non-representational global agency (i.e. direct action, activism, the politics of the every day)
- * questions regarding the feasibility of immanent politics (i.e. whether a non-representational demos of global reach is realizable in the first place)
- * spatializing practices and the politics of space that underpin immanent agency
- * compatibility between non-representational politics and institutionalized courses of political action
- * notions of power underpinning the politics of non-representation, i.e. overlaps between immanent politics and constituent power

Panel III: Representations in Practice: Danger, Identity, and Political Being

Despite recent questioning of the productive and generative functions of representation, the antagonistic frontiers constructed through discourses of danger have continued to dominate our understanding of the Self. Our inescapable modernity requires that collectivities derive safety and security under the benevolent authority of a Political. This inherently weak foundation of modern political authority requires an ever-evolving and expanding representation of danger in order to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the secured collective. However, this representation must be accepted by the audience if the Political is to remain legitimate, thus shifting the role of the Political from protector to representor in an effort to retain discursive hegemony over represented insecurity.

Given the limitless and fluid character of danger, as a threat to some or all aspects of our being, representations of danger are constitutive to our collective identity. The securitisation of an object or concept as endangered, complemented by the character of the represented danger itself, forms a discursive frontier from which identity and understanding of the Self is derived. The Political deploys representations of danger as a means of securing its discursive authority over the identity of the collective. Through deconstructing contemporary representations of danger, we can unlock how these processes identify and securitise constitutive referent objects of the Self. This provides an exciting and fascinating new avenue of study which reinforces and broadens understandings of our political ontology. Furthermore, this focus rises to criticisms lodged against recent trajectories in Politics and IR by linking the benefits of epistemological inquiry to the worldly pragmatism of practical approaches. Essentially, representations of danger as well as the methods and processes deployed within them expand our understanding of the Political as a discursive authority as well as our social existence as a stage.

The following panel proposes to look at our relationship with represented danger and to deconstruct these representations as a means to uncovering our politically imposed understanding of the Self. This panel aims to provide an open discussion about how, and indeed if, representations of danger shape our political ontology with the hope of uncovering new avenues of study and challenging criticisms lodged against representation's place in political science. Contributions in the following areas may include:

- * Theories of discursive representations of (in)security and their impact on socio-political relations
- * Studies into the role of the Unknown as a discursive space, looking at how represented knowledge of the Unknown forms politicised social identities.
- * Investigations into how representations of danger and (in)security are performances of power deployed within society
- * Theories which look at (in)security as a represented concept and the impact these practices have on culture and identity
- * The agency of society to (re)represent danger through counternarratives and challenge the Political's discursive hegemony