

Our argument unfolds over three sections. First we outline post-political theory as used to explain social and environmental politics with policy and policy-making reduced to a 'policing' that operates through space. Second, we introduce our case study analysis of the Australian federal government's proposals for and subsequent passage in 2011 of a clean energy plan and carbon pricing bill which we see as a manifestation of post-politics. Third, we then examine the empirical material in theoretical terms to explore its temporal framing which is – unlike its spatial counterpart – rarely identified in such analyses of post-political issues and yet seems so relevant to climate change.

Post-politics: policing society and environment through space

At a high level of abstraction, the notion of post-politics is associated with philosophers Chantal Mouffe (1993, 2000, 2005) and Slavoj Žižek (1999, 2004, 2006, 2007) as well as Jacques Rancière (2001, 2003, 2007, 2009). A spatial sensibility inflects their work but is most pronounced in Rancière's oeuvre which is a significant source for post-political geography as discussed here.

Rancière's radical critique emerges from a tension between politics and philosophy, which he positions foremost in his seminal text *Disagreement* (1999 [1995]). Here Rancière lays out most fully the thesis he had started to explain in terms of 'the end of politics' with an essay of similar title in *On the Shores of Politics* (Rancière, 2007 [1992]). Following the May '68 student riots in Paris and with impetus since then from international events, the notion of democracy and politics itself has demanded rethinking. Still, Rancière (2009, p. 114) sees his method not as philosophy but more an interrogation of any given situation, such that his books 'are always forms of intervention in specific contexts.' Against a background that features the Soviet empire's collapse, and ongoing globalization of capital in the guise of democracy, he noted upwelling ethnic conflicts and racial hatred:

'On the Shores of Politics and *Disagreement* were elaborated as an investigation into this strange relationship between the assertion of the global triumph of consensual and peaceful democracy and those new forms of violence. They tried to construct the ideological paradigm able to account for it, by showing that consensus meant in fact the contrary of democracy and, by the same token, the erasure of politics itself. The opposition of politics and police was proposed as a tool for understanding the logic of this process.'

Rancière, 2009, p. 115

Here, with this policing, 'society consists of groups dedicated to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised, in modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places' (Rancière, 2001, §21). A politics proper, on the other hand, can disturb such an arrangement 'supplementing it with a part of the no-part identified with the community as a whole. ... Politics is first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable' (Rancière, 2001, §21). In assuming the principle of equality, extending it as the universal singular, new political subjects are constituted as they render themselves and the objects of their recriminations worthy of political recognition and contestation.

Usually for Rancière, however, politics gets reduced to the post-politics of a police function. This end to any politics proper, in being subsumed to a police function, is facilitated through spatial relationships. Rancière has therefore appealed to political geographers. There is 'a substantial spatial practice in his theorization of politics' in turn identified and deployed by Mustafa Dikeç in researching the troubled Parisian *banlieus* (Dikeç, 2005, p. 173; see

also Dahmann et al., 2012; Dikeç, 2007). Similarly, Swyngedouw (2011, p. 371) reads recent urban violence in Western Europe as challenging the post-democratic order's 'partitioned social and spatial distribution of things and people.' Yet others have used the idea of post-politics to investigate spatial planning (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012), housing gentrification (Davidson, 2011), urban regeneration (MacLeod, 2011) and development based around the provision of theme parks (Paddison, 2009) and golf courses (Neo, 2010).

Spatiality figures in the de-politicization of environmental issues too. A spatial process of closure associated with contemporary consensualism is therefore noted by Swyngedouw in his post-political analyses of socio-ecological issues. He sees the politics of nature, environment and sustainability as 'radically conservative' and 'inherently reactionary' (Swyngedouw, 2007, p. 23; 2010, p. 228). Climate change is a case in point as any space for alternative thought and action is closed down in populist discourse expressed through what Swyngedouw describes (and we later explore) as powerfully hegemonic and yet ultimately empty signifiers (Swyngedouw, 2007, 2009b, 2010; see also Boykoff, 2008). State politics and its policy function are akin here to policing or 'polic(y)ing' and 'polic(e)y/politics' (Swyngedouw, 2009b, p. 604; 2011, p. 2). The particularly spatial configuration of this post-politics is summarized as follows:

'These post-political climate change policies rest on the following foundations. First, the social and ecological problems caused by modernity/capitalism are external side-effects; they are not an inherent and integral part of the relations of liberal politics and capitalist economies. Second, a strictly populist politics emerges here; one that elevates the interest of an imaginary 'the People', Nature, or 'the environment' to the level of the universal, rather than opening spaces that permit the universalization of the claims of particular socio-natures, environments, or social groups or classes. Third, these side-effects are constituted as global, universal and threatening. Fourth, the 'enemy' or the target of concern is continuously externalized and becomes socially disembodied, is always vague, ambiguous, unnamed and uncounted, and ultimately empty. Fifth, the target of concern can be managed through a consensual dialogical politics whereby demands become depoliticized and politics naturalized within a given socio-ecological order for which there is ostensibly no real alternative.'

Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 228; see also Swyngedouw, 2009b, p. 613; Swyngedouw, 2007, pp. 34–35

Climate change policy developments in Australia

Australian climate change policy is redolent of a post-politics that we explore here. Before detailing our findings, we explain the political background to our case study, the choice of material examined and the methods used.

Case study context and methods

Climate change was not a pressing political issue in Australian administration during the eleven years of conservative government delivered with Prime Minister John Howard's election in 1996. Instead, environmental policy relied on the voluntary and market based instruments of a 'light-handed' regulatory approach (Papadakis & Grant, 2003). There was little leadership in implementing integration (Ross & Dovers, 2008). After this long period of conservative rule, federal politics shifted back towards the left when the Australian Labor Party (ALP or Labor), led by Kevin Rudd,

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