Brexit Britain

Ethnography of a Rupture

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A sense of belonging to what-has-been and to the yet-to come
is what distinguishes man from other animals.

John Berger

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Abstract

This thesis is the outcome of three months of ethnographic fieldwork in London, the year after the Brexit referendum. By conceptualising the referendum as a moment of rupture, as the beginning of an in-between period in British society, the central aim of this thesis is to trace some of the ways in which individuals and collectives have started to come together and shape strategic narratives about contemporary British society, articulating different scale-making projects within technological and political assemblages.

The fieldwork upon which this thesis is based is defined as a multi-speed approach to ethnographic research: on the one hand, it consists of embedded and embodied knowledge drawn from participant-observation and from interviews with politically active individuals; on the other hand, it consists of mediated knowledge drawn from research in and of cyberspace. A secondary aim of this thesis is to account for the role of digital technologies in political discourse and practice.

In terms of theory, this thesis aims for a relational understanding of Brexit, both as a process caught up in multiple flows and relations, and as a force that actively produces relations among different groups in British society. In other words, Brexit is here understood as a *problem* that catalyses the emergence of different (and divergent) *publics*, which in turn frame Brexit within specific scale-making projects.

In the final instance, these scale-making projects can be understood as horizons of public intervention, that is, as alignments of temporalities, spatial scales, and technologies that enact meaningful and intentional public interventions at specific junctures of society. By paying attention to these horizons, this thesis aims to bring into focus some of the potential social formations and cultural becomings that are currently emerging in Brexit Britain, trying as far as possible not to speculate on what will actually happen after Britain leaves the European Union.

Introduction

Haunted by collapse

For many people living in the United Kingdom and abroad, Brexit was felt like a sudden rupture in the normal state of affairs: after forty years of membership, the British people voted (by the smallest of majorities) to leave the European Union. Beyond the anxieties over what this would mean in practice, some also saw in Brexit the spectre of how previous supra-national blocs, such as Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, began their collapse seemingly out of nowhere. As Sarah Green writes in her introduction to the collected thoughts of twenty-four anthropologists in the days following Brexit, "my immediate reaction to the results […] was to remember Alexei Yurchak's book, *Everything was forever, until it was no more* (Yurchak 2005). In the book, Yurchak describes the feeling of many people in Russia when the Soviet Union broke up: it came as a complete shock because they thought it would never happen; but once it had happened, it was not really a surprise at all" (Green et al. 2016, 478).

This theme of sudden, unexpected (and yet, in hindsight, wholly predictable) collapse came back time and again during the three months that I spent conducting ethnographic fieldwork in London. On my very first night, I went to an event in Central London titled *Brexit: An Unorthodox View*[1]. Former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, Turkish novelist Elif Şafak, and Croatian philosopher Srećko Horvat were there to present a European perspective on Brexit and publicise the nascent *Democracy in Europe Movement 2025* (*DiEM25*), a pan-European political movement in which they work as coordinators, and within which I conducted a part of my fieldwork. Horvat in particular drew similarities between Yugoslavia and the European Union[2], arguing that the toxic combination of rising nationalism, labour reforms, and IMF-mandated structural adjustment programmes that contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia could also be perceived — albeit in different ways — across Europe today, from the Greek debt crisis to the rise of populist, often ethno-nationalist parties in various European countries. A few weeks later, one of my interlocutors, a Greek woman called Eleni who has been living in London for years and whom I met at one of *DiEM25*'s meetings, told me that she shared very similar fears:

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[1] DiEM25.official. "Brexit: An Unorthodox View." Accessed August 8, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AraqxOnOS64&t=553s

> I was born in Georgia, and I lived in the Soviet Union... after the Soviet Union collapsed there was a war, it was a really bad situation... the financial system collapsed completely, and it was literally – one of the reasons why I'm in *DiEM25*, I can see that happening again, the EU is literally following the steps of the Soviet Union... I've been thinking about it since everything started with Greece, I was sure that we're headed towards that, and I think Britain will be the first country. The very first one [in the USSR] was either Latvia, Estonia or Lithuania... then it was Poland and then Ukraine, and then it was a domino.

Shortly after the Brexit referendum, many were concerned that if the Netherlands, France, and Germany were to elect populist right-wing governments, Brexit might turn out to be the beginning of the end for the EU, especially given Donald Trump's election as President of the United States (Follain 2016). After twelve months of government mismanagement, gaffes and general confusion about Brexit, that 'worst-case-scenario' no longer seemed as likely, so much that Brexit has apparently "vaccinated Europe against populism" (Quatremer 2017). Meanwhile, many of those who voted Remain in the referendum have turned their attention to the implications of Brexit, and have begun articulating public responses to many of the issues involved, such as neoliberalism, austerity, immigration, populism, democracy, and the future of citizenship. In the months following the referendum, there was almost an explosion of linkages between the embodied and embedded dimension of Brexit, and its past and future ramifications, both in the UK and elsewhere.

Betwixt and between

If these linkages have any significance at all, it is because they have been made from a position of liminality[3], caught "betwixt and between" Britain's European past and whatever the future may hold (Turner 1967). Reflecting on the significance of Brexit, a number of anthropologists have noted that, had the result gone the other way, there would not have been the same "urgency to discuss or debate why 48 percent of voters preferred to leave the European Union" (Edwards, Haugerud and Parikh 2017, 196). Instead, in the months following the referendum, there has been a remarkable amount of discussion – not only amongst anthropologists but in wider society as well – about the impact of de-industrialisation and neoliberalism on British society, and especially about how working-class communities in post-industrial regions expressed their frustration against the political establishment by voting Brexit.

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[2] Collected in an edited volume on post-socialist transition in Yugoslavia (Horvat and Štiks 2013).

[3] Although initially coined by Arnold van Gennep in *The Rites of Passage* (2013) [1909], liminality only became a

Whether the Brexit vote was misguided or not is beside the point. What matters is that even after a year, Britain still feels like it's in a liminal position, because the shape of post-Brexit Britain is far from crystallising. As Thomassen argues, "if historical periods can be considered liminal, it follows that the crystallization of ideas and practices that take place during this period must be given special attention" (Thomassen 2009, 20), for they open up "lines of flight" in which the question of what the UK might become gains a fundamental importance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), especially from the perspective of subjectivity and the social relations and imaginaries that support it (Braidotti 2012, 245).

This thesis was researched and written at a time when Britain was in a dramatic flux: my fieldwork began with the landmark court case that ruled in favour of Parliamentary scrutiny over Brexit (Rayner 2017). It reached a high-watermark with the triggering of Article 50 that formally set Brexit in motion (Heffer 2017). The writing process began as the British electorate was asked once again to go to the polls, this time for a 'snap' general election that was called three years early (Ferguson 2017), and it was concluded as Britain and the EU came to their first impasse in the Brexit negotiations (Foster 2017). This thesis is about what happened in the twelve months between the Brexit referendum of June 2016 and the start of the Brexit negotiations in June 2017, between the moment when the

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central keyword in social anthropology following Victor Turner's seminal essay "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1967), in which he identified "the importance of in-between periods" and also of "the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (Thomassen 2009, 14). More recently, liminality has also been used to study large-scale societies (Eisenstadt 1995; Szakolczai 2000); Szakolcai in particular has asserted that modernity itself can be understood as a condition of "permanent liminality" (Szakolczai 2000, 215-227). While this concept is evocative for reading contemporary societies, it is important to resist "universalising definitions" of liminality and instead "discuss the limits and modalities of its application" (Thomassen 2009, 20). The kind of transition that has been initiated after the Brexit referendum does suggest a certain usefulness for thinking in terms of liminality, in particular because the outcome of Brexit and its definitive consequences for British society are still effectively unknowable.

question was asked and the moment when the answer was acted upon[4].

Acknowledging the significance of this moment of liminality opens up a number of questions: what has this rupture meant in practice for the lived experience of citizenship? How have citizens and diverse collectives articulated "strategic terrains"[5] (Fischer 2003) to intervene in the Brexit process? How have they grounded abstract notions such as democracy and community in specific understandings of society? What are some of the material, social and political processes that have helped crystallise these interventions? And finally, what are the alternative "cultural becomings" (Hall 2005a; in Roman 2015a, 165) that have been imagined and enacted in the practice of citizenship? We shall address these questions throughout this thesis by focusing on how diverse, contingent, and temporary social formations (which we will refer to below as 'publics') have come together to address the problem of Brexit by articulating what we shall call a horizon of public intervention: an alignment of temporalities, spatial scales, and technologies that enact meaningful and intentional public interventions at a specific juncture of society.

June 24, 2016: A city concussed

For a sizable chunk of the British population — especially in London, in which almost every borough voted to remain in the EU — the day after the Brexit referendum was the day when the future collapsed. Social media were buzzing with videos of weeping teenagers, distraught at the prospect that they will no longer be European citizens, and many non-British European nationals became suddenly self-conscious about their accents and apparent foreignness, often feeling unwelcome for the very first time (Oakley 2016). Writing for *Vogue* magazine, Italian Londoner Cristina Ruiz argues that even if Europeans are allowed to remain in the UK post-Brexit, "something has profoundly shifted in our relationship" (Ruiz 2017). "I have never felt so out of control of events around me," she reports one of her friends saying, a feeling that echoes what so many of my own friends and acquaintances told me at the time.

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[4] See *Appendix I* for a summary of the major events in Britain's relationship with Europe prior to the Brexit referendum.

[5] In *Emergent Forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice*, Fischer (2003) develops the concept of "strategic terrain" as a conceptual space "on which multiple technologies interact, creating a complex topology for perception and decision making" (Fischer 2003, 23). This notion belongs to a wider conceptual repertoire that Fischer develops in order to explore "the tapestry of media that society uses to think through issues of uncertainty and complexity, not only as technical, business, and policy issues but also as ethical, political, social, cultural, and philosophical ones" (*ibid.* 18).

That morning, I myself was absolutely bewildered at the news, my confusion made noticeably worse by the fact that I was bleary-eyed after staying up until five o'clock in the morning watching the live coverage on the BBC, hoping it would go the other way. At work, I got into an argument with some colleagues who voted for Brexit because they thought that it would mean £350 mln more a week for the National Health Service[6], and despite the early summer sunshine, the atmosphere in Central London was generally bleak. As I spoke with Eleni about Brexit, many months later, she told me about her impressions walking into her office in the City of London that morning:

> I didn't expect it... I was living in my bubble here in London, especially working in the City. I remember the next day when I went to work it was the first time in my life – and I've been working in the City for many years – that I saw such a silence. It affected our work directly. The moment I stepped into the office everyone was like – I can't even describe how awful it was. The City was obviously against Brexit. I felt a little bit-- it was probably the first time I felt a bit of racism in the UK, but it could have been just my perception, I don't know.

While the sense of alienation and disenfranchisement dawned on those who supported Remain, for many of those who voted Brexit the referendum was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to actually translate their discontent into something tangible that would have some effect on the status quo. "They did it to give David Cameron a bloody nose!", said Janet, another research participant who voted Remain and whom I also met through *DiEM25*. On this account, David Goodhart argues in *The Road to Somewhere* (2017) that those Remainers who woke up feeling that they were living in a foreign country "were merely experiencing, in political reverse, what a majority of people apparently feel every day" (Goodhart 2017, 23). The UK, it turns out, is a much more divided place than most people – especially on the Remain side – would care to acknowledge, and the Brexit referendum made this division impossible to ignore. But on top of all these pre-existing rifts and fractures, the legal, material, social, and political implications of leaving the EU[7] have contributed to an incredibly messy situation, making the task of writing an ethnography about Brexit Britain all the more delicate.

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[6] In one of the more notorious developments of the Brexit campaign, leading figures such as former Mayor of London Boris Johnson and Conservative Minister Michael Gove centered the Leave campaign around the false claim that the UK sends £350 mln to Brussels every week, and promising that after Brexit, this money could be spent on public services like the underfunded NHS. Understandably, this was an incredibly popular and persuasive argument, yet despite being printed on the side of the Leave campaign's "battlebus," it was also one of the first promises to be disavowed by Johnson and co., who argued that it was more of a suggestion than a policy commitment (The Independent 2016).

[7] As Ian Dunt writes in *Brexit: What The Hell Happens Now?*, "the referendum settled a question. It did not shape the answer… we are forced to try and extrapolate a particular type of Brexit from the result and the arguments made during the campaign. It's a messy, frustrating process, but it's all we have" (Dunt 2017, 64). Indeed, beyond the binary in/out question on the ballot paper, British lawmakers both in government and in the

Research objectives and structure

The Brexit vote opened a Pandora's box at the heart of the many contradictions surrounding globalisation, bringing the issues of populism, sovereignty, free trade, and contemporary capitalism to bear directly upon the lived experience of people in England[8]. As Ulrich Beck argues, national spaces are increasingly enmeshed in global webs of commodity circulation and normative regulation and harmonisation, to the point that "everyday practices involve an exceptional level of cosmopolitan interdependences" (Beck 2003, 455). However, the appeal of national sovereignty has not waned as a result, on the contrary. Harvard economist Dani Rodrik (1997) was one of the first to highlight the social costs of globalisation, showing how increased trade liberalisation came at the cost of social cohesion and stability. Indeed, as Beck argues, "with cosmopolitisation... the seduction and possibilities of re-ethnification and renationalisation of both politics and society increase" (Beck 2003, 466). While this is undoubtedly the case in Brexit Britain, any analytic frame for researching the notion of citizenship in this context would be severely impaired if it kept to the "methodological nationalism" that has been the norm in the social sciences since the nineteenth century (Beck 2003).

In his defense of methodological cosmopolitanism, Beck states that "in order to even understand the trend toward renationalisation or re-ethnification [...] one needs a

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opposition are now faced with the astoundingly complicated task of deciding how much of the European framework the UK is supposed to exit. Indeed, as Green explains, "trying to establish any fixed location or meaning of 'Europe' is unlikely to produce a coherent answer" (Green 2013, 347). At best, the European framework is made up of an uneven, overlapping and irregular set of European accords which include: the EU, the European Economic Area (EEA), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the EU Customs Union, and the Council of Europe — not to mention the Eurozone and the Schengen Area, of which the UK has never been a member.

