Thinking the Political: The Work of Ernesto Laclau Conference Abstracts

Torben Bech Dyrberg | University of Roskilde, Denmark
Power, politics and democracy:
Foucauldian comments to discussions of radical democracy

It is noteworthy that the post trends in the 1980s and 1990s, which questioned and deconstructed virtually everything, did not question two of the most basic axioms in political science/theory: that politics = conflict and power = domination. Instead, attempts were made to cope with a post Emancipation scenario, which sought to find a way to deal with conflict and domination. This accentuated an interest in liberal democratic institutions, which we have seen in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's discussions of radical democracy. Emphasis has been given to the dual ability of liberal democracy to secure stability by moderating conflicts by securing compliance to common rules and to frame and underpin libertarian and egalitarian values of pluralism and toleration.

Foucault's concern with the duality of liberal democratic institutions – security and enlightenment ethos – took a different turn, which is interesting not only for discussions of radical democracy, but also for discussing the nature of politics. The fundamental point is that Foucault did not accept the two axioms of mainstream and critical approaches, because he saw conflict as merely one way in which politics is articulated, just as domination is but one way of exercising power. Instead of defining 'the political' in terms of antagonism or friend/enemy relations, he discussed politics in terms of two entwined types of relationships: that between authority and laypeople/citizens, which cannot a priori be specified as one of, say, hierarchy and submission, and that among laypeople or citizens which concerns community life.

His numerous studies of power in his disciplinary period were directed against hierarchical forms of authority relationships, which institutionalized obedience and kept individuals in a state of domination, and fostered mistrust in oneself and others. However, discipline is but one form of power, which is bound up with a specific truth-regime. We find other forms of power and truth-regimes in his later studies of parrhesia (free speech, truth-telling) in Greek and Roman antiquity in which political power is seen as facilitating collective action and self-governing.

The point of mentioning this is that Foucault can enrich, and in fact radicalize, discussions of radical democracy in at least two respects. First, because he focuses on the essential political relationship between authorities and laypeople, he can point out that the democratization of state and civil society, which is manifested in legality, legitimacy, consensus, pluralism, deliberation, toleration, and so forth, has co-existed with political structures of submission and obedience. Hence, while endorsing a liberal-democratic set-up, Foucault has a critical eye to the underlying mechanisms of power, which are governing individuals and populations. Second, because he looks at where power relations take effect; his political analyses are geared to the output side of

politics where power is practical and efficient as opposed to being ideological. Here again, his take on political power runs counter to mainstream and critical approaches, which are concerned with the input politics of constitutional set-up, recognition, deliberation, representation as well as interest and identity politics, and which, mistakenly, see output politics as a sign of depoliticization.

The paper thus seeks to argue that the critical commitment of Discourse Theory – analytically as well as politically – could be enriched by Foucault's approach to power and politics.

Benjamin Bertram | University of Southern Maine, USA
"The People are the City": the "Mob" and the Body Politic from Coriolanus to Occupy Wall Street.

The social protest movements around the world in 2011-2012 made it clear that the work of Ernesto Laclau is more important than ever. This essay puts Laclau's writing on collective identities, especially On Populist Reason (2005), to work as a means of understanding the Occupy Wall Street movement. In addition to the OWS movement, I discuss the crowd scenes in Ralph Fiennes' Coriolanus (2011), a film based on Shakespeare's late tragedy (1608) with the same title. Guided by Laclau's rhetorical and psychoanalytic analysis of populism as a "political logic," I argue that our own movements, including OWS, can learn from Shakespeare's metonymic/synecdochic conception of politics, a conception exemplified in the citizens' mantra, "the people are the city." Some participants in OWS pursue what Laclau calls a "hegemonic totalization" while others champion a more "rhizomatic," pluralistic, or even apolitical approach. My essay will show how concepts from Laclau's work (partial embodiments, points de capiton, objet petit a, equivalence, etc.) might be used as tools for pushing OWS in the populist direction some— but by no means all— of its participants have in mind. The invocation of Coriolanus, whose collective identity formation might be seen as atavistic when contrasted with that of OWS, is intended to call attention to the way an older corporeal and metonymic language of politics ("the body politic") still offers helpful lessons for the present as we consider what Judith Butler, a participant in OWS, refers to as "a politics of the public body."

Raúl Burgos | Federal University of Central Catarina, Brazil
The concept of objectivity in Gramsci and Laclau

The theory of hegemony is presented in the general framework of political theory as an approach to effectively deal with the possibility of formulating a theory of democracy sensitive to the complex features of contemporary society: plurality of social identities, variety of subject positions within the same identity and the consequent ineradicability of social conflict. In the complex world of contemporary political theory, some new schools of theoretical analysis have shown outstanding ability heuristic and interdisciplinary dialogue. Among them, but in a prominent place, the Discourse Theory, born under the influence of theoretical positions of Ernesto Laclau

and Chantal Mouffe in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics (1985).

As part of this broader study of the Theory of Hegemony in Antonio Gramsci and Ernesto Laclau, this article intends to focus on comparative contrast in relation to the concept of objectivity. We'll show in the work how, despite Ernesto Laclau offer an extremely accurate overall reading of Gramsci's thought, particularly in relation to the concept of objectivity we noted a certain absence: in this sense will try to show in this work the relations between Laclau´s elaboration of the concept of the social as human discursive construction and the sophisticated elaboration of Gramsci in relation to objectivity as the "universally subjective", as that "historically unified in a unitary cultural system", that is, hegemony. Moreover, although some prominent authors Gramsci, as is the case of Carlos Nelson Coutinho, see this conception of objectivity of Gramsci as a idealistic slip, we shall show in this article –in relation to the proposed analytical theory of Laclau–, as the Gramscian concept of objectivity fully exposes its potential as a materialist theory of objectivity.

Cornelia Bruell | Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Stuttgart, Germany
Desire and Democratic Subjectivity. Laclau and Lacan on the Political

Recent developments within western political systems hint to a destabilization of democratic decision-making processes and an adequate representation of "the people". Everything is pointing in the direction of a lack concerning the description of characteristics of democracy. Traditional and rational approaches are not able to cope with the virtual and schizophrenic dimensions of political participation and articulation. Thus, we have to re-conceptualize the relations between power, desire and representation. This means also to reveal the necessary connection between the logic of desire and the logic of capitalism. Those issues will be addressed by elaborating on the affective dimensions in the theories of Jacques Lacan and Ernesto Laclau. I will first discuss the affective dimensions of the subject in psychoanalysis, which will provide the basis to understand Lacan's four discourses. These discourses are prototypical showing how the subject deals with the unconscious in the process of identification and decision-making. Lacan's four discourses can be considered as door openers to understand the complex relation between power, affect and democratic subjectivity. The challenge is to answer the questions why and how a radical investment in the political community is necessary/possible to make the political system work in a democratic way? These answers will be necessary to specify the affective dimension needed in a model of radical democracy as it is conceptualized by Ernesto Laclau.

Fabio Bruschi | NEED TO CHECK
Rethinking overdetermination between psychoanalysis and Spinoza

The Althusserian concept of overdetermination plays a crucial role in the structure of Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. It provides the authors with the idea of the social as a symbolic order, that is with the very ground of their attempt to overcome the impasses of the different forms of class reductionism implied by Marxism and to formulate a renewed interpretation of the Gramscian concept of hegemony. In our paper we will show that, if Laclau

and Mouffe insist on the psychoanalytic origin of the concept of overdetermination and correctly try to analyse it in the light of a Freudian and Lacanian problematic, they risk however to push into the background another concept that is constitutive of the Althusserian account of overdetermination, namely the Spinozist concept of immanent cause. By asserting the importance of the philosophy of Spinoza for the construction of the concept of overdetermination, we will claim that the overdetermination of the social whole can only be explained by revealing the productivity of social practices, always exceeding the limits of the system all the while being informed by it. Such a point of view will allow us to consider the possibility for a social practice to seize the relations of overdetermination of the social whole in order to exceed the limits in which it is situated as the very the condition of the construction of the identity between a particular demand and a universalistic claim, that is of hegemony itself.

Alfred Cardone | King's College, University of London, UK
"Soldiers, in the Name of Democracy, Let Us All Unite!": The Tea Party, the Occupy Movement, and Neo-Populism

Common opinion concerning the Occupy Movement and the Tea Party is that they represent extreme ends of the "left-right" political paradigm in the United States. With Republican "Tea Party" candidates and the "hippy" appearance of Occupy encampments, it is no surprise that such opinions exist today. However, does this imply that there is no alternative characterization that can be applied to either movement?

