

The boundaries of politics.

1

Over the last two decades liberalism has been the most prominent political orientation within Western societies. After the fall of the Berlin Wall some went as far as proclaiming that the *end of history* had arrived (Fukuyama, 1992). This was not meant to deny future historical developments their course, but to indicate that thinking about the political had come to its final culmination in liberal-democracy. Yet at the same time, and perhaps due to its hegemonic status, liberalism has met with vigorous opposition within academic arenas as well as within civil society. Some of its philosophical critics have dressed themselves against liberalism and take their own thought as irreconcilable with central liberal tenets; others have sought after a more friendly and mutually engaging approach. In this paper I will outline a critic of the latter strand: Chantal Mouffe. Her analysis of the paradox between a liberal logic and a democratic logic amounts to an interesting alternative position in thinking on liberal-democracy. Yet, I believe that her analysis and solutions are not sufficient to the normative goal she has set herself. In this respect, I will argue that her theory can profit from the insights into political theory of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In this paper I will elaborate on the shortcomings of Mouffe's theory of agonistic politics and demonstrate in which sense Deleuze's ideas can contribute to overcoming them. The question guiding this research asks whether Deleuzian engages positively with Mouffe's normative outlook on agonistic politics. And, if so, how?

The paper is outlined as follows; in sections two and three I will elaborate on their respective political ontologies, whereas in four and five I will focus on their specific ways of re-thinking liberal-democracy. In section six I will formulate an answer to the guiding questions of this paper by way of a conclusion. In the remaining part of this introductory section I will explain why I have chosen to compare Chantal Mouffe and Gilles Deleuze.

Both Deleuzian and Mouffian political philosophy are to be considered as critical and oriented towards transformation/emancipation. Both thinkers consider political philosophy as a conceptual practice, which is informed by the state of actual democracies but is not limited to this state of affairs. On the contrary, by analyzing the concepts constitutive of the empirical/actual reality both Deleuze and Mouffe engage in theorizing the genesis of the political. Thus, by the dismantling and

the subsequent reconfiguring of conceptual elements of liberalism and democracy they engage in a critical and creative way with these conceptual agglomerations. Moreover, both philosophers think of conceptual reconfiguration as informing social change. As such, besides describing the genesis of the political, they also engage with the actual politics within a constructed social setting. Inspired by problems experienced within actual democracies, political philosophy is considered to feed back into the social. As such, political philosophy is involved in both conceptual and social emancipation.

Thus, Mouffe and Deleuze share strong sense of normativity and consider emancipation, transformation and empowerment as the most important task of political philosophy. This paper does not address the justification of this normative conception. On the contrary, it accepts this normative dimension and investigates if and how both philosophies live up to this normative task.

In this second section I will focus on the manner in which Gilles Deleuze has taken up the task of political emancipation. I believe the best way to gain insight into his normative stance is by describing the political ontology he advocates, for from it arises an ethos which aims at the constant destabilization of the concentrated contractions of the social.

Deleuze's onto-political project is based on the strict immanence of desire. In *Anti-Oedipus* he, in intimate collaboration with Félix Guattari, develops an integrative account of Marxist philosophy, concerning the production of the social, and Freud's insights into the functioning of psycho-physical desiring. The outcome of this project consists in the reciprocal transformation of both conceptual domains. On the one hand the Freudian legacy is infused with political-economy. This leads to the destruction of Oedipal triangulation by conceiving desire in relation to social production and not in relation to the familial fantasy through which desire is represented according to Freud. On the other hand, Marxist thought becomes infused with desire and escapes its 'a-historical historical determinism' by recasting history and social production in relation, not to the dialectics between capital and labor, but to psycho-physical energies of groups and individuals. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1984) Deleuze and Guattari remark: '*The truth of the matter is that social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation [...] in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.*' (Deleuze&Guattari, 1984; 29, italics in the original). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the immediate interaction between desire and the regime of the Socius is what accounts for reality. Both elements of the real should not be thought of as pre-existing separate entities; on the contrary, both are intimately intertwined and come into existence only by reciprocal determination.

