



While not disagreeing with this line of thought and even celebrating its tenacious refusal of metaphysical certainty, I have a number of questions about the study itself that readers (and the author?) might like to consider.

- (1) To what extent is the book about developing the (anti?) philosophical (political?) strategy that Widder avers? Or to what extent is it a book about selected authors in the history of philosophy that re-explicates those thoughts for the sake of further scholarship?
- (2) What is the (political?) strategy that Widder hints at in the conclusion? Or what would be an example of a politics consonant with it? or an ethics? Some indicative but deconstructive work on issues in the political world would be helpful, in what is otherwise a very abstract study.
- (3) This book takes philosophy very seriously, but I'm not so sure it takes language seriously enough. Does Widder have a view about his philosophizing of difference as a range of more or less novel metaphor: excess, rhizome, fold, warp, out of joint, groundless difference, etc.? Or are these terms somehow descriptive (of what, exactly?)? Or are they performative — what things do they, or could they, help us do?

This book is highly recommended as a post-Nietzschean, pro-Deleuzean explication of a philosophical position, and it genuinely pushes political and ethical thought beyond good and evil into an intense engagement with non-binary concepts of difference. This is clearly differentiated from previous resolutions in philosophy that promised truth, certainty and redemption, and it does not amount to nihilism, refusal of judgement or cynicism. The scholarly work is erudite and should keep us busy for quite some time. However, I look forward to work from Widder that moves his project more obviously into the political realm.

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Radical Space: Building the House of the People

Margarete Kohn

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The main aim of this book is to demonstrate the centrality of space for politics. Focusing on spaces of 'radical democratic practice' in pre-fascist Italy, Margarete Kohn argues in particular for a better understanding of the role of spatial practices in transformative politics. She takes issue with Habermas'



abstraction from concrete places of bourgeois political encounter to a public sphere irreducible to such particular locations. While sharing his analysis of the class-specificity of the emerging *bourgeois* public sphere, she disagrees profoundly with his acceptance of this exclusivity as a necessary prerequisite for the formation of a sphere of *rational* political debate and with the assumption that private realms of interiority, subjectivity and privacy were necessary to enable individuals to enter debates in the public sphere. Rather than dispensing with the notion of the public sphere on the basis of this critique, however, Kohn makes an impassioned case for radicalizing our understanding of it, for locating it in concrete spaces and for showing that radical transformative politics could emerge from shared, social spaces without access to the refuges of a bourgeois private realm.

Kohn sees material places of association as central to the creation of spheres where sub-altern groups could make their demands heard and could begin to engage in democratic political practices. Such groups, according to Kohn, were unable to use private spaces like the 'home' as the basis of interiority and critical consciousness. They depended on the formation of 'social wealth' to make their interests count (p. 43). After a discussion of the spatial politics of the Masonry movement, Kohn gives evidence of how and why workers were precluded from forming equivalent associations through the extension of factory discipline into most areas of their lives. Drawing on the work of Foucault, she emphasizes the embodied effects of measures such as enforced silences during long working days and the severe economic consequences that prosecution for involvement in radical political movements had for workers with limited resources. Recognizing the limitations for political engagement that arose from the disciplining of workers' bodies and from the tight control of their everyday time-spaces leads Kohn to critique the Marxist embrace of the factory as a privileged site for the radicalization of democracy and of industrial workers as the most likely agents of revolution. In three subsequent chapters, she highlights instead the importance of sites and organizations that allowed a broad spectrum of sub-altern groups and workers to associate: the cooperative, the 'house of the people' and the 'chamber of labour'. These spaces entailed strategic exclusions, such as limiting the rights of bourgeois members and their physical presence, while enabling debate between different marginalized groups as well as lending material support for both everyday survival at a time of great dislocation (due to the impacts of emerging global markets) and for more radical political action. Kohn adopts Goffman's notion of the 'encounter' between bodies in physical space in order to argue that 'juxtaposing the social processes at work in different spaces of varying scales can disrupt what appears to be the homogeneity of the social' (p. 68). Much attention is paid in the main sections of the book to the question of whether the architecture of places like 'houses of the people' itself enabled democratic



encounters, especially when the emerging fascist movement in Italy equally seized the potential of built space to denote and extend its political power. The author is cautious here not to divorce space from the social and to show, with Lefebvre, that as products of human action the potential of spaces depends on whose needs they satisfy. This is an important qualification, which I missed in the first chapters, where in order to make the case for recognizing the 'power of place', its potential to 'matter' both to radical democratic and to authoritarian political movements seemed undertheorized.