I argue that there is another way to characterize them, if one abandons the homogenous description many place on both movements and realize that there are many actors in American politics today that assume the title of Occupy or Tea Party. Upon considering this, sections of both movements become noticeable that have escaped national attention and have largely been ignored by established media outlets (TV news, newspapers, etc.).

These sections are largely comprised of libertarian and anarchist elements and are seeking to redefine how Americans view their political system in order to escape the perceived injustices that occurred in the aftermath of the housing bubble collapse and the subsequent recession.

This drive for redefinition is emblematic of an American civil religion that emphasizes the sacredness of the citizen and assumes the role of arbiter to the "people" of the country. The methodology of this redefinition draws inspirations from the Populist Movement of the 19th century, which also was a reaction to similar circumstances that stressed the civil religion as well. However, these libertarian and anarchist groups are developing a Neo-Populist Movement today that differ slightly from their predecessor, in which elements from Occupy and the Tea Party are seen interchanging from one movement to the other.

It is this developing Neo-Populist Movement that is rendering the "left-right" paradigm ineffective in politics today and redefining how Americans interact in their civil society.

Gustavo Castagnola | National University of Tres de Febrero, Argentina
From Marxism to the Peronist Populism: a Tour through Ernesto Laclau`s Theoretical Work

At first examining phenomena and concepts that Marxism had difficulties to analyse, then together with Chantal Mouffe and, later on, in an individual enterprise again (even though in contact with her and with other intellectuals that shared similar preoccupations), Ernesto Laclau has sought to rethink theoretically the Socialist project. Laclau revisited the Socialist tradition by taking two steps. Firstly, he identified the set of social and political transformations that took place in the world during the last decades and explored in them all their novelty and complexity. Secondly, and taking into account the identification and exploration referred above, he examined critically the Marxist theoretical past in order to find in it ruptures and continuities from which to rebuild the Socialist tradition. In relation to this last enterprise, Ernesto Laclau has developed his intellectual project in two successive moments. Initially, he has examined critically the evolution of the concept of hegemony and the place that this notion occupied in the Marxist theoretical framework. Then, he has elaborated a new definition and a new theory of hegemony and, from it, a new theoretical approach to populism. In my paper I will explore two topics. In first place, I will make a brief presentation of Laclau´s theories of hegemony and populism: I will focus my attention in the connections that can be found between these two theoretical devices and, in particular, I will try to show that his theory of populism contains a full developed analysis of some insights that can be detected in his theory of hegemony which are very useful when applied to historical cases. In second place, and in order to illustrate the point made at first, I will make a general presentation of the main interpretations given about the emergence and political vitality of the populist Peronism in Argentina and the way in which Laclau`s theory of populism can offer a complete new perspective about this theme.

Carl Cederstrom & Sam Dallyn | Swansea University, UK
Why are we in Universities? Rearticulating Relevance through Public Engagement
We are presently in the middle of a potentially epoch changing crisis in capitalist societies that have expanded on the basis of an unsustainable private debt fuelled consumption. Drawing on Laclau's later work this might be termed a time of radical dislocation. Yet although we are seeing growing political protests there is little evidence in the UK of a widespread societal questioning of the assumptions upon which our financialised economy is based. While in Laclau's work there is a strong commitment to the idea of politicisation and of rendering social phenomena contingent and contestable; the importance of engaging and communicating with wider publics has often been neglected within the ideology and discourse analysis (IDA) tradition. Further, IDA is presently ill equipped to tackle this desperate need for greater public engagement because it remains too often caught in the language of an introverted academese. Thus now more than ever it is vital to pose the following question for those affiliated with IDA as radical scholars and researchers: Why are we in universities and what did we end up working in universities for? We argue that to retain a genuine commitment to wider politicisation we need to move towards more radical models of public engagement. Drawing on the work of Graff, Jacoby and Giroux we argue that IDA and other critical researchers and theorists need to work to radically resituate the role of the academic around an ideal of Gramsci's organic intellectual. Ultimately this reartiulation can be focused on three vital areas for future engagement: The development of a pedagogy that

engages students and encourages them to examine everyday practices from a critical perspective; by exploring and breaking down what we see as the too rigid barriers between journalism and academia; and by continually striving to reach wider publics through different means. We claim that this conception of the organic intellectual is the best way to remain committed to the ideals of radical politicisation that we find in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.

Jonathan Dean | University of Leeds, UK
The End of Left Melancholia?

Events such as the Arab Spring, Occupy and anti-austerity movements have, to some extent, engendered a shift away from the melancholia that has gripped the academic left in recent decades. This paper offers a critical examination of how, why and to what extent we have witnessed a weakening of academic left melancholia, paying particular attention to the recent rethinking of communism within contemporary (post) Marxist thought. Proceeding in large part via a reading of Jodi Dean's The Communist Horizon, I argue that the attempt to rethink communism is a welcome effort to generate more positive affective orientations within the academic left. However, I argue that the new communism's political and explanatory power is partly compromised by its tendency to emphasise anti-capitalism at the expense of questions of gender, race and sexuality (manifest in several key texts and also at the 2009 "Idea of Communism" at Birkbeck, which came under fire for its lack of women speakers and inattention to questions of race and gender). Drawing on a range of theoretical resources – including recent queer theoretical work on the concept of heteronormativity, and anti-racist feminists such as bell hooks – I argue that the attempt to move away from left melancholia must not entail a restoration of a form of left politics in which anti-capitalism is afforded priority over and above feminism, anti-racism and queer politics. In so doing, I argue that the neo-Gramscian perspectives of Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall, despite being initially formulated several decades ago, ultimately provide a more compelling account of contemporary left politics than the new communism because of, not despite, their willingness to take seriously the challenges to the academic and activist left posed by questions of gender, race and sexuality.

Diego Ferrante | Institute of Human Sciences, Italy
Proscenium for a genealogical analysis of the work of Ernesto Laclau

To deal with the prevalent need to formulate a new political lexicon, two authors are insistently cited (sometimes combining strained philological interpretations), Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Lacan. Laclau has sought to grapple with both of them at various times and in various texts, therefore his work represents an ideal locus in which to retrace Gramsci and Lacan at their point of junction, avoiding reducing either one to the other. Laclau's thesis is that they identified in two different spheres the same operating logic: the theory of hegemony and the objet petit a both point out the contingency of every structure or identity. Moving forward from this apparent mirroring between psychoanalysis and political theory, is it legitimate to postulate effects of sense for a social ontology? The structural assonance between objet petit a and hegemony is lost when examined more carefully or it actually prefigures the detection "of something that concerns the

very structure of objectivity"? The paper investigates this hypothetical relationship, assuming as starting point a literary model suggested by Beckett and made explicit by Mercier in 1956. Leaving aside the attempts to identify Estragon and Vladimir historically and conceptually, Mercier preferred to stress the symmetry of the two acts. Waiting for Godot is "a play in which nothing happens, twice". What discourse regulates the logic of sameness? What does repetition mean? Is the similarity of Lacan and Gramsci, the act of recognising and establishing such a resemblance, capable of producing a reciprocal overdetermination of the two discourses? The work of the Irish playwright is intended to offer a new angle to reconstruct the theoretical frameworks of Gramsci and Lacan, so to examine how they operate in Laclau and question the contiguity, the overlaps and the faults that make one discourse different, even if repeated twice.

Dani Filc | Ben-Gurion University, Israel
The people: us against them, but also a common we

In The Populist Reason Ernesto Laclau provides a political definition of the people as constituted through a chain of equivalencies between different claims (and between the groups that advanced those claims), partially stabilized around a particular claim that is posed as universal. When claims advanced by those different social groups cannot be met by the dominating sectors, the possibility is open to the framing of chains of equivalences between the different claims; in such a way that one (or more) particular claim also represents the universal, and the people is the subject constituted around the partial stabilization of the chain of equivalences in opposition to "them," i.e. the elite.

This definition of the people emphasizes its ever-changing character, offering a way to think about the people as plural and open. However, thinking about the people solely constituted as antagonistic to the elites, makes difficult to think about the people as the political community. Moreover it does not give enough weight to the role of previous identities, social institutions and cultural practices in constituting the people as a common 'we'; it does not account for the ways in which they influence on the possibility of establishing chains of equivalences between certain claims and not between others. For this reason, Laclau's hyperpolitical definition of the people is less useful in order to explain the lasting character of popular identities, and phenomena such as nationalism or exclusionary populism.

The present paper attempts to provide a critical discussion of Laclau's conceptualization of the people, and propose some possible directions of a conceptualization of the people that, without losing its eminent political character, will take into considerations both the tension between the people as a part and the people as the political community, and the weight of sedimented institutions and practices.