In order to account for the stratification of the social, Deleuze relies on this renewed concept of desire. Yet, it is not without genealogical precedent and is deeply inspired by Nietzsche's concept of the Will to Power. As Paul Patton remarks on the Will to Power: 'It is not energy expended in order to reach a particular goal or end-state, but simply the expenditure of energy itself. [...] not one drive among others but the immanent principle in terms of which all human drives are to be understood.' (Patton, 2000, p. 50, 51). As such, and

in opposition to the Darwinian conception of survival in which the interest of the (extensive) body-as-a-whole/the organism is at stake, Nietzsche's Will to Power is concerned with the manner in which (intensive) energies affect one another relationally. Moreover, the Will to Power is a pre-individual field of forces which, through their encounters, results in the empirical reality we perceive. Thus, the Nietzschean concept of Will to Power/force is a way of describing the creative genesis of the empirical. Deleuze takes on this idea of creative genesis, names it the virtual and makes intensity the cornerstone of his philosophy. In line with Nietzsche's conception of force, intensive relations describe the way in which the virtual (yet,real) is both determining and determined by the actual state of affairs. Or, a change in the relation between virtual and actual reality automatically entails a transformation of the status of these two distinct, yet inseparable ontological modalities. The process of relational transformation/becoming is crucial in understanding both Deleuze's ontological and political philosophy.

When it comes to political relations, Deleuze finds inspiration in the idea of intensive and relational politics and develops the concept of 'micro-politics'. In the ninth chapter of *Mille plateaux* (1987), entitled 'Micropolitique et segmentarité', Deleuze and Guattari describe the stratification of any given social machine by emphasizing the interconnectedness of its different strata. The political field is always divided in a 'molar' configurations of desire (assemblages that constitute the norm) and molecular configurations of desire (subterranean forms of desire that are not the norm). (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; 260). Yet, it would be a critical mistake to reify the distinction between molar and molecular and render a analysis of politics as a process into a re-presentative description in which the difference between political identities is understood in terms of quantity. Rather, the relation between macro-and micropolitics is constituted by the intensive interaction between molar and molecular modalities: 'From a micropolitical point of view, a society defines itself by its lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something which flows or flees, which escapes from binary organizations [...] Yet, the reverse is also true; molecular flights and movements would be nothing if they would not return to pass through molar organizations, and if they would not remodel molar segments and binary distributions of sex, class, party.'¹ (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; p. 263/4).

¹ Transl. from the French text : 'Du point de vue de la micro-politique, une société se définit par ses lignes de fuite, qui sont moléculaires. Toujours quelque chose coule ou fuit, qui échappe aux organisations binaires [...] Pourtant, l'inverse est

The above described analysis of political relations can also be stated in a somewhat different terminology which is used alongside the pairing of molar/molecular configurations of desire. Any social machine can also be considered as a *territorial assemblage*, yet territorial assemblages can roughly be understood in two ways. Paul Patton remarks: 'On the first axis, assemblages are composed of discursive and non-discursive components: they are both assemblages of bodies and matter and assemblages of enunciation and utterance.' (Patton, 2000; 44). Following this first line of understanding, the analysis of assemblages consists of localizing its contents and its expressions and finding out how these simultaneously differ from and relate to one another. Or, as Deleuze and Guattari themselves note: 'In every case one has to find both the one and the other: what is being done and what is being said? And between the two, between content and expression, a new relation establishes itself [...]: the enunciations or expressions express *incorporeal transformations* that 'attribute themselves' as such to the bodies or the contents'² (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; 629). As such, it is through the process of articulation between content and expression in an assemblage that desire is given its actual shape. From this point of view an assemblage is considered to be existing on the *plane of organization and development* on which form and substance together make up the territory of the assemblage (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; 632).

Yet, an assemblage is not to be understood solely as the one-directional/territorial production of desire, but also as a site of constitutive transformation/becoming. Here we find the second way of understanding assemblages; one which focuses on movement and virtuality. Again Patton: 'On the second axis, assemblages are defined by the nature of the movements governing their operation. On the one hand, there is the constitution of territories and field of interiority; on the other hand there are points of deterritorialization, lines of flight along which the assemblage breaks down or becomes transformed into something else.' (Patton, 2000; 44). From the point of view of movement, assemblages are considered to be partaking in the virtual realm of individuated, yet undifferentiated forces; or, assemblages exist on the *plane of consistency*. Deleuze and

aussi vrai : les fuites et les mouvements moléculaires ne seraient rien s'ils ne repassaient par les organisations molaires, et ne remaniaient leurs segments, leurs distributions binaires de sexes, de classes, de partis.'