[8] Brexit has affected the politics of the whole of the United Kingdom, however, in this thesis we will limit our discussion for the most part on the situation in England. Nonetheless, Brexit has considerably exacerbated the difficulties in the relationship between Westminster and the devolved administrations. Despite guarantees from Theresa May, the Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish have failed to be included in the negotiating process, a decision that may have significant consequences post-Brexit:

- Scotland voted to Remain, and Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has consistently lobbied for Scotland to secede from the UK and join the EU as an independent nation-state (Taylor 2016a);
- Wales voted to Leave, despite the fact that much of the Welsh economy depends on EU subsidies, and it seems that the economic downturn from Brexit may mean that the UK will not compensate these subsidies (O'Carroll 2017);
- Northern Ireland is arguably the most complicated situation because it constitutes the UK's only land border with the EU. Any restrictions to freedom of movement post-Brexit could lead to a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which may significantly jeopardise the peace process in Northern Ireland. (Lyall 2017).

cosmopolitan perspective" (Beck 2003, 456). This perspective can be loosely understood as a "debounded" perspective on politics and society (Beck 2003), in which "social fields ceaselessly leak and transform" (Biehl and Locke 2010, 318). The 'public' as it is conventionally understood is not a unified entity but a plural, composite entity, a "contingent and temporary formation" that emerges, crystallises and dissolves in relation to certain problems (Dewey 2016 [1927]; Bennett 2010, 100). The problem is Brexit, understood in Bruno Latour's terms as "the *res* that creates a public around it"[9] (Latour 2006), and the publics that will be presented here are those Remain-voting publics that have coalesced around (and often against) Brexit – or at the very least, against the prospect of a 'Hard Brexit,' a complete separation from all elements of the European framework. This debounded perspective can also be framed as a relational understanding of politics, against dominant "representations of 'the public' [that] rest on the erasure of social structures, allowing universalizing claims to be articulated only by particular types of people" (Cody 2011, 38). Instead, in order to frame how different horizons of possibility have been conjured by overlapping (yet distinct) publics in post-referendum Britain, this thesis will look at how publics are:

(a) Articulated discursively and in practice;
(b) At particular levels of scale;
(c) Through concrete and material assemblages.

This theoretical framework will be further explained in the next chapter, alongside an overview of the ethnographic fieldwork that took place in London in early 2017, the specific ethical issues that were encountered, and the methodological approaches that were used. In the second chapter, we will focus in particular on two different articulations of Brexit Britain according to two diverging groups of people who voted to remain in the EU: the first are the "Hard Remainers," staunch anti-Brexiters whose main priority is to reverse Brexit altogether; and the second are the "Re-Leavers," people who voted Remain but who have since accepted the referendum outcome.

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[9] Sociologist Bruno Latour asks "what would an object-oriented democracy look like?" (Latour 2006) as a way of drawing attention to how objects can trigger "new occasions to passionately dispute and differ," binding us together "in ways that map out a public space profoundly different from what is usually recognised under the label of 'the political'" (*ibid.*) In a similar vein, Jane Bennett (2010) draws on John Dewey's (1927) notion of "a public as a confederation of bodies… pulled together not so much by choice… as by a shared experience of harm that, over time, coalesces into a 'problem'" (Bennett 2010, 100). As she explains, "in naming a *problem* (rather than an act of will) as the driving force behind the formation of a public, Dewey (almost) acknowledges that a *political* action need not originate in human bodies at all" (*ibid.*, 102). This idea of problem-oriented publics has proved invaluable for this thesis insofar as it allows for a much broader, ecological perspective on Brexit.

Although there is a substantial overlap between these two groups in terms of political orientation (generally speaking, both groups tend to be lenient on the issue of immigration, for example), the public assemblages that they have formed differ to the extent that they have articulated strategically distinct understandings of the issues at stake in Brexit Britain. The third chapter will address attempts at rethinking the notion of 'control' that was so central in the Brexit campaign, by looking specifically at how the effects of neoliberalism and "fast-capitalism" (Holmes 2000) have been articulated as an alternative reading of Brexit within "minoritarian" political projects (Braidotti 2011; Madhu 2012). Finally, the fourth chapter will assess the role of information and communication technologies in assembling diverse publics, making them perceptible, and enabling them to articulate different horizons of possibility.

Last but not least, this thesis will alternate between two different registers, that broadly separate the analytic and theoretical parts of this text from the narrative and ethnographic ones. Mainly, this distinction has been made in order to convey a sense of the multiplicity of interpretive readings there exist around Brexit and how the research process of this thesis followed a multi-speed methodology, which will be properly explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 1: Conceptual framework

First, this chapter enumerates some of the salient developments in the UK since the Brexit referendum. Second, it introduces an outline of the conceptual framework that underpins this thesis. Third, it presents an overview of the ethnographic fieldwork, including relevant methodological and ethical issues.

#BrexitShambles[10]

'Shambles' is one of those words in the English language that has several layers of meaning. In its normal, day-to-day use, it is a synonym for 'mess:' However, it can also mean quite literally "a place of mass slaughter or bloodshed," and "a scene or a state of great destruction," as in "the city was a *shambles* after the bombing" (Merriam-Webster 2017). Since the June 2016 referendum, the phrase 'Brexit Shambles' has become a signifier for the political situation in the UK, cropping up on placards at demonstrations and on social media, as well as being the name of an anti-Brexit web page[11]. With all the twists and turns of politics in this period, there has been seemingly no shortage of occasion for using the phrase. Here are some of the highlights from that year in politics:

24/06/16: Leave wins the Brexit referendum by 52% to 48%[12]. Prime Minister David Cameron resigns (Lewontin 2016).

13/07/16: Theresa May is appointed Prime Minister (Gaffney 2016).

02/10/16: May gives her first speech on Brexit at the Conservative Party Conference in Birmingham, explicitly stating her intention to reduce immigration and leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (BBC News 2016b). Conservative ministers announce policies (many of which are dropped soon after) designed to restrict the number of foreigners in British workplaces, universities, and hospitals (Wilkinson 2016).

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[10] Hash tags are commonly used in social media as hyperlinks, turning a word or a phrase – here, Brexit Shambles – into an active channel for common discussion, debate, or 'shitposting' (the constant posting of memes, videos or pictures that are usually unrelated to any discussion). This and other hash tags in this thesis have been included because of their prominence as social media rallying points around Brexit.

[11] See http://www.brexitshambles.com/about/

[12] See *Appendix II* for a breakdown of the Brexit Referendum results.

03/11/16: The High Court of Justice rules that Parliament must legislate before the Government triggers Article 50 and sets the Brexit process in motion. The UK Government appeals the ruling and takes the case to the Supreme Court (BBC News 2016c).

24/01/17: The Supreme Court dismisses the appeal and confirms the High Court's previous ruling (Rayner 2017). Over the winter, the National Health Service is experiencing its 'worst-ever crisis' in Accident & Emergency departments across the country due to a chronic shortage of funding. Images of patients waiting for hours on trolleys in corridors, receiving improvised treatment go viral on social media (Campbell et al. 2017).

29/03/17: Article 50 is triggered, formally setting the countdown to Brexit. On March 29, 2019, the UK will no longer be a member of the EU (Heffer 2017).

18/04/17: Theresa May announces an early general election, to be held on June, 8. The polls at the time estimate that the Conservatives could increase their majority in Parliament from 17 to 100 seats, virtually eliminating the Labour Party as an effective opposition (Asthana and Walker 2017). The following day, the front page of *The Daily Mail*, a prominent right-wing tabloid newspaper, reads 'Crush the Saboteurs' (Harris 2017). Following a widespread backlash, the editorial board is forced to explain that it does not condone genocide (Daily Mail Comment 2017).

09/06/17: The Labour Party has pulled off an unprecedented performance during the elections under the leadership of left-wing anti-austerity politician Jeremy Corbyn (Jilani 2017). By campaigning (amongst other things) for radically reformed healthcare provision as part of an ideal of collective responsibility and solidarity, and by successfully portraying Theresa May as an unreliable, 'weak and wobbly' politician[13], Labour manages to gain far more seats than expected (BBC News 2017b). The final result is a hung parliament. Neither Labour nor the Conservatives have a working majority (Alfarra 2017). The Conservatives sign a deal with the Northern Irish Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), breaking with twenty years of neutrality in the Northern Irish peace process (Syal 2017).

19/06/17: The Brexit negotiations officially begin, but there are already hints of a 'civil war' brewing in the Conservative cabinet (Parfitt and Osborne 2017). Theresa May no longer seems like a reliable Prime Minister. The government's shortcomings in addressing the Grenfell Tower tragedy, that happened the week after the general election debacle, have further tarnished May's credibility (Leftly 2017), and rumours begin to circulate about a possible leadership challenge over the summer.

17/07/17: The second round of the Brexit negotiations begins amid more disagreement in the Conservative cabinet, which is becoming increasingly polarised over what the government should aim for in the negotiations (Harris 2017).

20/07/17: British politicians go on holiday for the summer recess. They will return on September, 5, almost six months after Article 50 was initially triggered. Meanwhile, Brexit negotiations are at a standstill, as neither the EU nor the UK government can reach an agreement on the "divorce bill" or on "citizens' rights" (Foster 2017).

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[13] In contrast to the Conservatives' depiction of Theresa May as offering "strong and stable leadership" (Poole 2017).

According to the European Union's directives on Article 50, the final deal needs to be ratified at the European Parliament by all 27 member states, a process which is estimated to take around six months (Nisbet 2017). This means that negotiations will have to end in September 2018 at the latest. By the time British parliamentarians return to the House of Commons after recess, there will be just over one year left to negotiate "one of the most complex negotiations ever undertaken by British ministers and officials" (Niblett 2016). Indeed, the European side of Brexit is if anything more difficult than the domestic side, not least because of the UK's notable shortage of experienced negotiators, most of whom are employed directly by the European Commission and not by the British government.

To complicate the matter even further, Brexit has exposed a decades-old faultline in British society that was most sharply revealed in the split between 'populist' and 'elitist' newspapers[14]. Middle-class, urban and liberal areas with high levels of immigration and a highly-educated population tended to vote Remain, while white working-class, rural and post-industrial areas with lower immigration typically voted to Leave[15]. These divisions, as many academics and commentators have remarked, are directly connected to long-term processes like de-industrialisation and the neoliberal transition to a service economy, and are less connected to historical party affiliations or political orientations (Edwards, Haugerud and Parikh 2017; Gilbert 2017; Balthazar 2017; Evans 2017; Thorleifsson 2016; Green et al. 2016). Indeed, although both Labour and the Conservatives have an accountability towards voters on both sides of the Brexit divide, neither has been able to develop some common ground on the issue of Europe.

Theorising mess

At the time of writing, a national consensus on Brexit seems extremely unlikely. Instead, a number of different articulations are emerging of Brexit as a problem at the local, national, and international scale. If there is any overlap in these articulations, there are also very significantly divergent representations of Brexit Britain. The aim of the theoretical framework outlined below is to distinguish between these different articulations in order to situate them ethnographically in a series of strategic interventions through which political subjects enact themselves as citizens and publics. Theory is here understood as a practice or "as a 'detour' to help ground our engagement with what newly confronts us and to let that engagement provide the ground for retheorising" (Slack 1996, 114). In this sense, multiple frames will be used to provide a more nuanced understanding of the often contradictory interventions emerging around Brexit.

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[14] During my fieldwork in London, I had the opportunity to interview Antonia, a journalism Bachelor's student who was writing her dissertation about the role of the media in the Brexit referendum. As she explains, "the elitist papers [*The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*] had all the 'factual' information, [but] they didn't really have the impact." Instead, "the populist papers [*The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Express*] had big, bold headlines, larger images, bullet-points, lists, and most importantly kept to a few core themes like immigration that mattered to their readership, it's all a matter of proximity, and what they would be affected by. One of my favourite examples was an article in *The Financial Times* about the difference between sovereignty and power. I wish more people would have engaged with it, and understood his argument, but then you have *the Sun* with big, bulging headlines saying 'Germany threatening here and there,' it's something that sticks."

[15] See *Appendix II*.

The multiple theoretical frames used here can be summarised as a *cartographic* approach that takes "shifts, mutations, and processes of change as key features of the particular historical period we are going through" (Braidotti 2011, 247). It is a "theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present" in which the spatial and temporal specificities of different subject positions serve as the main anchors for analysis (*ibid.*, 216). Braidotti's cartographic approach constitutes the frame for this analysis, and it will be supplemented by a number of conceptual tools including:

1. Stuart Hall's notion of *articulation* (Slack 1996; Clarke 2015);
2. The concept of *scale* as developed in the anthropology of globalisation (Eriksen 2016; Tsing 2005);
3. A philosophical perspective on contemporary social formations that pays attention to heterogeneous *assemblages* of material elements, technologies, human actors, and socio-political forces (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2006; Bennett 2010; Greenfield 2017).

These theoretical perspectives allow us to map out the implications of Brexit with regard to political subjectivity, and analyse the mediating role of material infrastructures of communication such as social media in creating contingent and diverse "imagined communities" (Cody 2011; Anderson 2011 [1983]). In the final instance, this theoretical approach is intended to elucidate the emergence of particular horizons of possibility that frame historically specific and situated social imaginaries of democracy at the local, national, and European scale. The wide array of social relations and imaginaries that will be brought into this discussion of citizenship contribute to an ecological perspective on society, one that reframes social and political formations as "ontologically heterogeneous" assemblages (Bennett 2010, 106), in which human agents are enmeshed with material elements and discursive, technologically-mediated articulations of politics and society. Far from offering an exhaustive account of the realities of Brexit or an all-encompassing way of making perceptible the multiplicity of issues at stake, the aim is to "work with our always inadequate theories to move understanding a little further on down the road" (Slack 1996, 114).

Indeed, our interactions are becoming increasingly mediated by lengthy and almost invisible chains of digital communication technologies, forming a complex infrastructure that is material and abstract at the same time. Beyond the familiar social media platforms used by hundreds of millions of people worldwide (Facebook, Twitter, etc…), there are more and more platforms that serve to relate disconnected individuals and groups as social movements, pressure groups, solidarity networks, co-working teams, and so on. With regard to politics, these platforms create social constellations and assemblages through which publics coalesce and articulate interventions in response to a given problem, such as Brexit. However, it is also through the medium of these platforms that publics can perceive themselves as such (Cody 2011, 47), meaning that there is a reciprocal dynamic at play: through digital communication technologies, disparate actors find themselves related to each other and participate in the articulation of situated and temporary problem-oriented publics; conversely, these digital communication technologies also make specific representations of these publics perceptible to the actors themselves, significantly framing the perceived horizon of possibility and intervention.

By developing this notion of public formation, our argument is that in regard to political campaigns, social media act both as an "echo chamber" and as a "persuasive device" (Vaccari 2012). For instance: in the weeks following the 2017 general election, pro-Remain social media networks on Twitter began speculating about the possible relaunch of an anti-Brexit campaign, arguing that there was the beginning of a shift in public opinion. One Twitter user proclaimed: "Looking at my timeline the number of people opposed to Brexit is growing rapidly. *@UKLabour* needs to be careful not to miss the turning tide." To which another user replied: "That's because the people on your timeline are *remainders* [*sic*] as am I." Twitter and Facebook work on the basis of following one's interests, meaning that these platforms can often lead to confirmation bias, as suggested in the exchange above. However, the role of digital communication technologies in political campaigns is far more ambiguous once we take into account the ever-growing possibilities for using the internet as a tool for political campaigning.

More often than not, these mass-membership social media platforms constitute the tip of the iceberg of political mobilisations (Juris 2012). One of the enduring developments of the *Occupy* protests after the 2007-2008 crash, for instance, was the growth of 'platform cooperativism' through web apps such as *Loomio* (Finley 2014), which was later adopted by social movements and political parties across the world (like the *Pirate Party* or the Spanish movement *Podemos*) as a way of embedding democratic norms of decision-making in daily practice. Many companies now use similar platforms for remote co-working, enabling flexible groups to emerge in a way that is relatively independent of location, ability, and occupation. According to Aral Balkan, a digital rights activist who is helping to shape *DiEM25*'s "Internet of People" tech policy, there is an "inextricable link between the topology of our technology and the topology of society" (Balkan 2017), in the sense that "digital-age organisational forms" and "emerging political norms" (Juris 2008, 201) go hand in hand with the specific technologies that are deployed.