Ben Glasson | University of Melbourne, Australia

Subversive rearticulation: Beyond deconstruction and dialectics

Points of tension between radical/revolutionary and reformist approaches to social transformation come clearly into view in contemporary eco-politics. On one side are eco-socialists and eco-anarchists who see in the present hegemonic bloc an immutable core and a genius for co-opting threats. On the other side are liberal environmentalists whose 'ecological modernisation' discourse preaches a faith that capitalist institutions are, ultimately, ecologically reformable. Recently, however, the outlines of a third alternative, apparently deconstructing the choice between resistance and reform, are discernible in the green political theory of John Barry, Andrew Dobson and Douglas Torgerson. This paper reads their particular brand of 'incremental radicalism' – employing hegemonic discourse while seeking to undermine its very basis – into a Laclauian framework of hegemonic struggle, perceiving in it the seeds of a politics of 'subversive rearticulation'. Subversive rearticulation begins with the dominant term of any opposition (market/state, consumer/citizen, growth/no-growth, progress/anti-progress, nation/planet), but circumvents the binary by way of a 'rearticulatory arc', arriving at the marginalised term without ever having challenged the binary directly. The rearticulatory arc is a special kind of equivalential chain that is distinguished by three features: a well-selected initial 'pivot term' agnostic to either side of the binary; a chain of signifiers that incrementally arc around to the marginalised term; and, crucially, carriage of the dominant term's metaphorical surplus through all members of the rearticulatory arc. The carriage of this surplus inoculates the arc from marginalisation, while the arc itself seeks to subvert the very ground of the binary. Drawing on further analyses of rearticulatory arcs operating in the Deng Era market reforms and recent party-political strategy in Australia, I offer subversive rearticulation as a unique Laclauian response to political-strategic questions of resistance or reform – one that cannot be assimilated to either dialectical transcendence or deconstruction.

Jenny Gunnarsson Payne | Södertörn University, Sweden
Affective Subjects, Affecting Politics
Thinking through the 'Messiness' of Political Will Formation

In his work on populism, Ernesto Laclau has forcefully argued that the creation of a 'people', that is, an articulation and retroactive naming of various, isolated and disparate demands against a common political 'enemy', is 'the political operation par excellence'. This process, he argues, must be understood as an affective one, as a process of 'radical investment'. In his own words: "It is clear, however, that if an entity becomes the object of investment—as in being in love, or in hatred—the investment necessarily belongs to the order of affect" (2005: 110). He even goes so far as to say that affect, in fact, lies at the very heart of signification; without affect therefore, the naming of a 'people', simply cannot take place at all. In On populist reason, Laclau turns to Freud and Lacan, as well as to the more recent thought of Joan Copjec, in order to provide an ontological foundation for the process of political mobilization. Although Laclau's model offers a convincing explanation for the ontological relation between signification, affect and the way

subjects comes to identify with, that is to say, invests in a collective political project on a 'vertical' level, there may still be more to say about the 'horizontal' level, i.e. what happens 'in-between' subjects or, wishing for a better term, what of 'intersubjectivity' and the role that it plays in such processes? In the hope of adding further to the complexities of the Laclauian theoretical system, this paper seeks to investigate what the anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of 'communitas' might contribute to the possibilities of thinking the 'messiness' of political life; how, for example, might affective differences be negotiated 'between' subjects, and how might one capture the 'real' intensity of a community in the process of its formation?

Halil Gurlani | University of Helsinki, Finland
Laclau and Oakeshott: Politics of Faith, Scepticism, and Populism
The theory of populism Ernesto Laclau put forward in On Populist Reason has been a source of fiery discussions among numerous scholars, most of whom coming from the post-Marxist tradition Laclau himself greatly influenced. His hypothesis that equates populism with politics, in particular, has been the locus of criticism directed by, among many others, Yannis Stavrakakis, Benjamin Arditi, and Slavoj i ek.

Though it acknowledges those interventions, this paper aims at critically engaging with Laclau's theory of populism from a rather different angle. Utilising Michael Oakeshott's classical distinction between politics of faith and politics of scepticism, the paper firstly argues that this distinction largely overlaps with the one Laclau makes between politics proper and administration. While politics in its faithful or proper dimension is taken to be the matter of achieving salvation in this world or, in Laclau's words, 'a choice at the crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges,' politics of scepticism assigns itself no overriding purpose, except to keep order and minimise occasions for conflicting interests, thus reducing politics to the level of administration in Laclauian terms.

Building upon this, the paper further argues, in contradistinction to Laclau, that a politics of scepticism (or an administrative understanding of politics) often forms the discursive basis of populism where the politics is taken to have very little to do with 'presenting an alternative to the existing state of affairs' but more as a matter of "playing" those state of affairs to the mutual advantage of populist actors and constituencies. Named as entrepreneurial populists by Fieschi and Heywood, populist actors such as Berlusconi in Italy, Timoshenko in Ukraine or Erdogan in Turkey are prime executives of a particular logic of articulation that is every bit of populistic in its modus operandi without 'postulating a radical alternative within the communitarian space.'

Diego Hernández Nilson | Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil
The defense issue at the Latin American hegemonic construction and the antagonism face the extra-regional powers. The cases of the ALBA and the Unasul.

At the beginning of the 21st century, left parties, coalitions and leaders won elections in most

countries of Latin American and the Caribbean, a fact known as "Latin America's left turn". The paper discusses that this turn isn't the result of parallel changes in regional national political situations; but mainly an expression of a new hegemonic international process, still under construction, with influence over national politics. This process also involves a decline on the USA's regional hegemonic capacity (particularly over South America), represented by the Pan-Americanism; the emergence of new political actors, like ethnic social movements; the overcoming of the neoliberalism, replaced for strong social policies and economic state intervention; and new international organizations, particularly the ALBA and the Unasur.

These two organizations are institutionalized expressions of two forms of the hegemonic challenge against the Pan-Americanism: Bolivarianism, with a strong Venezuelan leadership; and South-Americanism, with a prominence of Brazilian leader role. Both Bolivarianism and South-Americanism collaborate in the hegemonic build, including the attempt to restrict the USA influence over regional international politics. Despite these coincidences, these organizations also have differences about the scope and senses of their political practices, as well as eventual disputes to hegemonize the new regional political situation and the articulation of diverse social demands of the Latin American social space.

In this way, the paper aims to compare the perspectives of both international regimes. Appealing to the Laclau's theory of hegemony, the discourses and practices in relation to the process of hegemonic dispute and sense making. The approach includes the study of the emergence and resignification of concepts like "zone of peace", "popular integral defense", and "sovereignty and dignity"; the definition of boundaries inside the inter-American social space; the posit of identity regions; and the antagonism towards the USA's power and influence. As it happened at the beginning of last century, when USA built the Pan-American hegemony as from the division among Western Hemisphere and Europe, the exclusion of a hegemonic power that is identified like a threat is a starting point to the construction of a new hegemony.

Tariq Islam | Aligarh Muslim University, India
Dissent: The Grammar of Democracy
In its foundation democracy is a governance oraganised around the dual principle of equality and sovereignty of the people. The term 'people' is demographic determined by geographic boundaries combined with government/constitution. However, this simple notion was interrupted with the interjection of liberal values of individual liberty and human rights. The evolution of the liberal democratic societies is informed by these interruptions.
The failure of democracy to translate itself into practice disappointed Tocqueville whose writings led Mill to attempt a cementing of theory of democracy and its practice through his essay 'On Liberty', which in turn was taken as the basic document for future consideration and deliberation on liberal democracy. The basic point of his essay is freedom of expression, the central liberal value, which laid emphasis on the freedom of the individual to act and express so long as it does

not harm anyone. The liberal value, undermining the collective and stressing the individual, laid down the political notion of dissent as a rule delineating democracy, while subverting other forms of governance. Mill stressed that even if all agreed but one, s/he has the right to be heard. The notion of difference and dissent now defines the political discourse, the grammar of democracy, which is substantiated by recent upheavals across the globe.

The Rawls-Habermas camp versus the post-modernist-deconstructivist is a debate with grammar of democracy and the paradigmatic notions of difference and dissent as the central concern. The former is working to reduce, resolve or condense, to use Wittgensteinian phrase, the issue of difference into a drop of grammar, converging dissent to a rational discourse, while the latter maintains the grammatical nuances and suggests a working within the difference effecting a pluralistic society that is otherwise in danger of being reduced to a homogonisation through rationality. In Ernesto Laclau there is an attempt "...to determine...the logic of possible mediation between the two".

This paper will be an attempt to first of all outline the debate tracing out the grammar of democracy in the light of the two trends and construct and assess the position of Laclau's intervention to bring out the logic of the possible mediation.