² Transl. from the French text : 'Dans chaque cas il faut trouver l'un et l'autre : qu'est-ce qu'on fait et qu'est-ce qu'on dit ? Et entre les deux, entre le contenu et l'expression, un nouveau rapport s'établit [...] les énoncés ou les expressions expriment de transformations incorporelles qui 's'attribuent' comme tels aux corps ou aux contenus.'

Guattari remark: 'The plane of consistency ignores substance and form [...] The plane consists abstractly, but really, in the relations of speed and slowness between its non-formed elements, and in the compositions of corresponding intensive affects.'³ (Deleuze&Guattari,1987; 632). The plane of consistency is inhabited by *abstract machines*, regulators of speed and affectivity. It is through the relation that actual forms and substances have to abstract machines on the virtual plane of consistency that the constitutive movement of deterritorialization becomes possible. Patton remarks: 'Abstract machines are virtual multiplicities which do not exist independently of the assemblages in which they are actualized or expressed; they are neither corporeal nor semiotic entities but 'diagrammatic'. [...] As the diagram of a given assemblage, the abstract machine is vital to the operation of that assemblage.' (Patton, 2000; 44,45). Hence it are the abstract machines that perform the causal relation between the virtual and actual modalities of an assemblage. As such, abstract machines are the source of becoming and creativity.

The interaction between territory and deterritorialization, by means of virtual lines of flight, is not only a way to describe reality and its genesis, but also contains a normative dimension. By attributing priority to processes of becoming/transformation Deleuzian political philosophy is concerned with undermining territories. The normative dimension (or, ethics of deterritorialization (Patton, 2007; 4) is concerned with introducing 'new' elements into the accepted forms of power that produce both desire and the social. Yet deterritorialization is not an unambiguous process, but comes in several flavors.

First, there is *relative* deterritorialization; a process whereby the stability of a given assemblage is undermined. In *Mille plateaux* Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between a negative and a positive form of relative deterritorialization; or, the difference between conjugation and connection of lines of flight (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; 269). Negative deterritorialization occurs when a certain line of flight does not pair with other deterritorialized elements and is folded back into its former, though slightly changed territory through reterritorialization. The positive process occurs when a line of flight manages to hook up with other lines of flight and eventually reterritorializes in a new assemblage. Patton notes: 'In this sense [...]

³ Transl. from the French text : 'Le plan de consistence ignore la substance et la forme [...] Le plan consiste abstraitement, mais réellement, dans les rapports de vitesse et de lenteur entre éléments non-formés, et dans les compositions d'affects intensifs correspondants.'

the effective transformation of a given field of reality requires the *connection* of deterritorialized elements in mutually supportive and productive ways rather than the *conjugation* within a new system of capture.’ (Patton, 2007; 4). By favoring connection of deterritorialized elements over conjugation, Deleuzian political thought prioritizes the multiplication of connections and as such is preoccupied with the creative transformation of the social and emancipation of qualitative minorities.

Yet, processes of *relative* deterritorialization are surface effects and are necessarily accompanied by *absolute* deterritorialization; just as actual reality exists only by virtue of its virtual counterpart. ‘Absolute deterritorialization is the underlying condition of all forms of relative deterritorialization. It is the immanent source of transformation or the ‘reserve’ of freedom of movement in reality that is activated whenever relative deterritorialization occurs.’ (Patton, 2007; 5). Whereas relative deterritorialization occurs in history and entails historical changes, absolute deterritorialization concerns the a-historical becoming of concepts through pure events of thought (Deleuze&Guattari, 1994; 101). This is where philosophy’s critical vocation lies: the a-historicity of processes of becoming and its unavoidable reterritorialization on the concept is the reason why political philosophy is ‘inherently critical of the present in which it takes place’ (Patton 2007) and why philosophy calls for ‘a people and an earth to come’ (Deleuze&Guattari 1994; 99). One of the processes of absolute deterritorialization is the process of becoming-democratic, which I will address below.