In her discussion of the significance of 'houses of the people', Kohn draws on Foucault's notion of heterotopia, which refers to places which juxtapose incompatible spaces and locations and which thus invert and contest existing economic and social hierarchies. While such heterotopic sites could have been built by both fascist and socialist movements, for Kohn the key distinction between them is how they used space, and not just their opposing ideologies: 'Because fascism and socialism had different political purposes, they used space in different ways. Fascist spaces were often built on a monumental scale to evoke authoritarian power; even their "houses of fascism" were structured to subordinate the masses to the leader' (p. 105). She repeats this argument in relation to the role of 'white' Catholic movements in municipal politics. While Kohn concedes that these contributed to the successes of democracy, she argues that they were not as effective at dispersing power as socialist movements, which sought to democratize sources of power. Demonstrating the potential of municipal politics to become sites of resistance on the periphery of state power, Kohn conceptualizes them as political sites, where deep-seated structural issues were addressed through local concerns. Significantly, the author sees municipalism as distinct from communitarianism in as far as it is not based on the assumption of constituting an organic entity, but forms 'an elusive forum for debating, applying, and revising' visions of community (p. 142).

I find myself much in agreement with Kohn's effort to focus attention on the centrality of space for politics and on the passions lived through and 'captured by a material place' (p. 152). The depth and detail of her historical analysis are impressive and form the basis of a convincing theoretical argument. I also found the connection between academic debates and theorizations by political practitioners that Kohn makes throughout the book compelling and insightful. Further, it seemed to me that the conclusions drawn from this project of historical analysis opened new paths indeed for reclaiming the potential of radical democratic politics from utopian ideals discredited especially by the realities and demise of state socialism. I am less convinced, however, by the notion of material space that Kohn employs in as far as it only goes so far in highlighting the political potential of different types of space. This is particularly evident in her



postscript on globalization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, where physical presence of bodies is argued to be more effective and likely to produce lasting associations than virtual connections in an increasingly commodified virtual space. In her effort to construct an embodied, materialist account of space and politics, I fear that Kohn resurrects binary divisions between the material and the imagined that have been critiqued particularly by poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist critics. It is a shame that she draws only marginally on conceptual debates in geography, limiting her references to the work of Harvey and Soja. The relational understanding of space adopted and elaborated by Massey (1999) and the performative concepts employed by feminist geographers (see Gregson and Rose, 2000) as well as by geographers working towards 'non-representational' understandings of space (Thrift, 1996; Dewsbury, 2000; Amin and Thrift, 2002) would have been particularly valuable for developing a conceptual framework that foregrounds the potentialities of embodied, impassioned, affective space without limiting its multiplicity and the plurality of its dimensions. I am also somewhat puzzled by the lack of engagement with Iris Marion Young's work on deliberative democracy, especially given the critical attention she pays to the exclusions entailed in 'community'. Although Kohn clearly conceives of the sites of resistance she has analysed as sites of contestation, there is indeed not much discussion of actual tensions and possibly irreconcilable interests. Little thought is given to the position of women in these organizations, their situation thus becoming very much subsumed under the general categories of workers, small-scale farmers and 'sub-altern' groups. It is an omission which weakens arguments about the inclusive and pluralistic character of democratic spaces in my view.

These critiques notwithstanding, Kohn's book makes an important intervention in debates on the nature of public space and, in unearthing a largely unrecognized history of sub-cultural political struggle, contributes indeed to the effort of 'momentarily disrupting the certainties of the past' in order to 'open up the possibility of reconfiguring the future' (p. 159).

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Solidarity in Europe: The History of an Idea

Steinar Stjernø

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'Solidarity' is one of those words that is used so frequently as a rhetorical gesture that is not easy to discern whether there is also, somewhere beneath the froth, a theoretical concept. In political theory the judgement so far appears to be entirely negative, for, as Steinar Stjernø comments, it has virtually ignored the analysis of solidarity as a concept (p. 20). In this ambitious and highly impressive text, Professor Stjernø remedies this inexplicable gap in the literature and, hopefully, lights the way for further research into a concept which ought to be at the centre of political debate in the global age.

The relationship between the rhetorical use of the term and its potential as conceptual tool is tricky, yet in the past this has not prevented theorists attempting to clarify the descriptive and normative meaning of other "hurrah" concepts such as democracy and liberty. In acknowledging the difficulties Stjernø discusses different methodological approaches to the study of the history of ideas, arguing that his own approach owes more to Michael Freedén's work than to Quentin Skinner's. In particular he does not want to restrict himself to examining the work of individual theorists, and in the second part of the book he examines the evolution of the concept in the language of political parties and movements in order to ascertain shifts in meaning and context.

How does Stjernø define solidarity? He provides a 'statist' definition whereby solidarity is conceived as 'the preparedness to share resources with others by personal contribution to those in struggle or in need through taxation and redistribution organised by the state' (p. 2). This enables him to analyse how an often-vague idea, developed in different ideological traditions, has been utilised in political programmes which helped to fashion the social structures of modern West European societies. However, it also plays down the myriad ways in which solidarity has been practiced beyond the reach of states. So, there is