Carsten Jensen | University of Copenhagen, Denmark
Hegemony and the Development of Democracy

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy described a process of transition and the following article 'Post-Marxism without Apologies' confirmed that the transition had taken place. What started as an attempt to develop Marxism beyond economism and class reductionism ended in a break with Marxism. This story is well known. In most cases it then tells how Ernesto Laclau later developed new ideas leading towards post-structuralist readings of various themes in contemporary political 'debates and battles'. This paper takes another turn. It focuses on those elements from the above works that focuses on what should be expected from the future development of (radical) democracy. Both HSS and PMWA contains formulations that invites to a neo-structuralistic and optimistic reading of the way one should expect democracy spreading to still wider areas of social relations. The theory of democratization that is implicit in the two above mentioned text has since been abandoned explicitly by Laclau. The paper nonetheless develops these ideas in a direction that is true to the original formulations with their Tocquevillean overtones of democratic redemption, but which differs considerable from the directions later taken by the authors. If HSS is 'Gramsci without Marx' the paper develops the democratic theory imbedded in a direction that could be popularized as 'Laclau and Mouffe without Derrida'. This constitutes a major break with their general lines of thought and indicates a 'neo-structuralism', that is more in touch with 'pragmatic' political theory than with the theoretical field that Laclau operates in today. The paper outlines 1) the original formulations concerning the spread democracy in HSS in their context, 2) an interpretation alternative to both Laclaus and Mouffes later writings and 3) an example on how this formulation can be used in the debate of contemporary democratization.

Andy Knott | University of Brighton, UK
Laclau, representation(s) and political space: Occupy and UK Uncut

This paper explores Laclau's account of political space and its relationship with the operation of the representational process. It argues that Laclau breaks with liberal and revolutionary accounts of the *topos* of politics, and presents a more subtle and complex account of the spatial operation of politics in contemporary societies. This ties in with his account of multiple representations, which moves beyond the simple representative-represented relation between professional politicians and those they are deemed to represent. The paper finally applies this account of political space and representation(s) to recent and emergent political developments, such as the Occupy movement and UK Uncut.

Jüri Lipping | University of Tartu, Estonia
Laclau and Schmitt on Political Form
My purpose in this paper is twofold. Firstly, I would like to bring out and discuss an interesting parallel between Ernesto Laclau and Carl Schmitt with respect to how they conceive the formation of political entities. They both argue that any political form, that is, any political constitution, involves the interplay between two opposing principles or logics: these are the logics of equivalence and difference in Laclau, and the principles of identity and representation in Schmitt. I will explore the similarities and differences which these respective conceptualizations entail, and I conclude that the most productive way is to view them as complementary to each other. Secondly, this structural correspondence itself points toward some further implications. On the one hand, it makes us more attentive to Schmitt as a "post-foundational political thinker" *avant la lettre*, whose ideas and insights could yet contribute (beyond the well-known friend-enemy distinction) for the pursuit of a radically conceived democratic theory. But this association also helps to enlighten certain critical aspects of Laclau's own approach, by extending the latter past the confines of discourse analysis toward a more comprehensive theory of the political.

Atila Lukic & Gordon Maslov | University of Zadar, Croatia
A permanent transition:
A proposal for Laclauian approach to the understanding of post-socialism

Ever since the publication of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, the work of Ernesto Laclau provoked strong rejection from the far left. One of more commonplace critiques of Laclau's attempt at moving beyond classical Marxist epistemology, aside from the accusations of open idealism, was the inability of its theoretical apparatus to properly engage with economy. And while most critiques were subsequently answered to by Laclau or his followers, this question remains somewhat open. In this paper we will try to rethink a possible connection between discourse

theory and political economy on the example of East European post-socialist countries (especially countries of former Yugoslavia). In this way we will aim to connect Laclau's discourse theory to the political economy of the transition via its dominant forms of representation. This will be done by critically re-examining the indispensable category of post-socialism – transition – in the light of what Laclau calls the "empty signifier". There is no reference point for transition except as a point de caption of transition as such. We maintain that this approach can stand to the hegemonic use of the term transition as a common denominator of everyday post-socialist experience, as well as a central category of social sciences, aiming to reconstruct the "society effect" after the fall of socialism and implementation of capitalist relations. Not only does transition not add to the understanding or explanation of post-socialist condition, but it further contributes to its ideological obfuscation because it is never able to explain the condition; it's always something through which the society can be seen. Contrary to its (implicit) teleology, which subsumes contemporality to the post facto analysis and condemns the future to "the infinite task of perfection", we will try to address the radical contingency of the Social as the necessary precondition of any attempt to think society as such.

Spiros Makris | University of Peloponnese, Greece
Revolution and anti-capitalism in contemporary Marxism
Reflections through Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's oeuvre
While within the framework of a new socialist strategy the issue of communism has been the subject of a comprehensive debate among the most pioneering thinkers of contemporary Marxism, the equally critical issue of revolution and anti-capitalist struggle has not yet entered at the heart of Marxist-influenced analysis of neo-liberal globalization. This sounds as a paradox because it can't be adequately understood how the transition to a communist society will take place without prior political strategy of rupture with capitalism. From this angle, we will attempt here through Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's oeuvre to constitute the conditions of a Marxist dialogue on revolution, revolutionary subject and anti-capitalism in the era of neo-liberal globalization. For this purpose, we will consider the relevant projects of important contemporary Marxist theorists as the well-known neo-Marxist geographer and anthropologist David Harvey, the Marxist-oriented sociologist and philosopher John Holloway and last but not least the famous post-Marxist political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri whose argument for a counter-empire of the multitude is one of the most discussed projects to constitute a revolutionary subject in the late capitalism.

Wiktor Marzec | University of Budapest, Hungary
Thinking political historically/historical thinking of the political.
Political moments in Revolution 1905 and philosophical confrontations of the time
How can we think the relation of the political to history? However we render the political as a transcendental limit of the politics, a structural impossibility of closure of the social or a radical (i.e. necessary) contingency, it appears to be rather trans-historical. Nevertheless, it was worked

out in particular philosophical discourse and in particular historical moment. Vast arrays of commentaries suggest that the Laclau's theoretical intervention is embedded in the given historical contexts and mere and answer for temporally deployed challenges. Laclau himself is not perfectly clear in that matter, although the genealogy of the concept of hegemony in HaSS or examples from Populist Reasons tend to suggest that the political was already there but it was only gradually "discovered".

In his "Heideggerian" reading of the political Oliver Marchart argues that it is somehow revealed (parallel to Being?) in particular "moments" of philosophical discourses. Therefore, we can search for the moment of the political within the historical continuum of political theories not resigning from its quasi-transcendental status. Nevertheless, a fully fledged "conceptual history of the political" should also look for correlative historical conjunctures, which constitute the conditions of possibility for given philosophical discourses, also empirical situations pregnant with the political moment. From the other angle, work of Aletta Norval on democratic subjectivity poses a question of empirical realisation of democratic potential of the political in ontic realm of politics. Drawing from these two conceptual reservoirs, we can trace particular historical conjunctures inducing political moments in philosophical discourse. In my contribution the Revolution 1905 in the Russian Poland and its theoretical repercussions in writings of Rosa Luxemburg and Stanis aw Brzozowski will help to flesh out the problem of historicity of the political and shed light on a logic of historically deployed political moments. Historically, 1905 is certainly the moment of

dislocation, when new, divergent and hegemonically mobilised political subjectivities among workers emerged, hitherto foundational concepts of class or nation became to be conceptualised politically, and most sagacious thinkers of the time attempted to face the radical contingency, however without appropriate stock conceptual language.

Janar Mihkelsaar | University of Tartu, Estonia
Laclau's Political Articulation and Agamben's Sovereign Decision

In 'Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?', Ernesto Laclau confronts the work of Giorgio Agamben. In general, Laclau's article leaves an impression that there are only profound disagreements between the two thinkers. My presentation, however, aims to outline a common root of Agamben's and Laclau's views. For this purpose, I investigate Laclau's notion of 'political articulation' in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy and Agamben's conception of 'sovereign decision' in Homo Sacer. I defend a claim that political articulation and sovereign decision occur in the terrain where, for example, the inside and the outside, the contingent and the necessary, are undecidable; that is, in the terrain where the normal functioning of 'the social' or the juridico-political order is broken down. But in the same undecidable terrain, political articulation/sovereign decision institutes the social/the juridico-political order. What, however, has to be kept in mind most of all is the fact that Agamben's decision and Laclau's articulation inscribe the outside within the inside, the exception within the law etc.; that is to say: political articulation/sovereign decision contaminates

the inside with outside, the whole with the particular. In this way, political articulation/sovereign decision posits and maintains a relation between binary categories that have to be rearticulated anew from time to time.