As the prominence of technological platforms has grown in public and private spheres of life, so has there been a sustained development in critical frameworks for understanding how and to what extent these platforms affect our capacity to act as individuals and collectives. Popular representations tend to endorse highly deterministic models of how technologies work, for instance by attributing specific effects to an intrinsic function of a given technology: the assertion that Twitter and Facebook create echo chambers, or that co-working platforms can create a frictionless "hivemind" society (Arjun 2016) are instances of this tendency. On the other extreme, portraying digital technologies as social constructs (Gamson et al. 1992) minimises the dynamic interplay of factors that frame the possibilities (and limitations) of given technologies. Here, many in the social sciences have turned to the idea of *affordances*, a concept first developed in perceptual psychology to explain how the possibilities for animals to act come both from the environment and from the animals' own capabilities (Nardi 2015, 18; Juris 2012).

Transposed to the world of digital media, this idea of affordances effectively shows how technologies "frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object" (Hutchby 2001, 444). By bringing digital technologies into our discussion of how political subjects enact modes of participatory citizenship, the aim is to foreground the contingency of processes of public formation, and to show how they rely as much on the capabilities of individuals and groups as on environmental factors, including technologies, discourses, and spatial and temporal dimensions of society. To this end, we now turn to how material, social, and political elements are brought together in situated assemblages, starting with how ideas of collectives in society are articulated and grounded in practice.

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For Hall, an articulation is a contingent linkage between distinct elements within a discourse, and "between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected" (Grossberg 1996, 141):

> Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects.

In the context of Brexit, this notion allows us to map out how different discursive elements (such as ideas of class or cosmopolitanism) come to cohere, temporarily, in contingent formations. These formations, in turn, problematise Brexit through practices of participatory citizenship, or "substantive citizenship," defined by Isin as "practices of becoming claim-making subjects in and through various sites and scales"[16] (Isin 2008, 16). It follows that tracing the articulations of divergent or overlapping discourses in Brexit Britain also requires an attention to scale, a concept that has been used extensively in the anthropology of globalisation (Eriksen 2016; Tsing 2005).

"In a very general sense," Eriksen argues, "scale simply refers to the scope and compass of a phenomenon — whether it is small or big, short-term or long-term, local or global" (2016, 28). By integrating a scalar dimension into our understanding of articulation, it becomes possible to discern not only the multiple ramifications of Brexit for the local, the national, and the European scale, but also how different situated actors articulate Brexit on specific scales as a way of problematising it and enabling public interventions. Indeed, as Tsing argues, "scale is not just a neutral frame for viewing the world; scale must be brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded, as well as taken for granted. Scales are claimed and contested in cultural and political projects" (2005, 58), forming "scale-making projects" (*ibid.*) that – in the case of those who voted Remain – articulate different understandings of the problem with Brexit and how it can be addressed in practice. In order to analyse how these scale-making projects come to be associated concretely with the political practices of individuals and communities in the UK, we also need to pay attention to the material infrastructures of communication that make them widely accessible to political actors.

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[16] As Isin and Nielsen write in their introduction to the edited volume *Acts of Citizenship*: "what is important about citizenship is not only that it is a legal status but that it involves practices – social, political, cultural and symbolic. In other words, *formal citizenship* is differentiated from *substantive citizenship* and the latter is seen as the condition of the possibility of the former" (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2; my emphasis).

In his seminal book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Anderson identified the press and "print capitalism" as the primary vehicles that "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (Anderson 2011 [1983], 279). However, with the rise of social media and the relative decline of traditional media outlets, it becomes important to reassess how the articulation of specific scale-making projects enables the emergence of mass-mediated subjectivity by defining "material, collective and discursive relationships" (Ong & Collier 2008, 4). As Cody writes, "the very capacity of publics to know themselves and act in the world is premised [...] on recursive processes of mass mediation and self-abstraction" (Cody 2011, 47).

The concept of assemblages, developed extensively within science and technology studies (Fischer 2003; Latour 2006) and the anthropology of globalisation (Collier & Ong 2004), is useful here because it allows us to recognise how unrelated elements may form "heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated" arrangements that nonetheless allow certain possibilities to be enacted (*ibid.*, 12). As a concept, 'assemblage' has slightly different meanings depending on the author[17], however in the analysis below we will draw mainly on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of assemblage as a "heterogeneous composition" that nonetheless entails "a constructive process that lays out a specific kind of arrangement" (Nail 2017, 24). In other words, an assemblage is not just "a mixture of heterogeneous elements" (*ibid.*) that forms a unity, it is primarily defined by an arrangement of relations that forms a "multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole" (*ibid.*, 23).

With regard to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their relation to publics, the notion of affordances will be used to distinguish between the different publics and the assemblages within which they are inscribed. This will enable us to compare between different social formations and how they are mediated through material infrastructures of communication in order to construct discursive articulations of Brexit Britain. Many of the examples of emergent publics described below have been encountered precisely through the medium of ICTs (such as social media). however, during the three months of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in London, I engaged in particular with the British branch of *DiEM25*.

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[17] Latour's use of the term 'assemblage' draws on the idea of 'assembling' as the act of drawing together (forming an 'assembly')(Latour 2006), whereas Deleuze and Guattari's(1987) notion of *agencement*, ('assemblage' in English) is closer to the idea of an 'arrangement' (Nail 2017, 22).

Fieldwork overview

DiEM25 was founded in February 2016 in Berlin by a number of intellectuals and activists (including Yanis Varoufakis, Elif Şafak, and Srećko Horvat) and counts several of other prominent figures among its coordinators, including Brian Eno, Vivienne Westwood, Noam Chomsky and Julian Assange. In the year and a half since its initial launch, it has established a presence in several European countries and has grown into a complex, polysemic movement, addressing a multiplicity of political issues that nonetheless come together in a loosely defined project of pan-European democratisation. Thus, in Greece and in Italy, *DiEM25* has positioned itself strategically in opposition to the European *troika* and to the top-down programme of austerity that has been implemented since the financial crash in 2007-8. Elsewhere, as in Barcelona and in Berlin, *DiEM25* is contributing to the "rebel cities" project, drawing on lively local dimensions of activism to foster an alternative view of Europe based around collective practices.

More recently, *DiEM25* has announced plans to field candidates at the 2019 elections for the European Parliament. Indeed, alongside grassroots activism, *DiEM25* members are building a pan-European policy platform – known as the *European New Deal* (DiEM25 2017) – to address the migration crisis, the rising automation of the labour market, the potential for a citizens' income, climate change, and the excessive financialisation of the economy. It is an ambitious project to complete within a decade, but perhaps one of the most tangible results of *DiEM25* so far has been the emergence of a European proto-public sphere at the level of participatory citizenship. Interlocking social media platforms enable *DiEM25* members to share insights and projects across places and countries, building a political agenda through both horizontal and vertical means.

As for the UK, the situation is understandably more complex. Brexit has neutered a substantial part of *DiEM25*'s antagonism towards the EU machine: in a nutshell, 'we're leaving anyway, so what's the point in trying to change it?' Yet, during its official launch the day after the *Unorthodox View* presentation in Central London, there was a palpable sensation of enthusiasm and optimism about the potential for *DiEM25* in the UK. A lot of this was down to the radically inclusive articulation of democracy that was put front and center by the organisers: instead of the usual condescension towards Leavers, here was a group of Remainers[18] who actively wanted to reach out and build a common ground for social democrats, environmentalists, liberals, and progressive conservatives, and yes, also for the people who voted Brexit out of concern for sovereignty, local stability and immigration, a common ground that simultaneously articulated a local dimension of agency and a pan-European dimension of democracy — a heady prospect for imagination-starved progressives who were still recovering from the traumatic referendum of the previous year, not to mention the recent election of Donald Trump.

DiEM25's launch event took place at the wood-pannelled theatre space of Conway Hall in London's university district Bloomsbury. The stage was empty, except for a large *DiEM25* banner on a stand. In the hall itself, all the chairs were turned inwards, making a wide oval in the centre of the room. Although it was a wet cold Saturday morning in late January, the hall was packed, as was the balcony upstairs. In his opening speech, Brian Eno recalled the last time he had been here, in the late 1960s, when the hall was one of a handful of venues to host avant-garde underground bands. "That was another moment in time when it felt like everything was changing," he said. But with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and the rise of a particularly insidious form of competitive individualism, that dynamic feeling was lost. Successive waves of wealth creation and wealth stagnation ensued, and now, for Eno, Brexit and Trump feel like the end of forty years of decline. "I think we're bottoming out now. Getting involved in politics seems something that's worth doing again."

Towards the end of the meeting, after the speeches and after several interventions by members of the audience, we all break off into smaller groups and begin organising. E-mails are exchanged, and initial coordinators are nominated. I put my name down for the media and communications group, and we decide to take it online. Over the course of the following three months, I would remain continuously involved with *DiEM25*. Alongside my own fieldwork, I contributed to *DiEM25*'s own goals for articulating a potential intervention in British politics, keeping up discussions with members in various parts of the UK, many of whom had come to London for the Conway Hall meeting.

Most of my co-participants in *DiEM25* met once again in London shortly after I returned to the Netherlands at the end of my time in the field, this time at the October

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[18] *DiEM25* campaigned as part of the *Another Europe is Possible* umbrella campaign, which presented a '*Critical Remain*' agenda for Brexit, critical of the EU project but also supporting the material, economic, social, and political importance of Britain's EU membership (Hudson 2017).

Gallery, just five minutes away from Conway Hall. The meeting was called to discuss the general election and to agree on how *DiEM25* would organise itself in the UK. Although I couldn't be there in person, I was able to follow the discussion thanks to a Skype connection that was set up on the day. The first reason why digital technologies are so prominent in this thesis is because they have had a central importance in my fieldwork and in how I developed my methodology.

Citizen ethnography: Methodology and ethics

In his ethnography of grassroots movements against corporate globalisation, Jeffrey Juris outlines a mode of politically-oriented ethnographic inquiry that focuses on the accountability of the ethnographer towards the political realities in question. He asks, "what is the relationship between ethnography and political action? How can we make our work relevant to those (with whom) we study?" (Juris 2008, 19). His answer, framed as "Militant Ethnography" (*ibid.*) is relevant to this project to the extent that it foregrounds collaboration, participation and multi-scalar networking as a rich basis for ethnography (*ibid.*). The only difference is that while he conducted ethnography among militant anarchists, my informants were by and large much less militant. Nonetheless, just like Juris, I position myself squarely as a participant in this debate over citizenship, and therefore I have chosen the label "citizen ethnography" to describe how this project was developed out of a collaborative effort to unpick and unpack the complex ramifications of Brexit.

During my time in the field, I employed a number of different methods. I conducted participant-observation in London, attending meetings and public demonstrations about the implications of Brexit. I also used the internet in order to contextualise the emerging public discourse around Brexit with social media trends, discussions, and commentaries. Furthermore, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews, eight of which were with *DiEM25* members, and the remaining two with members of similar groups. These interviews provided deeply textured and diverse understandings of what is going on in British politics today, and they have been used both as primary data for this thesis (in other words, quoted directly in this text), and as additional points of reference for my own research process whilst I was still in the field, following what O'Reilly (2012, 182) and Becker (1970) call "sequential analysis," namely the practice of analysing data during the period of data collection. Finally, I recorded in my field notes my own experiences of engagement with *DiEM25*, registering the qualitative changes that occurred as we switched from one medium to the other.

Taken together, this spectrum of methods can be summarised as a multi-speed approach to research. One the one hand, I conducted an embodied, embedded and situated ethnography with *DiEM25*, relying on interviews and participant-observation in virtual and in physical settings, and on the other hand, I drew on a more mediated, less physical set of methods as a way of addressing 'Brexit' as a phenomenon within British society. My primary concern, for the latter task, was to avoid collapsing the messy situation of Brexit Britain into "a specific set of determinate processes," and in this sense I followed the direction of John Law's methodology for studying messy social realities, according to whom "events and processes… are complex because *they necessarily exceed our capacity to know them*" (Law 2010, 6; emphasis in original). Law argues for a methodological orientation that can "open a space for the indefinite" (*ibid.*), and articulate "a sense of the world as an unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce particular realities" (*ibid.*, 6-7).

This perspective has informed my overall approach to research to the extent that I decided to focus on Brexit both as a process caught up in multiple flows and relations, and as a force that actively produces relations among various publics. Indeed, this focus on assemblages also informed how I approached scale-making projects surrounding Brexit as "a complex of ideas, practices, experiences and sentiments which do not necessarily cohere into single homogeneous world view, but which are constituted by a particular unity of distribution of meanings, sentiments, sensations and possibilities" (Gilbert 2013, 151). In addition, although this ethnographic project is not strictly-speaking a multi-sited ethnography, it does draw on an orientation to research that "moves out from single sites and local situations […] to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space" (Marcus 1995, 96). The notion of "non-local ethnography" (Feldman 2011) is perhaps more suited here, as it focuses not so much on a multiplicity of sites, but rather on the ubiquity of certain immaterial apparatuses that create "social relations between disconnected actors through abstract, mediating agents that replace direct social connections" (Feldman 2011, 378).

Amid all the claims and counter-claims over the direction of travel in Brexit Britain, this thesis, then, will deliberately avoid following any of them in their future-making projects[19]. Instead, this thesis will attempt to "dwell" in some of the articulations of what matters in Brexit Britain (Ingold 2011), in order to describe and compare a number of contemporary representations of British society, and explore their links to individual and collective agencies. The ethnographic fieldwork that laid the foundations for this thesis did not yield a circumscribed 'site' in the conventional sense of the term, but rather a multiplicity of sites – some virtual, some physical – each of which offered a different perspective on the issues at stake in Britain today.

Finally, there are several ethical considerations worth mentioning. The guiding assumption that informed my entry into the field was that "the tendency to position oneself at a distance and treat social life as an object to decode rather than entering the flow and rhythm of ongoing social interaction hinders our ability to understand social practice" (Juris 2008, 20). It is primarily for this reason that I chose to ground myself for a large part of my fieldwork as a member of *DiEM25*. After almost a month in the field, I considered shifting the focus of my research towards a micro-analysis of *DiEM25*'s own practical articulations of democracy in Britain. However, by the time I had come to this decision, I had already been active as a member of *DiEM25*, and many of my co-participants within *DiEM25* knew me for the most part as such and interacted with me without necessarily being aware of my role as a researcher. As O'Reilly explains, there are several difficulties when it comes to securing consent in group settings, but the most important one for me is that by casting myself explicitly as a researcher doing fieldwork about *DiEM25*, I would have changed the dynamic of my relationship with *DiEM25* in a way that might not have been appropriate (O'Reilly 2012, 79). With regard to specific interviews I made sure the participants understood my intentions, obtained informed consent, and recorded the interviews in full.