Daniel de Mendonça | Federal University of Pelotas, Brazil
Laclau (not as theorist but) as activist: the centrality of political antagonism

The aim of this article is to "extract" from Laclau's discourse theory his own political project. I claim that there is an ongoing development of radical democratic project since Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (HSS) based on the centrality of political antagonism. I am not considering that since that time Laclau has developped a linear political project. On the contrary, my hypothesis is that if in the HSS some positive achievements linked or attributed to political liberalism have been crucial for his earlier political project, I do not think that they remain central for the author. HSS clearly have to be seen as theoretical moment when Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have established the foundations of post-marxism. Because of this goal of opening up a new frontier of studies in the political and social areas Laclau and Mouffe had necessity to face the marxist tradition by exploring and defending crucial aspects of liberal tradition. They clearly admit this in this quotation of HSS: "the task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to depeen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy" (1985: 176). By this, I am not claiming that those liberal values are not still important to them (mainly in the case of Mouffe's works), but in Laclau's recent works I argue that they are not central anymore. Nowadays, his project can be viewed as a kind of "returning to the people", perspective which was quite central in his early studies such as Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory. On Populist Reason will be the main document of my analysis as well as his interviews and lectures in order to sustain my argument towards his political project inside his discourse theory.

Martin Nonhoff | University of Bremen, Germany
Eva Herschinger | University for the Armed Forces, German
Hegemony and its strategy: How hegemonies emerge and what strategy has to do with it

This paper starts with a puzzle: Shortly after its publication, Laclau's and Mouffe's „Hegemony and Socialist Strategy" (HSS) raised a vivid debate about the state of socialist theory and praxis. Since then HSS and its follow-up writings have also affected a sophisticated redesign of hegemonic theory. However, the case is different with "strategy", the third component of the HSS-title. Already in HSS, Laclau and Mouffe wrote little on the subject and, until today, discourse theorists have been very reluctant to engage with the concept. In our opinion, this is surprising, as strategy is a crucial element in understanding how hegemonic projects emerge and become successful or how they are destabilized and might wither away. Moreover, we deem it necessary to "bring strategy back in" since empirical research on hegemonies will usually look at the exact processes of setting up and expanding hegemonic projects or fighting counter-projects. Hence, it is highly beneficial to expand the remit of hegemonic theory by integrating a distinct (discourse theoretical) notion of strategy and by outlining a way to operationalize this notion for empirical

research. We will look at strategy in three steps: First, we will reconstruct the little that discourse theory has to say on that matter. Second, we want to elucidate what we think is the main reason for the reluctance to theorize strategy. Too obviously, strategy seems to imply an intentional subject – a conception of the subject that cannot easily be reconciled with one of discourse theory's main tenets: the discourse-embedded subject that is continuously failing to constitute itself fully. Finally, we will explore how a theoretically useful understanding of strategy can look like (thereby re-evaluating the subject-strategy dilemma) and base this exploration on empirical examples from hegemonic analyses on the national and the international level.

James Ormrod | University of Brighton, UK
The Ghoulishness of Protest Spectators

This paper uses Lacanian social and political theory to explore how we might understand the position of spectators within a protest event. Its starting point is Laclau's understanding of the discursive articulation of demand. It makes the argument that protest spectators (as opposed to 'audiences') are never articulated within the discourses that structure the protest event. They therefore remain ephemeral and radically subaltern figures in Spivak's sense, and unable to speak. The paper then takes inspiration from the collective behaviour theorists Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian's projective statement that 'the curiosity that attracts spectators to the scene of an exciting event need not be regarded as evidence of ghoulishness, although it is often interpreted this way'. The paper uses the mythical metaphor of the ghoul to explore further what might be disturbing about protest spectators. It explores the ghoulish spectator's existence across Lacan's three registers. Firstly, the ghoul is an uncanny figure who has access to a greater enjoyment than any of those articulated within the protest can ever possibly demand. Secondly, the ghoulish spectator brings to the surface the fact that they have no authentic desire of their own, but that their desire emerges only with the desire of others. Thirdly, the gaze of the ghoulish spectator, especially when it comes from behind a window, is the gaze of the Other for whom the protest must be staged. The paper concludes that a Lacanian vocabulary is useful in explaining why protest spectators might be experienced as ghoulish, but that greater attention must be paid to who it is that is doing the experiencing if we are to understand why their effect is not always the same.

Christos Pallas | University of Essex, UK
Reinstating Rhetoric in Laclau's Work: tropology, ontology and the domain of aberrant phenomena

Laclau's theoretical decision to conceive the constitution of the social in rhetorical/tropological terms has recently steered considerable controversy. It has been argued from various angles that Laclau 'reduces' rhetoric to tropology, thereby excluding the possibility of approaching concrete 'rhetorical situations' involving persuasion through arguments and/or struggles, and risking subsuming the 'ontic' to the 'ontological'. Reconstructing Laclau's position and the responses it has elicited, this paper makes a weak and a strong claim. The weak claim is that some of these

arguments although rightly calling for empirical research – historically informed discourse, ideology and rhetorical analysis, to which we could add Foucault's problematization – often misrepresent the way Laclau sees the relation between the 'ontic' and the 'ontological'. In addition, while Laclau is not providing a methodology for analyzing ontic instances of rhetoric, his reading of how populism has been represented in scholarly arguments is itself an example of such analysis.

The stronger claim is that there is a basic rationale that governs Laclau's strategy of 'ontologizing' rhetoric which has become more visible in his later work and yet remains unthematized in the current debate: the historical predominance of what Laclau calls the logic of difference has not only constructed populism as a dangerous form of politics by equating it to 'mere rhetoric', but it has also actively involved the denigration of rhetoric itself – an operation that has established rhetoric as a form antithetical to reason and has concealed its capacity as an intrinsically tropological practice of remaking the social. In that sense, Laclau's strategy can and should be interpreted as a plausible move in the struggle of re-drawing what he calls in his On Populist Reason the 'social frontier separating the normal from the pathological'.

Emilia Pallonen | University of Helsinki, Finland
Thinking populism with Laclau: four analytical concepts

How to study populism from a perspective that sees populism as crucial to democracy and part and partial of political process? This article draws upon the theory of populism of Ernesto Laclau (2005). Reflecting on Laclau's understanding of populism, seemingly extendable to infinity, the paper proposes four analytical concepts as tools for investigating political dynamics of such a notion of populism, regarding the contemporary development of populist political parties and movements – and the nature of politics and the political.

Mainstream, fringe and competing populism seek to cover the dynamics of dominant and emergent or marginal parties. They also seek to cover situations where two or more dominant political parties base their rhetoric on the common opposition to each other (Palonen 2008). A distinction is made between competing populism derived from Laclau's conceptualization and bipolar moral division pace George Lakoff (2002).

The fourth concept "abuses" or rearticulates Jim McGuigan's concept of cultural populism taken from the study of cultural studies to the study and praxis of politics and in the process gaining a new meaning in this study, echoing perhaps the relationship between Ernesto Laclau and Stuart Hall. The notion of 'cultural populism' articulated in this way, helps an analyst of populism grasp certain developments and political contexts.

The analytical concepts, addressing the distinction between politics and the political, are fleshed out reflecting on political developments in contemporary politics in Europe and the United States.

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David Payne | NEED TO CHECK

Political Unilateralism: On Equating Contingency with the *Strictly* Political.

In New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time, Ernesto Laclau writes that radical contingency 'subverts the necessary, not as the negative side of necessity, but the element of impurity which deforms and hinders its full constitution' (Laclau, 1990, p27). While indeed this post-metaphysical wager, positing the necessity of contingency, is to be placed beyond suspicion, the task of this paper will be to examine a further (though illicit) move—identifiable in much political philosophising and theorising of recent date and note—in which the political is converted into the real and primary condition of the appearing of contingency as such. The logical entailment involved in this deduction is as follows: (i) that everything is without any ultimate wherefore, Cause or sufficient reason; (ii) that this absence of ultimate grounds secures for the political its status as the conditio sine qua non for any thinking that would give temporary and partial fixity to what is without any necessary and sufficient fixture. This pairing of premises and conclusions can be read in claims raised by many. While Gianni Vattimo sees in the breakup of every foundation, the political destiny of all thought (Vattimo, 2004, p86), similarly Thomas Keenan claims that the 'removal of grounds, objective and subjective, gives to our decisions the quality of contingency that makes them strictly political,' (Keenan, 1997, p176). Oliver Marchart, as a further example, argues that 'all dimensions of society (including the fields of 'love', 'art', and 'science') are subjected to the constant play of grounding/ungrounding as it is conceptually captured by [what is identified by him as] the political difference,' (Marchart, 2007, p9)—an insight that the field of 'post-foundational political thought' is said to be perfectly placed to register, and is therefore installed as presiding 'over all other disciplines' (Ibid). What, though, of this unilateralisation of the political detected in these three examples, and others besides? If it is the political that is fudamentally attuned to contingency then what might be said of other spheres of practice, of thought and other modes of existence, that can be said to be in touch with the principle that things can be otherwise, though which seemingly find the specificity of their own responses eclipsed by being subsumed under the logic of the political? What ultimately secures for the political its designation as the proper name of contingency? And what, if anything, stops politics from being unseated as the privileged name for the being of contingence, since politics remains exposed to, and not ultimately sheltered from, the restless play of the contingency of Being?

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Paul Rekret | Richmond International University, London
Abstraction, Reality, and Political Ontology: Escaping the Limits of the Discursive

In an important yet brief methodological account Ernesto Laclau claims that the logics of discourse through which he has consistently sought to explain the structure and dynamics of the political are 'real abstractions.' That is, Laclau follows Marx's analysis of capital in arguing that reality itself generates the abstractions which constitute the political identities and practices that the discourse theorist then describes and explains. However, for Laclau this reality is ultimately defined in terms of ontological axioms pertaining to the contingency of discourse. This paper contrasts Laclau's understanding of 'real abstraction' with that of all-too-often neglected critical theorist Alfred Sohn-Rethel in order to demonstrate that a historical materialist approach to political theory allows us to avoid a number of fundamental problems with Laclau's discourse theory. The basic claim underlying Sohn-Rethel's magnum opus Intellectual and Manual Labour, is that the abstractions upon which Western conceptual thought is grounded result from material social activity – the act of commodity exchange in particular – and that the theorist can infer the material social relations which would have formed the conditions for the emergence of particular concepts and forms of thinking. This approach provides us with the terms of a historical materialist approach to the political that escapes Laclau's usual claim that Marxism is pervaded by determinism and essentialism while also providing us with a framework to understand the conditions of particular political orders without entering the theoretical cul-de-sac of positing generalised ontological axioms to 'ground' our accounts of politics.

Paul Reynolds | Edge Hill University, UK
Laclau and democratic agency: Some critical reflections

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's contribution of a post-Marxist (or in some senses anti-Marxist) radical democracy project has been one of the key articulations shaping the renewed interest in radical democratic agency since the 1980's. Yet it is by no means straightforward as to who the democratic agent is to Laclau. Whilst some of the central strands of their work are shared, it is clear from a reading of their individual works that Mouffe's democratic agent is an extension of the liberal democrat, with their atomised individualism diminished and civic (some might say bourgeois) character accentuated with contemporary identity politics. For Laclau, the democratic agent appears altogether more difficult to decipher. Whilst *Emancipations* probably

addresses the question most closely, it is nevertheless limited - sketched as a contingent subject borne of the tensions between universality and particularism, and constituted and self-constituting in their identity. The elusiveness and malleability of who the subject is - as an agent who populates and colonises systems, processes and structures - is in part a product of the necessary open-endedness of Laclau's democratic schema and the inherent heterogeneity necessary for a tempering of the attribution of 'fixidities' and determinant points within both the character of the agent and the structures and processes in which they dialectically takes form and formulates. This paper will explore the allusions and insights on the democratic agent that arise from Laclau's work since Hegemony and Socialist Strategy and seek to provide a critical mapping of Laclau's democratic agent and the scope and limits to its articulation and composition.

Luis G. Rojas Castro | University of Essex, UK
The logic of populism: a community with *ressentiment*?

In this paper I wonder for which are the elements in Laclau's logic of populism that tend to glue a community through ressentiment. Likewise, I explore possibilities to produce a politics without resentment. For theoreticians as Zizek (1990, 2006) and William E. Connolly (1991), Laclau's conception of the political based on antagonism and the populist logic risks to glue communities through ressentiment. Particularly, this tends to be a political logic which blames the other for the subject's inherent dislocation and securitize the identity against the difference. For some Laclau's readers this is not problematic. For instance, Oliver Marchart (2004) considers that the form of the political and the revolution is analogous to the theatrical form of melodrama (blaming the other) which is opposed to the form of tragedy (wondering for the own precarious nature). But if this is the case, there is not a real difference among the practices of a xenophobic community which blames immigrants and tried to eliminate them from a communist community which try to eliminate fascist, capitalists, soft left wings partisans and so forth. Laclau has acknowledged that the populist logic can glue communities with any sort of ideological background, also has stated that the subject's acceptance of contingency is not necessary to make operable his theory. This makes more robust his theoretical proposition but leaves more problems to solve for the real politick. So, in contemporary politics is urgent to think about alternatives that help to promote more pluralist and radical democratic communities.

On the other hand, some others readers of Laclau (Stavrakakis (2007), Gkynos (2000, 2003) among others) consider that the subject's acknowledgement of contingency is central for building a radical democratic ethos and to tame antagonism. But if the subject acknowledges the contingency of its own identity, the motivation for melodrama fades, antagonism becomes weaker and the effectiveness of the populist logic may be compromised. How does this sort of dilemma can be addressed?

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Kohei Saito | Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany
What is Left for Marxists after Laclau's Critique of Marxsim? From "Chain of Equivalence" to "Association"

The emergence of "new social movements" in the 60s and 70s undermined the privileged position of the worker's movement, as a result of which the strategic importance of the hegemonic struggle for the left politics has significantly increased as an attempt to combine various subgroups through "chain of equivalence." Laclau demands that Marxists accept this reality, as their loss of the privileged position is based on the eternal absence of the transcendental signifier, which he claims to be the ontological foundation of the radical democratic struggle. However, even according to Laclau's view, this does not deny the necessity to regulate the reified force of capital. It is in fact hardly justifiable to overlook the tie between the realization of "decommodification" institutionalized in western welfare states and the further development of civil society in the 60s, which then served as the material basis for the emergence of new social movements. This connection is exactly what Marx's theory of "association" (Assoziation) had anticipated. It provides, therefore, a theoretical framework for understanding a materialist foundation of new social movements. Marxists must admit that the economics is not the "last instance" that determines the political, but it does not follow, by any means, that all social movements possess equal status in terms of the strategic importance within hegemonic struggle. In this sense, too much emphasis placed on the fluidity of identities is misleading, for there are factors that destabilize the radical democracy and thus must be regulated to begin with. Marx shows why various attempts of "association" to overcome the logic of reification plays a more significant role than a mere "chain of equivalence" for the sake of establishing radical democracy.

Mathjis van de Sande | University of Leuven, Belgium
Prefigurative politics and synecdochal representation

any of the protest movements of the past years (the "Arab Spring", the Indignados, Occupy etc.) were characterised by a radical conception of political practice, which could best be described as

"prefigurative". Originally derived from anarchist theory, "prefiguration" refers to a political practice in which means and ends are "mirrored"- in which, in other words, the means of political struggle and the objectives of radical change are strived to converge as much as possible in the experimental political practice itself. Prefiguration is more than a form of protest. Rather than a symbolic expression of discontent, or a mere distancing from specific structures, institutions or policies, prefigurative movements directly embody the change they strive to realise. Through direct democratic decision making processes, spokes councils and general assemblies, the occupation camps on Tahrir Square or Zuccotti Park or St Paul's literally pre-figured an alternative political order, by experimentally bringing this order into existence.

At the same time, these recent "prefigurative movements" also made a strong representative claim ("we are the 99%"). The occupation camp may be more than a symbolic gesture, but it equally strives to embody something "bigger" than itself. The aim of this contribution is to conceptualise how these prefigurative movements give rise to a new understanding of (political) representation. By use of the rhetorical/semiotic form of "synecdoche", this concept of "prefiguration" will be critically related to Laclau's theory on hegemony and representation. In what sense could the prefigurative movement be understood to constitute a synecdochal relation? How can the partial occupation camp embody a whole (a "people", a "99%") that exceeds it? Could the construction of hegemony be understood as a prefigurative process? In what ways could this (predominantly anarchist) conception of "prefiguration" or correspond with, or complement, Laclau's theory of hegemony?