I opted to take *DiEM25* as one instance of a situated perspective on British politics and society, one that stressed more cosmopolitan themes such as European democracy and solidarity, and that by virtue of my own engagement I was in a good position to dwell in, and use as a lens to make sense of Brexit Britain. This perspective is one among many others in British society, and so I decided to take a comparative approach, one that would enable me to map some of the more conspicuous developments in post-referendum Britain. *DiEM25* is articulating a radically inclusive, multi-scalar, and decidedly "cosmopolitical" approach to politics (Stengers 2010, 79-80), one that foregrounds issues of copresence as well as difference in the constant pursuit of a democracy to come as "the impossible-yet-necessary horizon of a good politics" (Derrida 1994, 65; Gilbert 2013, 120). In this sense, I have taken *DiEM25*'s approach more as a way of framing my own research objectives, rather than as an object of research.

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[19] For the sake of full disclosure, I believe that the Brexit referendum was a mistake of epic proportions. The Remain campaign was a feeble, technocratic set-up that utterly failed to predict the extent to which Britain's large Eurosceptic minority could harness social discontent and deploy it against the European Union. I think it's appalling that there has been such a rise in xenophobia and racism since the referendum, and I sympathise wholeheartedly with non-British EU nationals who no longer feel welcome. I am not optimistic about the outcome of the Brexit negotiations, however I do not believe that a second referendum will make the situation any better. Although I don't agree with it, I think the only option for the UK at the moment is to carry on with Brexit and hope for the best.

Chapter 2: A tale of two countries

First, this chapter develops the notion of *political ecology* as a way of understanding the different positions around Brexit. Second, it relates the perspective of “Hard Remainers,” many of whom gathered in London in late March for a pro-EU demonstration the week before Article 50. Third, it engages critically with cosmopolitan scale-making projects in Brexit Britain.

Political ecology: Clashing scales in Brexit Britain

One way of understanding the different positions around Brexit, both for and against, is by looking at them in terms of *clashing scales*: be it on sovereignty, on identity, or on trade, the pro-Brexit perspective and the pro-EU perspective are almost always mutually exclusive. Both articulate a specific representation of Brexit Britain by selectively taking into account certain issues, and by referencing other scales such as the temporal dimension of Brexit (its history and its future), and the cognitive scale that frames the category of ‘us.’

Brexit can be understood as a problem on two different levels: for many Leavers, Brexit is the only possible response to a perceived loss of sovereignty and self-determination in Britain. With regard to working-class communities, this loss refers specifically to the loss of a local dimension of control that began in the 1980s with Thatcher’s programme of neoliberalism and the impact of de-industrialisation (Thorleifsson 2016). Conversely, for many Remainers, Brexit raises the problem of Britain’s loss of international status and the ability to work across borders; after Brexit, Britain will no longer have a seat at the European table, and it is unclear whether, or to what extent, British citizens will be able to consider themselves European in any meaningful way.

If Brexit is taken as a problem around which publics coalesce and enact political ways of being with each other, then the scale at which the problem is articulated matters, because Brexit can be seen from both a domestic, internal perspective, and from an international, external perspective. Following the Brexit referendum, many of those who advocated for Remain fell into two broad alignments: the Hard Remainers[20], who categorically reject Brexit and claim that the referendum was a fraud, and the Re-Leavers, who accept the outcome of the referendum and seek to address the social, political and material concerns that led to the Brexit vote. These two perspectives articulate *scale-making projects* that problematise Brexit and coalesce specific publics around it. These scale-making projects also involve a "changing ensemble of forces (or articulations) that create and maintain identities that have real concrete effects" (Slack 1996, 126).

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett (2010) attempts to broaden the horizons at which we conceive of our links with the world by arguing for a "political ecology of things." Events such as a black-out (Bennett 2005), or the *longue durée* process of climate change cannot be properly understood so long as they are conceptualised within a human-centered ontology in which humans are inscribed within determinate structures. Similarly, Brexit does not only involve human agents, it also involves a far more complex alignment of non-human entities and forces that are substantially affecting the political terrain in Britain today and how it is perceived by different groups of people. Bennett proposes to look at public problems as "open-ended wholes" (Bennett 2005, 447) by framing an ecological perspective that takes into account individual and collective human agencies as well as a "vast entourage" (Bennett 2010, 108) of nonhuman entities and forces that structure affordances within a given environment.

Here, we turn to the question of how anti-Brexit publics articulate particular and contingent connections "between social or economic forces and those forms of politics and ideology which might lead them in practice to intervene" at specific historical conjunctures (Hall 1985, 95; in Slack 1996, 124). In other words, we are concerned here with the kind of political linkages that inform practices of public-formation and that articulate scale-making projects through which Brexit is problematised (Tsing 2005, 57; Eriksen 2016). In doing so, we will begin to flesh a "political ecology" of Brexit, focusing on how political subjects are enacted as publics through "ontologically heterogeneous" assemblages (Bennett 2010, 106). Stuart Hall's notion of articulation will be used firstly to explore how different anti-Brexit publics have framed the problem with Brexit as involving different spatial, temporal and cognitive scales (Eriksen 2016, 29), and secondly to address the remarkable contradictions and gaps that exist in diverse responses to Brexit.

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[20] This terminology has been taken from opinion polls about Brexit Britain (Wells 2017).

By developing the notion of articulation, Stuart Hall was concerned with strategic interventions in political arenas, and how social and economic forms may be brought into dialogue with particular collective practices (Roman 2015b, 211). The main contribution of the idea of articulation is that it allows for a nuanced understanding of how political practices are informed by discourses on society, and how different political practices can be thought together despite contradictions. With regard to a complex situation such as Brexit, this idea of articulation allows us to consider the different ways in which Brexit is understood as problematic, and the different strategic terrains of intervention by anti-Brexit publics. As Hall writes, the notion of articulation allows us "to begin really to conceptualize the specificity of different practices (analytically distinguished, abstracted out), without losing its grip on the ensemble which they constitute" (Hall 1980, 69; in Slack 1996, 123-124). In order to further distinguish these articulations of Brexit as a problem, we will focus on the notion of scale as one of the main issues on which responses to Brexit have diverged.

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Scale has long been one of the crucial conceptual tools for the anthropology of globalisation, and Eriksen most recently formalised it as a "sorting device" (2016, 16) to guide ethnographic research through the *maelstrom* of uneven change that characterises our globally-connected and locally-differentiated world. Scale is both a methodological tool for thinking through complexity, and a way of describing the sort of strategic terrains that are "conjured" (Tsing 2005) by situated actors or groups, and through which public interventions are deployed. With regard to Brexit, a simple example would be the 'Brexiteer' project that aims for the recovery of national sovereignty coupled with an expansion of global trade unfettered by EU norms, while the 'Remainer' project sees Britain's future within the wider project of the European Union, emphasising economic and political interdependences as well as a common heritage and a shared European identity that has been nurtured by decades of pooled sovereignty. Both these projects prioritise certain elements of scale, but they also completely ignore other aspects.

The Brexiteer project argues for a return to national sovereignty within a context of globalised capitalism in which it is unclear whether (or to what extent) a nation-state can ever be considered fully sovereign, given the *de facto* regulatory function of global institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and the degree of compromise involved in securing beneficial trading arrangements[21]. If Britain leaves the EU with no deal and signs a free trade deal with the United States of America — which may well include the obligation on behalf of the UK to open its markets to products that are currently forbidden under EU regulations, such as chlorine-washed chicken (Gilchrist 2017) — can this be truly considered as a victory for national sovereignty? Conversely, if Britain decided to stay within the EU and completely ignore Brexit because it would be too harmful for the economy, how would it be able to address the desire for autonomy that is so strongly felt at the local level without causing "a very considerable backlash" that could "undermine faith in democracy" (Jones 2017)? In both cases, the articulation of what is to be done with Brexit presents what seems like a solution at one level of scale, whilst overlooking the implications for other levels.

It is not only that these two broad articulations highlight incompatible priorities with regards to scale, in the sense that one focuses on national sovereignty while another focuses on pooled sovereignty at a European level. There are also clashing scales *within* these two projects, between the local and the national, between the national and the global, and between the global and the local as well. What Brexiters and Hard Remainers may consider good at the international scale (for the former, Britain's ability to trade freely around the world, and for the latter, benefiting from harmonised relations with Britain's closest neighbours) may well be damaging for the local scale if domestic producers were to go bankrupt, either because of post-Brexit trade deals (Lewis 2017), or because of European regulations that overwhelmingly affect smaller businesses (Ross 2015). Eriksen states that "a clash of scales occurs when the intersection of two or more levels of scale lead to a contradiction, a conflict or friction" (Eriksen 2016, 29). For those in favour of Brexit, as well as for those opposed to it, these clashing scales make it impossible to take a holistic vision that resolves problems at each level of scale. Rather, it is because of this sort of clashes that scale-making projects specifically develop along strategic terrains, prioritising certain scales and enabling particular interventions.

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[21] One of the most consistent arguments within the Hard Brexit project is that Britain can flourish as a global trading nation within the WTO rules because it will be able to sign its own trade deals, and will no longer have to abide by EU regulations on trade. However, being in the WTO as an independent member state opens Britain up to potential complaints by other members, including notably the EU. As Dunt argues, "Britain is bound to replicate everything" that happens in the EU with regard to external tariffs. "Even tinkering with the system would trigger an avalanche of complaints which the government is in no position to deal with […] Britain would not really control its tariffs at all. The only way to survive transition from WTO membership under the EU to WTO membership outside the EU is to keep things exactly as they were when Britain was in the EU" (Dunt 2017, 69).

In the rest of this chapter, we will illustrate this political ecology by looking at the articulation of Brexit from the perspective of Hard Remainers, while in the next chapter we will turn to the perspective of Re-Leavers, for whom Brexit is a problem tied to several *longue durée* processes in recent British history, most notably the transformation that has occurred with the rise of neoliberalism in the UK since the 1980s. For many Hard Remainers, Brexit raises a whole range of issues in which leaving the European Union relates not only to the complex assemblage of legal frameworks, economic and financial arrangements, but also to political ties and affective linkages relating to Europe's post-war history and the peace that came with the European project.

In the public interventions staged by Hard Remainers, there is often a sense of pre-emptive mourning for a future that has been lost (Knight 2017), all because of an ill-fought campaign on a matter that is seen as too important to be decided with an advisory referendum (Grayling 2016). Conversely, the Re-Leavers that we will turn to in the next chapter emphasise how neoliberal restructuring, the legacies of industrialism, the transition to a post-industrial economy, and the impact of migration have all played a part in the feeling of loss of control that is experienced at the local level (Thorleifsson 2016, 556). Both of these perspectives highlight salient problems with Brexit, but they are also both partial and contingent, unable to bridge the gap that separates these two worldviews.

#UniteforEurope

One of the most obvious outcomes of the Brexit referendum was that Britain, and especially England, turned out to be a far more divided country than most people cared to acknowledge, with the country more or less evenly split based on education, age, occupation, and place[22] (Becker et al. 2016). To be clear, the Brexit referendum did not *produce* any of these cleavages, it merely made them perceptible. For what seemed like the first time, those who didn't feel like Britain was in a particularly bad way — mostly affluent, educated, city-dwellers — were no longer able to ignore those who had voted for change. Many on the Remain side have experienced Brexit as a rupture and as a pointless act of self-harm that can only go badly, given Theresa May's government evident lack of vision and preparation for the Brexit negotiations (O'Toole 2017).

In the months following the Brexit referendum, and particularly in the weeks leading up to the beginning of the Brexit countdown in March 2017, London was awash with talks, seminars, panel discussions, and public demonstrations, all centred around the implications of Brexit and addressing, in some form or another, the realities of a divided Britain in the early twenty- first-century. The Conway Hall meeting that launched *DiEM25* was a meeting of this kind, in which a specific perspective on Britain and Europe was articulated and in which, by extension, members of a public began to be enacted not only as subjects but also as citizens, as constituents of a polity. These enactments of citizenship, however, "also instantiate other subjects from whom the subject of a claim is differentiated" (Isin 2008, 18). Here, these "other subjects" are those who voted for Brexit, those who, in the eyes of many Remainers, were either conned and didn't know what they were voting for, those who knew all too well that they were voting for so-called "Little England," or people whose voices had been ignored for far too long, and who were demanding to take part in the politics of the United Kingdom.

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[22] See *Appendix II*, Fig. 2.

"I feel very strongly about the dangers of Brexit," a woman told me during the *Unite for Europe* march in London that took place a few days before Mrs. May triggered Article 50, in late March, 2017.

> I actually feel that we're doing this for other people, not just for ourselves. We are shouting loud, giving our arguments, obviously we believe we're right, because we know that there are terrible dangers with coming out of the EU.
>
> We're doing this for the country. We're doing this because we believe that it's a disaster to come out of the European Union, certainly to come out of the single market and the customs union.

That day, an estimated 100,000 people marched in Central London, from Hyde Park Corner all the way down to Parliament Square, to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome and to protest Brexit by showing the breadth of opposition from across the country. Coaches had arrived in the morning, carrying hundreds if not thousands of anti-Brexit protesters. As we shuffled down Pall Mall, flags of blue and yellow waving above our heads, people chanted Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, the EU's official anthem. Many of us were carrying daffodils and irises, jointly mourning Brexit and those who had lost their lives at the Westminster bridge attack the previous week (BBC News 2017a).

For the people I spoke to that day, Brexit is an existential threat to their livelihoods and to the prosperity of the UK. As one man from Bristol told me, "the future of our country is dependent on our closest neighbours and oldest allies. I feel that I have to fight until there's no fighting left to be done. You just have to resist. No choice. Some things are simply unacceptable." Most of all, the lack of preparedness and long-term planning on behalf of the government had made the situation noticeably worse. For another person at the demonstration, an elderly British man of Italian descent, the government's handling of Brexit had been absolutely deplorable, and had shown an alarming incompetence:

> "The referendum was advisory, and the Houses of Parliament should have taken that advice and then said what can we do about it, instead of going for the Hard Brexit they did. What do we do? Why has a majority of the population voted this way? What do we do about it? How do we do it? Do we have to leave, or can we do something, or can we put something back? But they chose not to do that."

The previous day, I was in Greenwich for an interview with two anti-Brexit activists, Janet and Anthony. I had met Janet a few weeks earlier, at one of *DiEM25*'s meetings, and her husband Anthony was involved in other anti-Brexit groups. Anthony, an industrial journalist, explained to me all the disastrous implications of Brexit for Britain's manufacturing sector, and how important it was to raise awareness about all those issues that were barely mentioned during the referendum.

> I think what I want to do in the early stages [of Brexit] is just try and focus on doing everything I can to make the case against Brexit from an industrial point of view, which is my specialism [...] I've never been a political animal at all. I never got personally involved in politics, never wanted to, and I've always taken the view in the magazines that I've edited that they're technology-based and they shouldn't really have a political angle either, until now.
>
> *So why is this so important for you, why all of a sudden did you think you wanted to become political?*
>
> Because I think it's wrong on so many levels. Primarily my well-being and my economic survival throughout my life was serving the manufacturing industry, and to see it being destroyed is, well, it's just like seeing a child being murdered in front of your eyes [...] but is that really a main reason why I think the EU is so important? Probably not quite, because for me the biggest is the peace angle.