Anayra Santory | University of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico
The Moral Underpinnings of Demands: The Creation of 'Unexplored Viabilities'

One of the most fruitful and powerful theses in E. Laclau's work is the redrawing of relations between individuals, political practices and demands. While liberalism posits that individuals are the basic unity of moral and political analysis, Laclau establishes the primacy of demands. The articulation of demands by one of two kinds of political practices –differential or equivalent– will result in different political agents, characterized by Laclau as political precipitations of practices (2009, 52). The epistemological primacy of demands makes it necessary to delve into the process of their constitution. Laclau notes that the notion of demand has a double nuance: it is a petition, but also a reinvindication. It points, on the one hand, in the direction of those who are presented with it and, on the other, towards the historical position of relative deprivation which characterizes those who demand it. M. Retamozo's (2009) interpretation of Laclau's notion of demands proposes at least two other levels to be studied: one, the level of desires, which are mediated by discourses and social imaginaries, and two, the underlying but concomitant plead for recognition placed by those who make a demand.

These two levels suggested by Retamozos are inevitably engaged by the prevailing moral discourses and by any other discourse that frames the moral understanding of a situation. Both questions–which desires are allowed to fuel demands and what is the proper level of recognition to

be expected by those who place them–are clearly recognized as recurring moral issues. This paper explores the following hypotheses: (1) moral discourses are one of the first discursive frames to aide the constitution of a demand and (2) the more rigid moral public discourses are, the more likely demands are to become popular, rather than democratic, in Laclau's senses of the terms.

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Daniel Saur | University of Cordoba, Argentina
The Laclausian disjunction: between the semiologic horizon and the political alley

This communication is intended to illustrate a disjunction present in Ernesto Laclau's work, established between the "discursive horizon" and the "political theory". Our central argument asserts that the reflections of the Argentine thinker can be summed up in a double movement. In the first place, the enormous opening that implies the non essential thought of the social reality, and to place discourse in the center of the intellectual scene for its understanding; and, secondly, the closure that involves raising a dominant logic (hegemonic) that organizes the political function.

What we will try to show is the enormous freedom that offers the notion of discourse created by Laclau, to the philosophical and conceptual levels, thanks to its theoretical and ontological foundations. This concept offers immeasurables epistemological bases, accordant to the freedom and drifts typical of a process of "social semiosis", with enormous complexity, that have no fundamental borders, and therefore integrate a process that cannot be apprehended. In turn, we maintain that this conceptual and ontological potential has been oriented, so privileged, toward a political analysis that prioritizes a single logic, the hegemonic one, limiting their possibility.

In summary, this presentation proposed the recovery of the symbolic dimension of social processes raised in the thought of Laclau, without neglecting the dimension of power involves. This proposal implicate opening the inquiry to the multiple logical that make up the signification of the social reality, avoiding the hegemony of a logic which focuses on regional phenomena. In other words, we intend to distinguish the "singular theory" to the ends of recovering the "epistemological horizon", enabling all its opening, productivity and potential.

Benjamin C. Seyd | University of Jena, Germany
An Absence that Makes itself Felt: On the Place of Affect in Discourse Theory
DO THIS ON CAMPUS

Myriam Southwell | NEED TO CHECK

Neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism in argentinean educational policies (1998-2008)

Latin America is currently experiencing an ongoing diversity of political processes in a context o crisis of the neoliberalism hegemony. During the 1990 decade structural adjustment and subsequent policies of economic stabilisation has sought to liberalise trade, to end any protectionist policies, and therefore to facilitate the rule of the market in economy. Based in this conception Menem's government reached a new political and educational hegemony and developed a reform that modified the whole educational structure, which has been created a century ago. Menemist pedagogy articulated its discourse around the notion of technocratic modernisation and the myth of the market regulation. Discourse of technocratic modernisation put forward the notions of equity and efficiency. The notion of public education has changed and Neoliberal proposals drive to the logic of the market, and market exchanges should regulate educational investment. Considering some fundamental topics of education policies, this paper proposes also analyse new articulations of educational discourse from 2003 onwards, where National State took new ways of regulations and developed a particular renewal of meanings about egalitarianism and widespread social policies.

My concern is therefore on the conditions of enunciation of the educational discourses. The crucial point is the educational practice's role in the constitution of social subjects. Education like social practices is included in a social space. Hence is a discursive practice. Therein the notion of discourse such as a configuration of meanings and space of constitution of subjects is fruitful.1 According to this conceptualisation, discourse analysis seems the most pertinent way to analyse how pedagogical meanings, are historically built.

Daniel Steuer | University of Brighton, UK

The Antinomy of Critical Social and Political Theories (CSPTs) and the Question of Europe

Social and political theories, in so far as they consider themselves to be 'critical' or 'progressive', must display an interest in changing social and political conditions towards greater 'freedom', however defined. For this good intention they pay the price of being necessarily antinomical. Freedom, in the absence of a body politic that would be identical with any and all of its members, depends on the distinction between a public and a private exercise of an individual's multifarious faculties, and the result of such exercise not only can at any point, but must eventually question, contradict, threaten any public, legal, as well as theoretical framework, all of which cannot do without abstraction, and hence the eradication of difference.

Simone Weil in her 'Note sur la suppression générale des partis politiques', and in her meta-critique of Marxism (or, more precisely, of Marx's blind faith in progress, and its transformations in Marxism-Leninism), arguably expressed the antinomy with the utmost clarity for the field of practical politics. Any political unit, to the extent that it is particularist, must become a machine for generating power and using it for its own survival. And this argument can easily be given an application to the practice of theory: the corruption of reflection into power begins in the

theorising individual.

Of course, numerous critical theorists have been aware of this antinomy and have tried various ways out. One would be Adorno's negative dialectics, another the 'post-foundational' route which shares the principle of negativity, but turns it into a positive. Politics (in the plural) and the 'political' (singular) never match up, and the gap, or absence, thus created is then variously named, interpreted, and assigned various functions. But fundamentally it is charged with the duty to protect against totalitarian tendencies.

Weil's suggested way out differs from both these positions. She first analyses the necessary condition of freedom, and finds it to be a form of social transparency in which each member of the polis can – potentially – take the place of any other. In other words, there are no 'shamans', no 'priests', no 'Kings', no 'generals', no 'doctors', no theoreticians with special secret knowledge. This ideal condition of freedom might be platonically inspired, but the use Weil makes of it is Wittgensteinian in nature: it is not an ideal, transcendent object of whatever nature, but an object of comparison, a measuring rod. We are to hold it up against reality in order to judge in which direction we should move forward (i.e. towards it). The Wittgenstein in question is neither the communitarian one, nor that of Henry Staten or Laclau. The first is more normative, the latter less normative, than the theoretical approach I would like to sketch by taking some of Weil, some of Wittgenstein, and complementing it with a further petitio: in order to avoid the antinomical nature of CSPTs, theoretical reflection must always already be involved and applied. The empirical case I shall be using is the question: "What should become of Europe and the European Union?" My answer will be: "a post-national European state". The antinomy then takes the following form:

"How can a theoretical analysis of Europe's present situation have normative purchase - i.e. how can it allow me to justify my answer – without borrowing that purchase from some universalist principle, or begging the question in some other way?"

From the empirical side, I shall be looking at two pro-European arguments. The one was made by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt, as well as, in a different form, Robert Menasse, and it is centrally based on a rejection of 'national identities'. The other has been made by Jürgen Habermas, and it is based on, or rather leads inevitably to, the idea of a 'double identity' of Europeans as national citizens and as European citizens. Both positions have difficulties as well as advantages. I shall finally try to unite their advantages by using Weil and Wittgenstein in order theoretically to construct a model of political participation in which legitimacy is locally and regionally rooted, and in which political cohesion is established through concrete inter-regional cooperation, while the function of the central apparatus (European Commission, Council, Parliament) is limited to the role of a mediator. This model of horizontal and analogical political organisation meets with the demand for a post-national Europe, allowing us to see that the latter is likely to lead to a greater increase in freedom than any other political solution for Europe at present.

Meghan Sutherland | University of Toronto, Canada
People Machines: A Proposal for Thinking the Political 2013

In the years since Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe first presented their discursive conception of political ontology in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau's work has gradually elaborated the linguistic orders and forms that underpin it. It is thus not surprising that scholars generally take for granted the linguistic specificity of his approach to the political—and that some interpret his emphasis on rhetoric as an indication of logocentrism, formalism or some other structural limitation or rigidity. Nevertheless, this paper takes issue with both of these critical reflexes, arguing that Laclau's detailed formulation of the role that figurative language plays in the ontological constitution of social formations represents not only the most unique and underexplored aspect of his work, but also the one that opens up the most far-reaching implications and possibilities.