Janet added:

> We were brought up to be Europeans, those of us who actually went to school before the European Market came up. You know, I was at school in the 60s and early 70s, I went to university in 1971, and of course we hadn't acceded at that point.
>
> But the thought of, of you know, 'we are Europeans, we have a future in Europe, with Europeans.' That was just so lovely, to know that I could walk into France, walk into Italy,

> walk into Germany – we have a common heritage, we're not just a pimple on the backside of Europe, but that's what we're going to become.

A cosmopolitan vision

"A European miracle has taken place. Enemies have become neighbours! That wonder is historically unique, actually even inconceivable" (Beck 2007, 113). In the "cosmopolitan vision" of German sociologist Ulrich Beck, a transnational European public sphere already exists, and the realities of Europe today are "about forms and movements of ceaseless border-crossing" (*ibid.*, 110). The problem is that the instruments we typically use for analysing European society are the tools of "methodological nationalism" developed during the nineteenth century from the analysis of national societies (*ibid.*, 109). According to Beck, sociology in particular has failed to grasp the ontological particularities of the European public sphere because it takes "national organisation as a structuring principle of societal and political action" (Beck 2003, 456). The normative claim that "every nation has the right to self-determination on the basis of its cultural distinctiveness" has been taken as a "socio-ontological given" (*ibid.*, 454), erasing the "shadow realities" of actually existing cosmopolitanism: "multilingualism, multinational networks, binational marriages, multiple residences, educational mobility, transnational careers, and linkages between science and the economy" (Beck 2007, 110).

Beck's articulation of European cosmopolitanism echoes the sense of loss among many of the Remainers who have since formed campaigning groups against Brexit. Collectively known as "the 48%" — in reference to the Remain share of the vote — these groups have been built prominently at a local level, taking such names as *London 4 Europe*, *Bristol 4 Europe*, *Cambridge 4 Europe*, and so on. Furthermore, through several social media networks on Facebook and Twitter, and through media outlets such as *The New European*, these groups have formed a wide-ranging coalition of anti-Brexit publics that problematise Brexit in a number of different ways:

- On the left, a number of groups such as *Another Europe is Possible* and the *Stop Trump Coalition* argue that Brexit and Trump are both symptoms of the rise of reactionary populism (Kinstler 2017), and opposing Brexit means opposing racism, xenophobia, and the narrow nationalist mentality that underpins both.
- Others, such as *Scientists for EU*, have been drawing attention to more substantive issues like the transnational accords that enable British universities and research departments to access EU funding, as well as EU institutions such as the Euratom agreement and others that help

define health and safety regulations (Butler 2017).

- Another group is the centrist faction that has coalesced around *Open Britain*, an anti-Brexit think-tank founded by Peter Mandelson (Open Britain 2016), Tony Blair's former "spin doctor". It is largely seen as the continuation of the referendum's official Remain campaign, and focuses on strengthening the position of anti-Brexit MPs and groups across the political spectrum.

For all their differences, what brings together this loose coalition of anti-Brexit publics is an emphasis on the transnational scale, articulated within a cosmopolitan response to Brexit and grounded in an awareness of how the British national space leaks out as a European cosmopolitan space. This scale-making project often takes the shape of an endorsement of globalisation, privileging the transnational over the national or the local (Goodhart 2017). However, if in spatial terms the scale that matters is the transnational one — in the sense that Brexit is articulated as a problem that will affect Britain's external relations in years to come — taking cognitive scale into account complicates the picture further.

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Eriksen defines cognitive scale as "the size of your perceived world" (Eriksen 2016, 29), which "expands through exposure to other worlds" (*ibid.*, 90). The cognitive dimension of scale refers fundamentally to the position that one adopts within a scale-making project, and the complexity of issues that are taken into account from other levels of scale. In this regard, the cognitive scale of these anti-Brexit publics is often restrained to the British dimension of legislative and executive power. In an article for *The New European*, prominent Remainer and philosopher A. C. Grayling (2017) outlines three ways in which Brexit can be stopped in the summer of 2017:

> There are three mechanisms available for stopping Brexit. One is a Government announcement that it is withdrawing the Article 50 notification and that the UK is remaining in the EU. The second is a vote in Parliament, most simply on an Early Day Motion instructing the Government to withdraw the Article 50 notification [...] The third mechanism is another referendum on EU membership.

Grayling goes on to argue that if only an anti-Brexit government were to seize power, then Brexit could still be stopped. Leaving aside the speculative element of wishful thinking in this project[23], there are a number of blind spots in Grayling's argument that can be aptly understood through the lens of cognitive scale. Grayling articulates his response to Brexit at the level of government rule, but he completely excludes the European side of the argument, and indeed also excludes the complex arrangement of local issues that have contributed to the Brexit vote. This kind of blinkered perspective on Brexit (in which neither the supra-national nor the sub-national scale are considered) is relatively common in anti-Brexit debates. For many Re-Leavers, this orientation to Brexit can become particularly frustrating at times, and the following anecdote from one of my interlocutors (a British migration rights activist who helped organise a mobilisation to support migrants in the UK) is particularly telling:

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[23] There is no evidence that an anti-Brexit government will be formed any time soon: the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party are the only national parties that are overtly anti-Brexit. Before the snap election in June 2017,

> I remember not too long ago, when I suggested [on the "48%" website] that Tony Blair was not the guy to rally behind for the Remain cause, and I put forward the idea that actually rallying around someone like him will actually do more harm than good, I got some real flak for that, some people were saying, "no we need someone like him, powerful people who can pull strings for us". And I thought, "if you think you're going to get back in the EU by having someone like Tony Blair pull strings for you, you're seriously missing the point here."

Indeed, the path back into the EU is far more complicated: the leadership of the EU has already made clear that Britain is more than welcome to withdraw Article 50; the door is still open. However, to quote the European Parliament's Brexit representative Guy Verhofstadt, "like Alice in Wonderland not all the doors are the same. It will be a brand new door, with a new Europe, a Europe without rebates, without complexity, with real powers and with unity. That is the door towards Europe" (Cowburn 2017). In other words, Britain would have to join the project for a "more perfect union" (Verhofstadt 2017), an option that, given Britain's longstanding euroscepticism, would be politically untenable for whichever government decides to implement it.

Furthermore, proposals that aim to stop Brexit through top-down decisions in Parliament, or thanks to people like Tony Blair 'pulling strings,' betray an unwillingness to engage with the dissensual dimension of politics (Rancière 2010), an unwillingness that is often cloaked in dismissive labels such as "little Englander" or assertions of intellectual superiority on behalf of people who voted Remain. This tendency for technocracy was also prevalent during the Brexit referendum. Indeed, "at a time when millions have experienced stagnating or falling living standards, the official campaign to remain in the EU was

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there was a lot of speculation that the Lib Dems and the Greens might be able to harness the anti-Brexit sentiment and turn it into an electoral success after a disappointing performance for both in 2015; as it turns out the Lib Dems' popularity sank after five years in coalition with the Conservatives, and the Greens came out of the election still with only one MP.

burdened by an establishment and corporate feel throughout. It sent a clear message that if you wanted to make a protest vote against the establishment, then Leave was the way to go" (Cooper 2017).

Those on the Remain side who have since accepted the Brexit referendum (so-called 'Re-Leavers') emphasise instead the importance of understanding the local aspects of politics, and the affective differential in belonging and dignity among the two parts of the population, those for and those against Brexit. This is what we turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Rethinking control

First, this chapter introduces the perspective of “Re-Leavers,” many of whom have grounded their reading of Brexit in a local dimension of politics and society. Second, this chapter relates the perspective of *DiEM25* and how it attempted to connect the local level of scale to the European level.

Fast-capitalism

After the Brexit vote, the Labour party was faced with an uneasy situation. According to estimates, most constituencies where Remain support was the highest voted Labour in the 2015 general elections (BBC 2016a), and yet, seven out of ten Labour MPs represent constituencies that voted Leave (Hanretty 2016). The Brexit referendum revealed a tremendous gap at the heart of the Labour vote, cutting across class, age, education, and geographic location. In many ways, Labour’s problem with Brexit mirrors England’s problem with Brexit in general, to the extent that both Labour and England seem to have become sites of dramatic polarisation. Broadly speaking, Labour-held cities in England with large student populations and/or a growing “professional” class registered a higher share for Remain, while post-industrial towns and rural areas with an older, predominantly working-class population voted for Leave[24].

As Jennings and Stoker write, “two versions of England” are emerging, in which “geographical differences have not only become sharper but have also developed a strong cultural dimension” (Jennings and Stoker 2016, 372). The trend in England is part of a wider “pattern of change that can be seen in contemporary democracies, between cities and regions that are booming and creating high-skill, high-paid jobs and those that are declining and increasingly dominated by low-skill, low-paid jobs” (*ibid.* 373). Among the former are cities such as London, Manchester, and Cambridge, while the latter include aging coastal towns in the South of England as well as rural and post-industrial areas in the North.

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[24] See *Appendix II*.

Ethnographers of Britain have drawn attention to several issues underlying the Brexit vote in this second category of places, involving the articulation of identities, collective memories and notions of community (Edwards, Haugerud and Parikh 2017; Balthazar 2017; Evans 2017; Thorleifsson 2016; Green et al. 2016). While all the specific cases differ, what all these studies underline is how a number of different social, economic, political and material processes have contributed to a deficit in belonging, to the point that, according to David Goodhart, more than half of the British population agrees with the following statement: "Britain has changed in recent times beyond recognition. It sometimes feels like a foreign country and this makes me feel uncomfortable" (Kellner 2011, in Goodhart 2017).

For some, "the referendum was less about migrants or opposing nations and more about what should not be forgotten—the working-class makers, the war-fought past, and particular experiences of the world" (Balthazar 2017, 223). For others, the impact of Thatcher's programme of de-industrialisation in the 1980s meant not only that jobs were lost, "but also the very activities that gave locals a sense of community, identity, certainty, dignity and friendship" (Thorleifsson 2016, 557). New Labour's subsequent neglect of its traditional, industrial working-class voter base in favour of "a middle ground" politics "composed of middle-class professionals and other voters aspiring to middle-class status" left a "political vacuum" in working-class areas that was quickly occupied by far-right, populist parties from the early 2000s onwards (Evans 2017, 216). More recently, fiscal cuts in the context of David Cameron's austerity programme since 2010 have further exacerbated these geographic inequalities, arguably contributing to the Brexit vote: as Becker et al. argue, "the quality of public service provision is systematically related to the Vote Leave share" (Becker, Fetzer and Novy 2016, 32).

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All these elements have contributed to a feeling of disconnection between the life that is lived at the scale of the local community, and the life that is governed from afar, be it from Westminster or from Brussels. During a talk about the towns and countrysides in Brexit Britain at the offices of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) think-tank in Central London, Labour MP for Wigan Lisa Nandy explained the perspective from Britain's small towns, articulating a response to Brexit grounded in local issues of autonomy, stability, and dignity. Wigan, a working-class town in the North-West of England whose industrial history has been chronicled in George Orwell's book *The Road to Wigan Pier,* voted to Leave the EU by 63.9%, epitomising the trend of historic Labour constituencies[25] voting to leave the European Union, despite Labour officially endorsing Remain.

For Lisa Nandy, Wigan "symbolises the importance of towns in Britain, each with their own character, shared history and experience, where the sense of community is palpable and people are strongly invested in the local area" (Nandy 2017). The perspective on national politics from these towns is that "for those who prioritise rootedness, stability and continuity, there has been a growing sense" that mainstream politics is not listening to them (*ibid.*). "Cities have dominated political thinking for decades, denying voice to the lived experience in towns. Too often, as with Brexit, cities are wrongly treated as proxies for national opinion" (*ibid.*). She continued,

> This deeper sense of loss is encapsulated for me in the demise of Upper Morris Street Working Man's Club in my constituency, the headquarters for my first election campaign. Once a thriving hub in the community, the collapse of the mining industry and the replacement of the nearby rugby league stadium with a Tesco led to its decline, and eventually it was demolished. Today, that site is a McDonalds, employing young people on minimum wage, zero hours contracts. It tells a story of what has been lost. Those shared institutions that shape us as we help to shape them.
>
> It's impossible to ignore the destructive impact global capital has had on our sense of belonging, sweeping away the familiar and with it, our mooring in space and time.
>
> But this wasn't just an accident, it was a clear political choice, summed up for me in these words: "I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer [...] The character of this changing world is indifferent to tradition. Unforgiving of frailty. No respecter of past reputations. It has no custom and practice. It is replete with opportunities, but they only go to those swift to adapt, slow to complain, open, willing and able to change."
>
> This is the vision that Tony Blair set out in 2005 [at the 2005 Labour Party Conference] enabling a consensus that outlasted New Labour through Osborne's[26] Tories. To concentrate investment in the cities and embrace that culture of change, and in doing so stake out a future for the country that is alien to the values of millions.

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[25] Wigan, a town in the area of Greater Manchester and a coal-mining district since the seventeenth century (Farrier and Brownbill 1911), has been continuously held by Labour since 1918.

[26] George Osborne was Chancellor of the Exchequer under David Cameron, in charge of Britain's finances and in large part credited with the Conservatives' programme of austerity and neoliberal restructuring from 2010 onwards.

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Stuart Hall famously described New Labour’s political strategy as a “double-shuffle,” in which Labour’s historic social-democratic language of collective provision was articulated as subordinate to the dominant neoliberal push for marketisation and privatisation (Hall 2005b, 331). For Hall, New Labour’s strategy signalled “a hegemonic strategy, even though it may not be capable of producing a stable hegemonic outcome” (*ibid.*, 330).

New Labour’s aspirational politics and the “middle class-ification” of the United Kingdom reflected “the neglect [...] of its traditional working-class supporters” by creating a service class in which the very idea of working-class identity and community became a taboo of sorts (Balthazar 2017, 221). As Balthazar explains in her ethnography of Brexit voters in England’s south coast, “the service class has been interpreted as having moved away from working-class political consciousness and as being individualistic, its identity mediated by the market and advertising” (*ibid.*).

In *The Road to Somewhere*, David Goodhart (2017) takes issue with the individualistic culture that has permeated Britain’s elite over the last decades. Goodhart argues that this perspective, in which location and the rootedness of ‘the familiar’ are seen as superfluous — a perspective of the world as seen from “Anywhere” — is fundamentally at odds with how the majority of the country perceives society, from a grounded, localised, and circumscribed perspective — in short, from “Somewhere.” In this sense, Goodhart is primarily concerned with the perspective from which the world is made sense of, with “alignments of sentiment and worldview” (Goodhart 2017, 24), what we might refer to as the cognitive scale of society. According to Goodhart, “Anywheres dominate [British] culture and society” and espouse an ideology of “progressive individualism,” with “portable ‘achieved’ identities, based on educational and career success” (*ibid.*, 23). By contrast, “Somewheres are more rooted and usually have ‘ascribed’ identities based on group belonging and particular places” (*ibid.*); they “are more socially conservative and communitarian by instinct” (*ibid.*, 24).

These two profiles, based as they are on numerous surveys and opinion polls, can sometimes lead to a rather vague picture where several gaps are conveniently left aside, such as the amorphous group of “Inbetweeners” who supposedly make up around 25% of the British population[27]. At times, Goodhart’s argument, and his over-reliance on opinion polls (at best partial indicators of what the public wants and believes) leads to a sort of "cultural freeze-frame" (Massumi 2002, 3) in which very little can actually change because political beliefs are coded as pre-given identities and assimilated into statistical models; the public is seen here from a very particular, abstract cognitive scale, as something that is "unified, neutral and understandable through the collection and manipulation of information" (Tsing 2005, 102).

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[27] Goodhart (2017) estimates that Anywheres make up a further 25% of the population, while Somewheres account

What we are arguing here is that publics are contingent social formations that emerge in tandem with the articulation of a problem through specific scale-making projects. For instance, the working-class Brexit vote was articulated by Nandy as a response to *longue durée* problems that have been most sharply felt at the local level. Unlike Europhile Remainers, the temporal scale of this specific Brexit-problem articulates the 52% results as a symptom of a process that was decades in the making, and that was exacerbated considerably by six years of sustained cuts to public services. The spatial scale here is the relation between the local and the national, a space in which the localised voices of working-class communities are ignored by national politicians, whose concerns are perceived as being more in line with the free market orthodoxy. Through many conversations with members of *DiEM25*, a similar picture began to emerge in my own fieldwork

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Amanda is an active member and organiser of *DiEM25* in the UK. She lives in a rural part of the North of England and she's been involved with *DiEM25* since our first meeting at Conway Hall, helping to coordinate projects at the local and national level. For her, when discussing Brexit, it's important to acknowledge how decades of neoliberal policy under successive governments have affected the sense of dignity within working-class and rural communities, leaving a gap that has been filled by right-wing populists.

As we talk on Skype in early April, she argues that the UK has had "all sorts of policies that took dignity away from people who work extremely hard and do very important work [like cleaning and care work], and rather than giving dignity to those jobs, and proper pay and conditions, they talked about sending everyone to university so that they could get better jobs." She continued:

> They completely forgot that the care work and the cleaning and all of those kinds of jobs

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for the remaining 50%.

> are still going to exist, someone needs to do them, so we need to value them rather than get people into what we consider to be better jobs.
>
> I think an awful lot of the dignity of the working classes got forgotten [...] When you strip people of their dignity and suggest that people should be bettering themselves rather than valuing them for what they're doing now, that's bound to cause all sorts of social problems, of resentment.
>
> I mean, there's desperate poverty in parts of the country, and to blame people for voting in an extreme way, or kicking against the system when the system is kicking them, you've got your eyes closed to the problem, you know, if you treat those people as stupid rather than people who are in a fairly desperate situation.
>
> A lot of people are really taking a superior attitude just blaming – basically blaming poor people for the result, which is, you know, a fairly understandable result, because if the status quo is not working for you then it's fairly understandable that you'd vote against it.
>
> *So do you think the Brexit vote was more a vote against the status quo than a vote on the EU?*
>
> Yeah, I reckon it was, and against politics.

The implications of Brexit as a vote 'against politics' suggests the need to reframe how we understand Brexit. With regard to the temporal dimension, Hard Remainers have taken a future-oriented timescale in their articulation of Brexit, emphasising the impending loss that could come from a 'cliff-edge' Brexit[28]. Instead, Re-Leavers have looked to the past to see how an accumulation of historical processes may have contributed to the current situation, arguing for instance that Brexit is the outcome of "forty years of failure" in which "successive governments have served the interests of finance capital rather than serving the interests of the people" (Gilbert 2017):

> That is why the factories have gone, the wages have declined, and the public services don't work any more. In the service of those financial interests, governments have pursued a failed economic model: one based on the expansion of personal, household and national debts and the transfer of economic activity from manufacturing to retail and services. The communities who suffered most from this transfer have never been offered any adequate compensation for it; nor could this economic model ever work in such a way as to offer them any.

According to this alternative articulation, Brexit is not reducible simply to seven years of right-wing austerity, but rather to a much longer genealogy of policy failings, one that involves the neoliberal transition of the 1980s as well as Tony Blair's subsequent consolidation of the Thatcherite legacy. This articulation has not gained ground in a major way among Re-Leavers, it is instead an instance of "minority politics" that insists on "taking a line of flight from the given history" (Madhu 2012), unwinding the taken-for-granted interpretation of Brexit, and reframing it as a properly-speaking *longue durée* process.

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[28] That is, an end to the Brexit negotiations in which Britain finds itself expelled from the EU but without any transitional trade deal in place to ensure some kind of continuity post-Brexit.

Despite being a relatively minor position, this alternative articulation helps to explain why Remain failed to deliver its message on the economy to working-class communities: as Behr relates in his account of the Remain campaign, "the Remainers' warning not to gamble with economic security was failing to resonate. 'Emotional fear [for the impact of Brexit] wasn't credible because [working-class Labour supporters] felt their lives were already shit,' as one senior campaign source told me" (Behr 2016). Indeed, while the bogeyman of populist nationalism motivated many to oppose Brexit, this minor articulation suggests that at the core of the dissent underlying Brexit there may have been an implicit critique to neoliberalism as a force that has "accelerated socio-economic inequalities at various scales" (Thorleifsson 2016, 556).

If there are legitimate grounds for rethinking the notion of control beyond the populist, nationalistic dog-whistle of the Leave campaign, whose slogan was "Take Back Control," it is indeed along the lines of a critique of neoliberalism and corporate globalisation. This critique, which forcefully gained prominence in the early 2000s with a string of vocal public interventions in Seattle, Genoa, and Prague, asserts the primacy of "regional autonomy and communal self-determination" (Graeber 2009, 53) over a 'fast-capitalist' regime of circulation and commodification that "impoverishes preexisting frameworks of social meaning" (Holmes 2000, 11;). The contingent nature of articulations is evident if we consider that the very same material conditions that provided the grounds to mobilise left-wing and anarchist mobilisations at the turn of the century have been reframed on the right within a Tory-led "phony populism" (O'Toole 2017) in which local concerns for autonomy were subordinate to a discourse of revamped globalism that, for a brief period in early 2017, even saw the British Empire strike back with talk of a post-Brext "Empire 2.0" (Olusoga 2017).

'Europe will be built on its crises'[29]

During my time in London, the question of *DiEM25*'s position on Brexit came up time and again. Its official position was to accept the referendum result, but many members who felt a strong connection to Europe often fell ill-at-ease with this decision. The short answer for *DiEM25*'s decision not to contest the Brexit vote was that, 'as democrats, we have to accept the result, even if we don't like it.' However, over the course of long discussions (mostly online), another, more subtle reading began to take shape. As we attempted to tread a line between Britain's domestic issue with Brexit and a European critique of neoliberalism and post-democratic technocracy[30], we began to frame the absence of a *demos* in contemporary Western politics as something that was particularly acute in Brexit Britain, a vacuum that *DiEM25* was well-placed to occupy through its simultaneous participation in national politics and in European politics. We saw the potential for *DiEM25* to foster the emergence of a democratic public that crossed the divide between Leave and Remain, and that could be reconnected to the European sphere.

For many of the people I interviewed, their involvement in *DiEM25* arose from a recognition of deteriorating conditions that emerged from fast-capitalist logics, both in the UK and in Europe. This was particularly evident in the case of Eleni, who drew comparisons between Brexit and the Greek crisis:

> *Why do you think Brexit happened?*
>
> I definitely think that the face that the EU showed [during the Greek crisis] made a big difference [...] and also I think with the cynicism – I think people are just fed up with listening to rubbish. And I can tell you about Greece, because I listen to what people say, and I can see people turn more nationalistic – because that's the same thing, isn't it? Brexit means we want the country for ourselves, and go away.

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[29] In my interviews with DiEM25 members, a recurring theme was the future of the European Union, now that its integrity has been shook by Brexit. This sentence came from one of these interviews, as we talked about Europe's history from the Second World War.

[30] A number of critical theorists from Rancière (1998) onwards (ie. Crouch 2004; Gilbert 2013) have developed the idea of post-democracy as a way of defining a shift that has occurred in Western politics since the late 1970s. As Gilbert argues, "political leaders increasingly see and present themselves not as democratic representatives of their electors' views, but as professional delegates who are to be entrusted with the job of government on the basis of their competence or likability. In such a context, the decisions of governments and politicians are influences in part by their perceptions of voters' wishes… but very much by pressure from various lobbies" (Gilbert 2013, 2).

> It's the same thing in Greece, people starting to go towards those radical nationalistic parties like Golden Dawn, because people are fed up, they don't know what to believe. They had enough, and that's not rational thinking, but it's thinking like "what worse could happen," and that is really serious. When you hear people saying "what worse could happen," there's nothing worse, this is really pessimistic, there's no hope.

As material prospects diminish, there is also a gradual drift in what keeps people together, in their sense of community and belonging. The general trend towards individualism is seen as a large part in this process, antagonising people who have seemingly outdated notions of stability, community and rootedness. One of *DiEM25*'s aims, as Amanda emphasised, should be to strive to address the polarisation that has become so prominent following the referendum:

> We're divided on minute differences, and [at the Conway Hall meeting] it was really refreshing to hear people talking about the need for including people who voted for Brexit, not hitting them, which you see so much of pretty everywhere. [We need to be] working positively, and trying to bridge gaps, divides, I think that's crucial, if we're going to get anywhere we've got to engage people we don't necessarily agree with on everything, who we don't even agree with on much.

Another *DiEM25* member from Greece, Diana, echoed Amanda's comments about how *DiEM25* should grow in the UK and in Europe:

> What I want to see [with *DiEM25*] is a change in the landscape, changing the way we approach our communities and society [...] *DiEM25* is there in my view to make people relax a bit, and step back and think, don't swallow anything that's thrown at you [...] The concept behind democracy is about society, and everything we do as members of society has an impact on the next person, because now we are living in a very individualistic world [...] Of course democracy is in crisis, there is no question about that.

Ultimately, even though many of the processes that have contributed to Brexit have been years in the making, there was a strong perception that Brexit marked a tipping point and the beginning of a crisis, not just for the UK but for Europe and 'the West' more generally. But this crisis was also seen as an opportunity for change, on the premise that "Europe will be built on its crises."

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Here we have a substantially different articulation of Brexit compared to that put forward by many Hard Remainers. By taking a *longue durée* temporal scale, and by connecting localised processes to wider changes happening at the European level (and more broadly, at the level of the West), the Brexit Referendum enabled the articulation of an emergent public that has been affected by — and that is staking an intervention against — fast-capitalism. This emergent public is best understood as a social formation "in solution" as opposed to "precipitated" (Williams 1977, 133-134).

This conceptual shift is happening during a period that is intensely felt as a liminal moment, as a passage from a taken-for-granted neoliberal consensus to another horizon that is still to be determined and in which we can begin to discern changes in what Williams called "structures of feeling[31]" (*ibid.*, 132). This emergent public, as we shall argue in the next chapter, constitutes an assemblage because it is a formation that stems from "multiple determinations that cannot be reduced to a single logic" (Ong & Collier 2008, 12). To be more precise, this assemblage includes:

- Interpretations of the recent history of the West, most notably the rise of hegemonic neoliberalism (Gilbert 2013);
- A "new European social imaginary" that brings together a perception of Europe as a "postnationalist social space" (Braidotti 2011, 261-262) with a solid recognition of the importance of rootedness and local autonomy for many people in Europe;
- An articulation of 'democratisation' as a continuous process, "a dual sequence of both micro-political articulations, movements and blocs at the level of civil society, and as a sequence of macro-political, trans-national articulations" (Critchley 2007, 119), mediated by specific technologies, each carrying their own sets of affordances (Nardi 2015, 18-19).

As Cody argues, the processes by which publics articulate their political subjectivity are "irrevocably enmeshed in the social infrastructures of mass communication" (Cody 2011, 47), because it is through these social infrastructures that publics can perceive themselves (and can be perceived by others) as such, but it is also through these infrastructures that publics can articulate new horizons of possibility for political intervention.

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[31] For Williams, "'feeling' is chosen to emphasise a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' or 'ideology'" as a way of underlining that he is "concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt […] specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (Williams 1977, 132).

Chapter 4: Technological affordances

First, this chapter relates the experience of a decentralised public demonstration in the UK in celebration of migrants' contributions to British society. Second, it integrates the role of ICTs in processes of public formation such as those described above. Third, it draws a number of preliminary conclusions, specifically regarding political subjectivity.

#1DayWithoutUs

On February 20, 2017, thousands of people across the UK celebrated the contributions of European migrants in Britain with a decentralised UK-wide event called *One Day Without Us* (Taylor 2016b). The event was organised in response to the increasingly xenophobic tone of the public debate following the Brexit referendum, and included a wide 'spectrum of actions' like taking the day off work, and more 'joyous,' creative actions like holding cake sales, slam poetry events, spoken word, linking arms in public spaces, and so on. To tie all the actions together, there was a 'unifying action' at 1 pm, in which all the participants were asked to take a photo of their event and upload it to social media, in order to promote the *#1DayWithoutUs* tag and – hopefully – make it go viral. Matt Carr, a Sheffield-based writer who was one of the main organisers of the event, explained the background to me during a phone interview a few weeks later:

> It began with a Facebook post that I made back in October, and that was just after the Tory Party conference in Birmingham. Like many people, I was really pretty shocked, I had been quite alarmed by the kind of rise in street-level racism and xenophobia that had been going on since the June referendum [...]
>
> When you saw this kind of stuff happening, you began to realise that something new was going on, something we hadn't seen before in the sense that the referendum seemed to be interpreted by the people who were carrying out these physical or verbal attacks on migrants – it seems they had a new sense of entitlement that they hadn't had before [...] But the Tory party conference in particular seemed to crystallise this rhetoric, this

> willingness of politicians to pander to these developments rather than actually combat them.

The Tory party conference saw the official beginning of the Conservatives' Hard Brexit narrative, which included Home Secretary Amber Rudd calling for registries of foreign workers and for a cap on the number of foreign students allowed in the UK, and Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt suggesting new measures to exclude foreign-born medical students from training in the UK. A number of other stories in the news further signalled a reactionary shift towards the right, including notably a spike in hate crime following the referendum that was epitomised by the case of a group of teenagers in Essex, who murdered a man and critically injured another after hearing them speak Polish (Quinn 2016).

For the organisers, *One Day Without Us* would only make sense if European migrants took ownership of it, and created their own events in their local communities. On a national level, social media became the main vector for getting people involved. However, the organisers were cognizant of the non-correspondence between offline and online relations, and were aware of the difficulties in moving "from the digital to the physical." As Matt explained:

> I can't imagine how you could do a campaign now, of any kind really in the early 21st-century, without relying on social media. But the learning curve for us was to see how that can actually limit you as well as facilitate you, so you have to get around it, because our campaign in the end, we wanted it to take place in the street, in public, with bodies involved, not just simply clicking keyboards.