The paper argues that the graphic dimension of figurative language that comes forward in Laclau's recent work instead suggests a generative point of contact between linguistic and visual modes of discursive production, opening the way to a more flexible understanding of the graphic process whereby images, words, and technological platforms overdetermine and undercut one another on the multi-medial ontological terrain of discourse. Offering a close formal analysis of the how textual, visual, and technical registers of mass-media representation resonate with the stylistic contours of Laclau's tropic account of populist rhetoric, the paper teases out a material process whereby images, bodies, texts, and speech intervene in the ontological constitution and de-constitution of the social. At the same time, it demonstrates the significant implications that the automatic qualities of this hegemonic process hold for both our reading of Laclau's work and our understanding of the political today—especially where it concerns the aesthetic nature of the relationship between the concepts of liberalism and neoliberalism that dominate debates about post-Marxist political thought.

Tomasz Szkudlarek | University of Gda sk, Poland
Empty Signifiers, Normativity and Education

The focus of my paper is twofold. First, I analyse educational practices in terms of the production of empty signifiers applicable in the construction of collective identities. Education is here considered as rhetorical practice of constructing multiple communities through mobilisation of particular demands and diverse phantasms of totality. Second, such a perspective brings to the fore the question of normativity. Institutionalised education is performed in artificial, partially isolated millieus where idealistic aims may precede the costruction of social environments, including their normative aspects. In other words, the relative isolation of schools may make it possible to invent "unthinkable" identites, both more democratic and more totalitarian than those produced outside their walls. The ideas of "social cohesion" and "national oneness", for example, are both catachretic empty signifiers and for some people they may sound "the same", but their normative consequnces may be dramatically different, and as such they may be "invented" and

implemented in schools, creating a "readiness" for their possible hegemony in politics.

This issue has been discussed in an exchange between, i.a., Ernesto Laclau and Simon Critchley under the label of a "normative deficit" of theory of hegemony. In my view, an interesting way of dealing with this problem can be derived from the work of Chantall Mouffe, where one can find an instance of normativity that is located somehow "between" Laclau's "the normative" (grounded in the ontic) and "the ethical" (as an aspect of the ontological). This is normativity that speaks to possible forms of the social and as such it can be applied in "judging the emptiness" of diverse signifiers designed in pedagogical and political practices of identity formation.

Kei Yamamoto | Nagoya University, Japan
Strategy and the Political: Facing the Abyss of Contingency

A controversial problem of Ernesto Laclau's thinking is whether his theory of hegemony contains a normative dimension. Although Laclau has attempted to provide a solution, it has been said that hegemony is effective only as a descriptive theory, does not promise a political project, as "radical democracy" does. This dilemma is obviously a necessary result of "contingency", which was introduced to overcome "essentialism" and to release the concept of hegemony from its fetters. In other words, although acknowledging the contingent character of political space opens up the possibility of radical democracy, we cannot deduce any democratic visions from the logic of contingency.

Generally, there have been two ways of negotiating this abyss: firstly, through "decisionism", which jumps across the uncertainty; secondly, through a Platonic approach that reintroduces necessity and thereby escapes the unpredictability of contingency. However, both responses amount to averting one's eyes from the chasm and closing the space that contingency opened.

I shall suggest the concept of "strategy" as a third way to face the radical contingency. Though Laclau once remarked that "strategy is at the heart of any action which can be called political", the potential of "strategic thinking" has not been adequately explored. Drawing on Clausewitz, Moltke, Gramsci and others, I will present strategy not as a single decision, but rather a succession of decisions in tune with an actual tactical situation. Strategic thinking may provide an important bridge for crossing the gloomy abyss of contingency, creating an opportunity for a normative mode such as democracy.

Efstathia Veremi | Independent Scholar
The Lacanian Real in Laclau; is rupture the limit?

Lacanian psychoanalysis has had an important influence on Ernesto Laclau's work. Apart from the direct loan of terminology regarding terms such as identification or subject of lack, lacanian ideas can be traced to the basis of lots laclauian concepts such as the empty signifier or the impossibility of society, corresponding to the master signifier and the lack in the Other, so to speak.

However, if we tried to pin down a single fundamental idea that brings the two thinkers together, this would be their shared suggestion against utopianism, each one regarding their own field; Lacan regarding the analysis of psychical experience and Laclau that of the socio-political one.

Leaving aside the strictly political reasons that are entailed, this is basically why both of them are widely considered as radical, sharing a discourse which deals with aspects that classic analytical approaches have been constantly neglecting.

My talk will focus on the place of the lacanian real in Laclau's work. As already familiar to Lacan's readers, the real appears as one of the three registers along with the symbolic and the imaginary around which the psychoanalytic discourse is articulated. The real is a vaguely described space that cannot be mastered by language. Laclau claims that in political discourse it roughly appears as the limit of symbolization i.e. of what we can actually conceive and refer to.

What kinds of lacks in political theory has the concept of the real come to fill? What are the different interpretations that the term allows? How does the traumatic nature of the real emerge in social reality? How does Laclau's appropriation of the term relate to further steps taken in consequent theoretical developments?

Finally, from a critical standpoint, I will emphasize on the significance of this part of Laclau's work for political theory in general, as it moves beyond a superficial psychopathology of society and has led to broader changes in social theorists' perceptions.

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Martin Walter | University of Nottingham, UK
The Tea Party Movement and the Reconstruction of Conservative Populism in the United States

This paper interprets the emergence of the Tea Party phenomenon in the United States in 2009 with the help of Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's concept of hegemonic blocs and Laclau's theory of populism. The argument of this paper proceeds in two steps. It starts out with a number of observations on the historical genesis of movement conservatism in the U.S. from the 1950s to the formation of the Tea Party's conservative 'resistance'. Since the 1950s the conservatism of the New Right developed into a hegemonic bloc with an elaborate institutional and rhetoric infrastructure. Over time, the efforts of involved business elites, Republican politicians, and grassroots activists reaped considerable successes. They provided the discursive resources and manpower to end the political leadership and progressive agenda of the New Deal coalition and instituted a new symbolic order that redefined the American 'people' as a conservative, anti-status quo force in opposition to American liberalism and the politics of equality.

Tea Party discourse operates at the intersection of the aforementioned conservative infrastructure and political practices of the Republican Party. With the use of primary sources, the second part

of this paper addresses continuities and novelties of the Tea Party movement. While Tea Partiers entertain numerous links with Republican politicians and conservative organizations, the movement also represents an unprecedented development in the history of U.S. conservatism. Different from many earlier conservative movements (i.e. directed against taxes, the Equal Rights Amendment or abortion) the Tea Party movement developed an all-encompassing agenda that seeks to redefine established social frontiers. It constructs the 'people' as defenders of democracy and representation who not only oppose the classical tenants of liberalism but political elites in general. They thus challenge longstanding Republican claims to constitute the locus of conservative interpretations of liberty and conservative identity.

Clare Woodford | Queen Mary, University of London, UK
Populism or Politics? Rancière and Laclau on the 'logic' of disruption

In a footnote on p.244 of 'On Populist Reason' Laclau acknowledges that his work has grown closer to that of Jacques Rancière over the years, yet he still seeks to emphasise two points of divergence. Taking this footnote as a springboard, this paper seeks to explore the intersections of Laclau and Rancière's writings suggesting that although the divergence noted by Laclau may be overcome, the ontological differences are actually far more stark, with Rancière offering more scope for social disruption and change through his disavowal of all ontological positioning. It will be argued that the Rancièrian schema thereby widens the scope for political action in a way that is denied by Laclau's populism.

Onur Yildiz | University of Essex, UK
Populism and Democracy: Political Investigation of Democratic Politics

This paper aims at discussing the theoretical opportunities provided by Ernesto Laclau`s theorization of populism for investigating democratic politics. It intends to illustrate that the political conceptualization of populism in On Populist Reason lays the ground for a political engagement with democracy and democratic politics. It is going to be argued that this political perspective has strong normative connotations if thought with the works of thinkers such as James Tully, Aletta Norval, David Owen and Alan Keenan.

Laclau`s conceptualization of populism, with its stress on the formation of antagonistic frontiers between the people and the power and, the articulation of demands in an equivalential chain for making the emergence of the `people` possible, puts forward the political dimension of populism. By this political dimension, the differences between a populist totalization and an institutionalist totalization become clear. `Democratic demands` being not fulfilled in their isolation makes visible the gap that has emerged in the harmonious continuity of the social. It is this very gap in the social which on the one hand makes possible the hegemonic intervention for constructing a popular identity out of a plurality of democratic demand, on the other hand it allows us to politically engage with `democratic politics`.

In this paper it is intended to discuss the points in which the Laclau`s conceptualization of populism might contribute to our understanding of democracy and democratic politics. The parallels between the democratic vision put forward in Laclau`s political account and the normative postulates in the works of other thinkers mentioned above will be highlighted.

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