The One Day Without Us day of action enacted a certain public that coalesced around the issue of xenophobia in Britain following the Brexit referendum, grounding a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" (Werbner 2006) at the heart of a debate on what it means to be part of a community in Britain. In this context, social media acts as a 'double-edged sword' that can either create new flows pushing towards horizons of possibility, or circular eddies where nothing really takes off.

> When you're dealing with potential social movements like this – whether they are long-term or short-term – we found that lots of people flocked to this idea in the beginning, but then they didn't do anything at all. I think this is another role that social media play, it's that in alarming and disturbing times like the ones we're living through, people are even more inclined than usual to gravitate towards groups of like-minded people, and they take certain reassurance and comfort from being in those groups, exchanging views that are more or less the same as theirs, but they don't necessarily want to do anything.

And yet, social media was still crucial in raising the profile of the event, and in amplifying the "affective contagion" (Goodman 2010) that took place on that day: by making the hash tag go viral with photographs, videos, tweets and status updates, 'joyous' representations of ethnically diverse communities were enacted as broad – if temporary – publics, amplifying what would otherwise be localised stories to the level where they became part of a sustained public representation of solidarity and belonging, even though the event itself went largely unreported in most media outlets. But the story was different on social media:

> I don't know if you saw any of the *#1DayWithoutUs* Twitter, but there's a lot of very moving and positive messages that are continuing to come through [...] One particular day we asked people to imagine what they would miss most if there were no immigrants left in the UK. People had a great range of things you might expect about certain contributions, economic contributions, but lots of really personal stuff about the people they knew, the doctors that had saved their daughter, the dentist who had been really kind to their sister, stuff like that.
>
> *And I think having that personal emotion brought into it actually was a real strength of the campaign*[32]. Some of the people who had been involved in it have said to us that that's what they liked the most about, they said it felt fresh to them, and they really liked the whole celebratory, the almost joyousness of some parts of the campaign. Social media was crucial to that whole messaging part of it.

But would this have happened, had it not been for the Brexit referendum? For Matt, the "sense of alarm and despair" that was felt after the Brexit referendum was a major catalyst for organising the day of action: "If I had put out a proposal like that – or if anybody had put out a proposal like that in 2015, it probably would have just died a peaceful death on Facebook, and would have never come off it. Given that particular context it just struck a nerve."

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For many people in the UK, the Brexit referendum was lived as a rupture in the perceived continuity of their lives, a break from the taken-for-granted trajectory. As we have seen in the introduction, it opened a period of liminality in which new horizons of possibility for public intervention became perceptible, spurred on by the urgency of that historic moment. The main concern of this thesis has been to understand how publics have emerged and coalesced in response to the problem of Brexit. In doing so, we have fleshed out an ecological perspective to describe how these publics articulate specific scale-making projects that constitute their respective horizon of possibility, or the specific alignment of issues that inform their interventions in the public sphere. Here, we turn to the role of digital technologies in creating an “information ecology” (Nardi and O’Day 1999; Treré 2012) in order to properly account for its role in shaping not only the perception of different publics, but also the extent to which they can enact possibilities for action.

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[32] My emphasis.

According to Nardi and O’Day (1999), an information ecology is “a system of people, practices, values and technologies in a particular local environment. In information ecologies, the spotlight is not on technology, but on the human activities that are served by technology” (Nardi and O’Day 1999, 49), The notion of information ecologies allows us to “travel beyond the instrumental view” of digital communication technologies and “capture a notion of locality” in how political practices involve such technologies (Treré 2012, 2365). In general, as Greenfield argues, “networked digital information technology has become the dominant mode through which we experience the everyday” (Greenfield 2017, 17); as for the scale-making projects in Brexit Britain, these technologies constitute situated information ecologies, in which publics perceive and act following the affordances that are made available by these technologies.

The ecological approach to sociality that we are developing here has several important political implications for how we understand the role of the human subject in society. Mainly, an ecological approach to sociality means that we are moving away from “the irreducible reality of the individual as the basic unit of human experience” (Gilbert 2013, 69), and by extension from the idea that collectivities are merely an aggregate, a sum-total of individuals. Rather, the subject here is reframed as a relational entity, that is, as an entity whose subjectivity emerges through multiple encounters within given, situated and partial assemblages. As Gilbert argues, “our capacity to act in the world is in fact dependent upon our relations with others, relations which are constitutive of our subjectivity as such” (*ibid.*, 144).

Furthermore, “the formation of publics raises serious questions about the ontological status of the political subject” (Cody 2011, 47) precisely because of the role of material infrastructures of communication such as social media and the diverse (and ever-growing) ecology of digital platforms in enacting “mass-mediated political subjects” (*ibid.*, 38). The social imaginaries and the scale-making projects that have framed public interventions since the Brexit referendum are inextricably linked with these technologies insofar as they play a productive role in “giving substance to the articulation of mass-mediated subjectivities" (Cody 2011, 42), thus allowing unrelated groups of strangers to coalesce and form a public, no matter how temporary.

The analytic richness of integrating assemblage theory into ethnographic inquiries derives primarily from the fact that assemblages prioritise shifting relationships over stable structures, and thus allow for nuanced understandings of how contingent processes of change are inscribed within wider forces and flows, from global infrastructural systems to neoliberal modes of governance (Ong & Collier 2005). In this sense, just as there is a "vast and elaborate infrastructure" underpinning "the performance of everyday life as mediated by the smartphone" and similar user interfaces (Greenfield 2017, 32), we can distinguish critically between different constructions of publics, and how they relate to contemporary subjectivities.

Mediating the public

'The public' in the everyday sense of the word (and not in the analytic sense that has been developed here) is made *truly* perceptible only at certain key junctures. Elections offer periodic glimpses into 'the will of the people,' and *referenda* offer an exceptional look at what the people may think about an issue or the other. Every polling day, at around ten o'clock at night, the BBC publishes its exit poll, the result of hours of arduous (and often inaccurate) guesswork by its small army of pollsters. Shy of the actual result — which usually begins to crystallise between four and five in the morning — these exit polls are often the closest thing available to the truth, and as the results are drip-fed to the offices of the BBC, a narrative begins to emerge about what the most significant issues were, and how they might have affected the outcome in a number of local constituencies.

The BBC election set-up at Broadcasting House in Central London is itself an assemblage of information technologies, conjuring a decidedly abstract public on the basis of polls, localised statistics and interactive maps, making up a complex chain of mediations and filters that turn British society and British politics into something straightforwardly representable, something that David Dimbleby (the BBC's veteran political host) and his cohort of pundits can dissect, break down, analyse, process, and speculate about for the entire night and – if they're lucky – for a few days after that as well. In this assemblage, 'the public,' with all its complex horizons and scale-making projects, is boiled down to a series of statistics, swings, and pie charts that will determine Britain's institutions in the years to come.

Another such assemblage, one that is decidedly more deeply ingrained in our lives, is the big data infrastructure, the material and informational core of the world's favourite social media networks (such as Facebook and Twitter), and an increasingly pervasive substratum to our every interaction, both online and offline[33]. During the Brexit referendum, a number of specific affordances of this big data infrastructure were leveraged by Leave in order to create what investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr has called a "propaganda machine" fit for the twenty-first century (Cadwalladr 2017a). Writing for *The Observer,* Cadwalladr alleged that the two major pro-Brexit campaigns built psychometric profiles of 'swing' voters (the undecided ones who could swing either way) so that they could be directly reached with micro-targeted ads and political propaganda.

Whether or not the full extent of these allegations (which specifically refer to pro bono services provided by a number of American data analytics firms that are connected to Donald Trump's political campaign) turns out to be true[34], the fact remains that, according to Vote Leave campaign director Dominic Cummings, 98% of the official Brexit campaign's budget was spent on digital campaigning. Yet "there was not a single report anywhere (and very little curiosity) on how the official Leave campaign spent 98% of its marketing budget. There was a lot of coverage of a few tactical posters" (Cummings 2016, in Goodman et al. 2017). The way this marketing model worked, in a nutshell, was on the basis of computer-based models, which in recent years have become able to automatically predict people's personalities "without using human social-cognitive skills" (Youyou, Kosinski and Stillwell 2014), simply by aggregating one's social media activity. Although such mechanisms have become predominant in online marketing practices, the Brexit referendum was an exceptional development for the fact that these marketing dynamics were redeployed as a form of political campaigning.

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[33] In *Radical Technologies*, Greenfield argues that our lives are increasingly digitised, "plotted in space and time" (Greenfield 2017, 12): "Latent patterns and unexpected correlations can be identified, in turn suggesting points of effective intervention to those with a mind to exert control […] And all this is possible because of the vast array of data-collecting devices that have been seeded throughout the quotidian environment, the barely visible network that binds them, and the interface devices just about everyone […] carries on their person" (*ibid.*).

[34] If true, these services would constitute foreign interference in Britain's democratic process, as well as being a breach of legislation on election expenditure.

Damian Tambini, the director of the LSE's media policy project, argues that psychometric profiling practices mean that "we have now the ability to manipulate public opinion on a level we have never seen before" (Cadwalladr 2017b). Here, the public is again made perceptible, albeit in a different way. It is no longer something to be read in order to understand an electoral outcome, but a malleable material that can be worked with and controlled (Deleuze 1992), and that can be recursively measured on a scale that was unimaginable until very recently. However, as we have argued above, the possibilities for action within a specific technological assemblage cannot be determined *a priori*, and the same technological environment can be reconfigured to create radically different publics.

During the 2017 general election, left-wing campaigning organisation *Momentum* rallied a groundswell of support among young people for socialist candidate Jeremy Corbyn, leading to the most significant result for Labour at least since Tony Blair's victory in the 1997 general election. Just like the pro-Brexit campaigns, *Momentum* understood the potential of complementing standard, 'physical' campaigning strategies with digital, social media campaigns. Over the course of seven weeks, it managed to reach one quarter of all Facebook users in the UK by relentlessly pushing pro-Corbyn content, live-streaming campaign events, rallying support from celebrities[35], ensuring that the *#RegistertoVote* tag went viral as many times as possible as the voter registration deadline approached, and many more digital inititatives as well.

In particular, an online organisation called *Labour's Digital Army* developed a methodology to help Labour members reach as many people as possible with pro-Corbyn content. In a video posted on Facebook (Digital Army 2017), founder Adam Knight explains that "there is something we can all do at any time and pretty much anywhere:"

> Facebook and Twitter show posts to a bigger group of people the more Likes, Comments and Shares it gets. The quicker this happens, the bigger the group that it will be shown to. We're going to make the echo chamber exponentially bigger, so that all our friends and our family get to see our messages.

Knight goes on to outline a number of ways in which Labour supporters can multiply the reach of their echo chambers, by marking themselves explicitly as Labour supporters with "I'm voting Labour" banners, by following or befriending other Labour supporters, and by searching for posts with the *#VoteLabour* tag. The results of these digital tactics were almost immediate, with the hash tag receiving 318 million hits in just a few days (Digital Army 2017).

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[35] Most notably with the *#Grime4Corbyn* campaign: *Momentum* and the Labour Party received the backing of several popular artists and collectives in the 'Grime' music scene, an underground genre that was very popular among young British people in 2017 (Duggins 2017). Across London, Birmingham, and Manchester, several *#Grime4Corbyn* parties were held throughout the election campaign. This campaign is partially credited with a last-minute spike in voter registrations among young adults.

The medium is the same, and so is the aim. But the medium is not the message anymore, because here the public is not an algorithmic construct that affects individuals and groups on the basis of their psychometric profiles, or their user data. Here, the public is embodied (albeit virtually), employing what we might call digital 'guerrilla' tactics in order to affect large-scale processes of collective identification and affective contagion. It is furthermore actually embedded in collective expressions of substantive citizenship: the 'I'm Voting Labour' banners that were used as common signifiers were part and parcel of a wider scale-making project that was articulated by a broad pro-Labour public, both on the local and on the national scale.

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The public, as we have seen, is a contingent social formation. Publics are articulated through scale making-projects, and are made perceptible through lengthy chains of technological mediation. In the three brief examples above, the public that is articulated ultimately reflects a specific understanding of what it means to be a political subject — be it as the subject (matter) of political commentary, as the subject of (and subjected to) propaganda, or as the subject (agent) of a political campaign. The determining factor in each instance of public formation is not the technology through which a public is represented, but rather the overall assemblage that is constituted by the public, the scale-making projects in which it is articulated, and the technologies through which it is mediated and made perceptible.

For instance, the BBC articulates the British public in a very top-down way, in order "to cut itself off from and rise hierarchically above" (Nail 2017, 31) the political realities of elections and referenda. Thus, the intricacies of the British public and its politics are represented as part of their-scale making project, making us imagine the British national space through polling data. As for Cadwalladr's allegations of psychometric profiling during the Brexit referendum, the process of articulation is radically different, decoding qualitative relationships between citizens and society and recoding them as commodified, quantitative relations that can be accurately mapped and pre-emptively targeted by computer-based models.

With regard to *Labour's Digital Army*, its creative use of Facebook and other social media platforms can be understood as a "'nomadic assemblage" (Nail 2017, 32-33) that "constructs a participatory arrangement in which all the elements of the assemblage enter into an open feedback loop" (*ibid.*, 33). Within a nomadic assemblage, "particular problems are themselves transformed directly by those who effectuate them and who are affected by them" (*ibid.*). The subjectivities of those involved, the publics that emerge from their encounter, and the problems that are addressed by the articulation of a horizon of intervention, are all implicated in a process of "cultural becoming" (Clarke 2015, 165), in the sense that the identities that are articulated in these processes of public formation foreground the question of 'what we might become' rather than 'who we are' or 'where we come from' (*ibid.*).

The example of *Labour's Digital Army*, and the kind of work that led to the emergence of that specific public during the general election, is taken here as a model of the kind of articulations that all the publics considered above have attempted to construct at different times and through different media, including *DiEM25*. What is particular about this example is how explicitly it drew on technological affordances in producing a collective response to the elections.

However, what it shares with the other examples is the fact that its strategic intervention in society and politics was based upon the articulation of a scale-making project within a broader assemblage composed of socio-political elements, technological elements, and human (individual and collective) agencies. All of these publics, in different ways, have taken a line of flight from the rupture of Brexit in order to imagine (and sometimes enact) a different alignment of human, material, social and political elements as a way of opening onto a different horizon for society.

Conclusion

The prospects for Brexit do not look good, nobody can deny that. In March 2019, Britain's membership of the European Union will come to an end, and at the time of writing, nobody knows what comes next. In the best case, it will secure a transitional deal with the EU in order to gradually phase out its ties with the EU and set itself up for a new relationship. In the worst case, it will leave the EU with no safety net whatsoever, meaning that it will be virtually cut off from almost every transnational arrangement it has been involved in since 1973. Whatever the outcome, it is undeniable that the Brexit referendum that started this process has been felt by a great many people in the UK as an abrupt and unexpected rupture.

But if anything, as this thesis has argued, the rupture that was so intensely felt because of Brexit has stirred a reimagination of politics, and has fostered an accelerating pace of interconnections, relations and enactments among unrelated political subjects, who consistently created minor becomings and minoritarian forms of politics. In focusing on such contingent and temporary formations, this thesis has attempted to recognise that "the majority is an abstract and empty representation of an ideal identity that is linked to particular systems of power and control" (Madhu 2012, 4), and that it is from a minoritarian position of subjectivity that it becomes possible to discern new horizons of possibility.

In the first chapter, the aim was to establish a conceptual framework in order to discern how different instances of minoritarian politics staked a public intervention in the messy situation of Brexit Britain. By drawing on Stuart Hall's notion of articulation, Eriksen's concept of scale, and Deleuze & Guattari's definition of assemblages, these minoritarian politics were situated as expressions of contingent and temporary publics.

In the second chapter, the focus was on Hard Remainers, a loose group of individuals who – for various reasons – have refused to accept the outcome of the Brexit referendum. These groups have articulated a cosmopolitan vision of British society as part of their commitment to stop Brexit, however, a crucial aspect of the scale-making projects that have been described is that these are always partial, and to a certain extent, unable to account for all dimensions of scale simultaneously.

In the third chapter, the focus was on Re-Leavers, who took a different (if somewhat complementary) perspective on Brexit, paying attention not so much to the cosmopolitan and future-oriented dimension of Brexit, but rather to the local, situated and rooted dimension of British society, and to the material and socio-political changes that may have contributed to the Brexit vote. This chapter also paid specific attention to *DiEM25* as a social formation that is attempting to bridge both the local scale and the cosmopolitan scale in articulating its response to Brexit.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, the perspective was widened in order to account for the role of ICTs in the emergence of publics. Admittedly, doing justice to the dense meshwork of material infrastructures, policy decisions, market imperatives, and powerful interests that make up our daily interactions with these technologies is a task that is far beyond the scope of this thesis[36]. However, what this thesis has attempted to show is how these technologies have contributed in mediating unrelated actors in temporary publics, affording them the possibility to imagine and enact different understandings of what is at stake in Brexit Britain.

In the final instance, this thesis has argued that out of the chaotic situation of post-referendum Britain, individuals and collectives have coalesced into contingent publics, from where they have enacted public interventions. Through these public interventions, these publics have also contributed to the establishment of cultural becomings, of line of flights that have helped to imagine new horizons of possibility for British politics and society after Brexit.

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[36] For more on this, see Greenfield (2017).

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Appendix I: The UK in Europe

On January 1, 1973, the United Kingdom (UK) joined the European Community (EC) after previous membership bids were vetoed by French President Charles de Gaulle. According to the BBC, Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath was optimistic about the UK's accession, stating that "the cross-fertilisation of knowledge and information [...] will enable [the UK] to be more efficient and more competitive in gaining more markets not only in Europe but in the rest of the world"[1]. In 1979, the European Monetary System (EMS) came into force, setting the stage for the Euro. All EC members joined except for the UK[2].

The Single European Act of 1987 was the first significant act towards the establishment of the European Union, abolishing national vetoes in relation to the single market and increasing the legislative powers of the European parliament. At around this time, Margaret Thatcher's opposition to the European project became more pronounced. According to her biographer, "she was fiercely against monetary and economic union and the euro – and very opposed to political union. She felt Britain would be better off if it kept a distance from all of this"[3] (Scheuermann 2016). However, her views were at odds with the views of her Cabinet, and by the end of 1990, she was ousted from office precisely on the issue of Europe.

The following year, the Maastricht Treaty was signed and the European Union formally came into existence. Thatcher's successor, the Conservative PM John Major, enthusiastically endorsed the European project, although the UK secured a number of important optouts, including on monetary union. Despite John Major's positive opinion on European integration, the split within the Conservative Party over the European question was such that towards the end of his premiership it became a question of party management, as he "endeavoured to preserve a fragile semblance of party unity"[4]. In all likelihood, these divisions helped Tony Blair win a landslide victory for the Labour Party in the 1997 general election.

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[1] http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/january/1/newsid_2459000/2459167.stm

[2] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3583801.stm

[3] http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/brexit-interview-with-thatcher-biographer-charles-moore-a-1099182.html

Tony Blair, like his predecessor, believed that the UK belonged firmly within the European project, and as *The Economist* reported in 2001, he was "keen for Britain to join the Euro as soon as possible," even when two-thirds of the British population were reportedly opposed to it[5]. Ultimately, the UK's decision not to join the Euro proved beneficial in the wake of the crash of 2007-8, as the British economy was spared from the deflationary spiral that affected mainland Europe.

In 2005, David Cameron became Leader of the Conservative Party, defeating long-time Eurosceptic David Davis (who would later be appointed Secretary of State for Exiting the EU under Theresa May). At the Conservative Party Conference the following year, Cameron urged his party delegates to take a more centrist position, conceding that the party had alienated voters by "banging on" about Europe[6]. In 2012, two years after being elected Prime Minister, he rejected calls for a referendum on Europe from the right wing of his party, but announced less than a year later that the Conservatives would hold one if re-elected in 2015[7].

In February 2016, David Cameron held a summit in Brussels with European leaders to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership of the EU, especially on key points such as migration and the project for an "ever-closer" political union[8]. Despite claiming he had secured a "special" deal with the EU, leading Eurosceptics such as Nigel Farage claimed that "[Cameron's] deal is not worth the paper it is written on." Upon his return, Cameron announced that the referendum would be held on June 23, 2016.

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[4] http://www.brugesgroup.com/media-centre/papers/8-papers/801-john-major-and-europe-the-failure-of-a-policy-1990-7

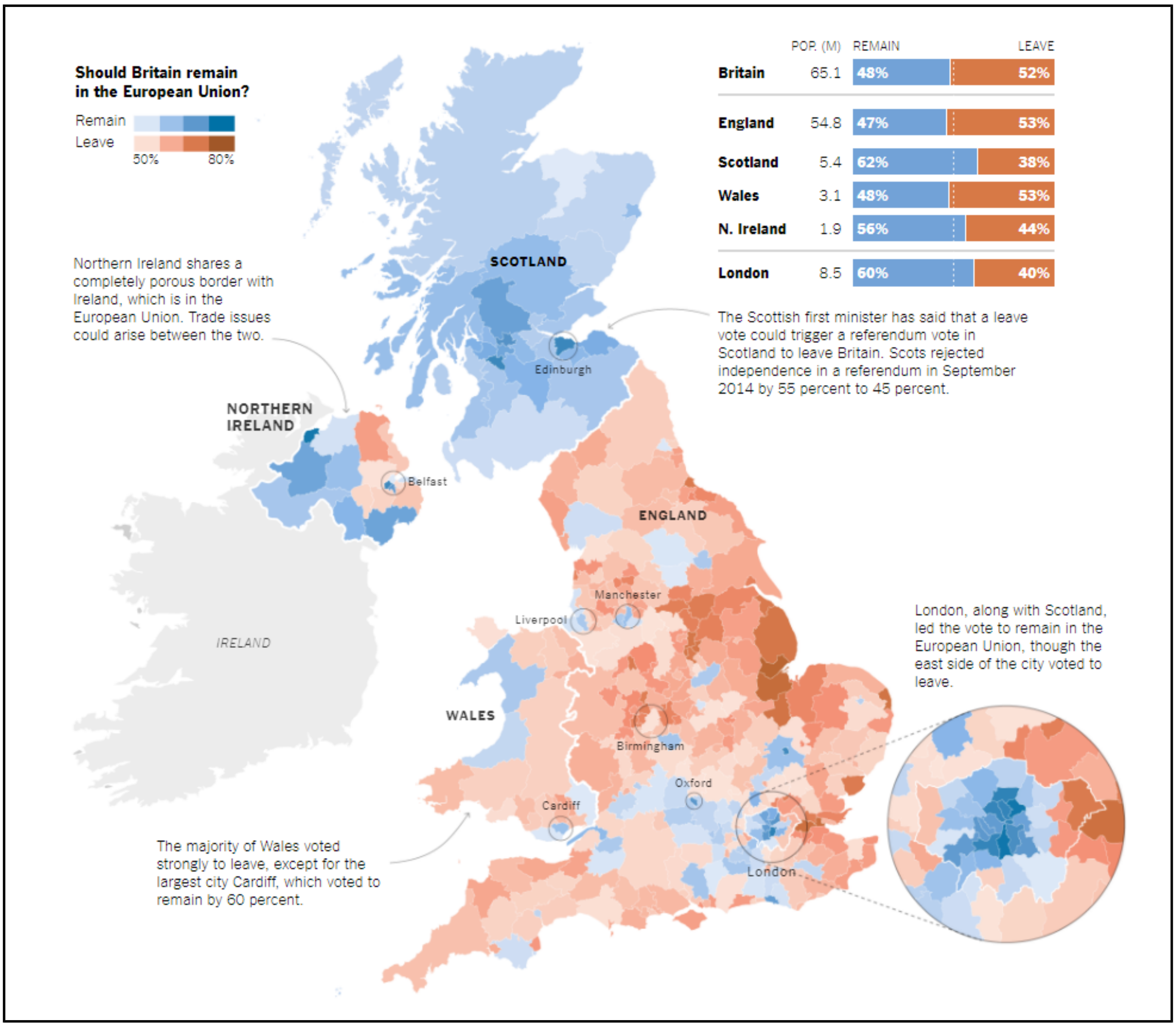
[5] http://www.economist.com/node/64598

[6] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5396358.stm

[7] http://time.com/4381184/uk-brexit-european-union-referendum-cameron/

[8] https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/feb/19/eu-summit-all-night-negotiations-deal-cameron-live

Appendix II: Mapping Brexit Britain


Should Britain remain in the European Union?
Remain
Leave
50%
80%
SCOTLAND
Edinburgh
NORTHERN IRELAND
Belfast
IRELAND
ENGLAND
Manchester
Liverpool
WALES
Birmingham
Oxford
Cardiff
London

	POP. (M)	REMAIN	LEAVE
Britain	65.1	48%	52%
England	54.8	47%	53%
Scotland	5.4	62%	38%
Wales	3.1	48%	53%
N. Ireland	1.9	56%	44%
London	8.5	60%	40%

Northern Ireland shares a completely porous border with Ireland, which is in the European Union. Trade issues could arise between the two.

The Scottish first minister has said that a leave vote could trigger a referendum vote in Scotland to leave Britain. Scots rejected independence in a referendum in September 2014 by 55 percent to 45 percent.

London, along with Scotland, led the vote to remain in the European Union, though the east side of the city voted to leave.

The majority of Wales voted strongly to leave, except for the largest city Cardiff, which voted to remain by 60 percent.

Fig. 1: *The New York Times*: "How Britain Voted in the E.U. Referendum." By Gregor Aisch, Adam Pearce and Karl Russell, June 24, 2016. Accessed August 10, 2017.

https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/24/world/europe/how-britain-voted-brexit-referendum.html

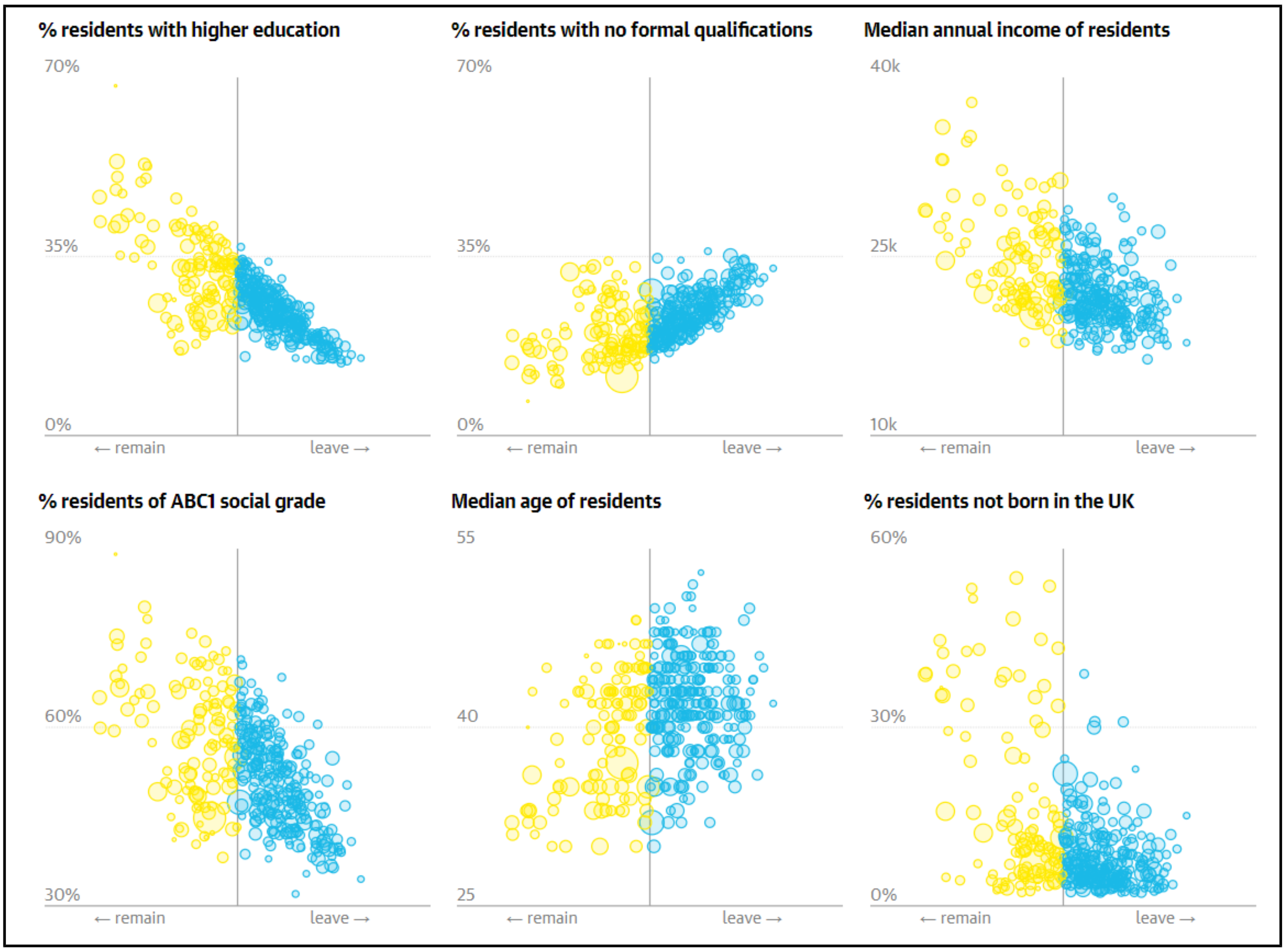


Fig. 2: *The Guardian*. “EU referendum: Full results and analysis.” Accessed August 10, 2017.

> “Comparing the results to key demographic characteristics of the local authority areas, some patterns emerge more clearly than others. The best predictor of a vote for remain is the proportion of residents who have a degree. In many cases where there are outliers to a trend, the exceptions are in Scotland.”
>
> https://www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2016/jun/23/eu-referendum-live-results-and-analysis.