In this section I will elaborate on the manner in which Chantal Mouffe has taken up the task of political emancipation. I will do so by focusing on *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (1985), a book that resulted from collaboration with Ernesto Laclau. It is within this work that they develop the political ontology on which Mouffe's later solowork is also founded. As such, I believe the concepts of 'hegemony' and 'radical democracy' to be continuous with the project in which she re-thinks the relation between liberalism and democracy.

Hegemony and socialist strategy can be considered as one of the pivotal works of neo-Marxist philosophy. Yet, as is also noted by Richard Howson (Howson, 2007; 235), the theory of hegemony developed by Mouffe and Laclau has implications that exceed the traditional field of Marxist thought. In the first two chapters the authors occupy themselves with criticizing the various forms in which socio-economic determinism is considered to be the starting point of thinking about the political. From Rosa Luxemburg to Sorel, they discern and refute the tendency to consider the field of the political as directed solely by the dialectics between labor and capital. In the introduction they state: 'Many social antagonisms, many issues which are crucial to the understanding of contemporary societies, belong to fields of discursivity (and thus practices) that are *external* to Marxism – given, especially, that their very presence is what puts Marxism as a closed theoretical system into question, and leads to the postulation of new starting points for social analysis' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; ix). The foremost offence of Marxism vis-à-vis society concerns the installation of the working class/proletariat as the privileged focal point of revolution. This theoretical reification of social relations not only excludes non-proletarian antagonisms from the political, but also erases all the differences within the so-called proletariat exactly by naming it such. Classical Marxism overcodes social relations with its discourse of revolution and class-homogeneity and is thereby theoretically unable to understand the social by its real and multiple differences. Accordingly, history is thought of as the unfolding of a scenario in which fully constituted elements dialectically play out the roles assigned to them by the Marxist system. As such, history is constituted by necessary contradictions and unavoidable antagonism.

At the end of the third chapter of *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, Mouffe and Laclau introduce the concept of hegemony in order to criticize the objective identities that Marxism works with. Taking *antagonistic relations* as point of entry into the discussion they note that antagonism has often been explained either through logical contradictions or real oppositions (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 122/3). However, as their criticism goes: 'in both cases we are concerned with full identities. [...] In both cases, it is something that the objects *already are* which makes the relation intelligible.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 124).

In the preceding paragraphs the authors have dwelled on the importance of Jacques Derrida's contribution to thinking about language and identity-formation. According to his notion of the 'constitutive outside', both meaning and identity are no longer constituted by the correspondence between mental and extra-mental entities, but through the interplay of discursive and contextual relations. On page 107, Mouffe and Laclau note: 'Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence [...]' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 107). Against Marxist materialism, Mouffe and Laclau here conceive of social relations in terms of a process of discursive *articulation*. The notion of 'constitutive outside' refers to a surplus of relations that is constitutive of both meaning and identity of objects. This 'outside' is not to be understood as something literally external to discourse, for as the above quote shows meaning and identity do not exist independently of discursive formations, but as the discursive limitations to a particular meaning or identity. As such, every identity is always already part of a web of discursive relations and invariably made possible by what it is not. Mouffe and Laclau note: 'Being inherent in every discursive situation, this surplus is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice. We will call it the *field of discursivity*. This term indicates the form of its relation with every concrete discourse: it determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 111). Instead of following Marxist orthodoxy and understanding identities as both fully given and necessary, they conceive of identities as discursive and necessarily partial and contingent results of articulatory practices.

Though the above described logic of the 'constitutive outside' is crucial to understanding the concept of hegemony, it is not enough

to state that every object is constituted by what it is not. What is at stake here is the reciprocal determination/subversion of an identity and its outside(s) through a relation of equivalence, a form of relating in which the differences between positively defined objects are cancelled out by their underlying similarities (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 127). I believe the possibility of both partial and total equivalence corresponds to the division between *popular* and *democratic* struggles that the authors introduce later on in the book, and to which I will turn below. For now, focusing on relations of total equivalence, it should be remarked that in a relation of total equivalence the terms involved in the relation are no longer positively defined, but, because of the dissolution of all differences, are known through either a) a positive determination underlying them all or b) a common reference to something external. Option a) is readily discarded for reasons of contradiction (if there is 'a *positive* difference underlying all equivalential terms' there is no need for the establishment of a chain of equivalence) whereas b) leads to the introduction of negativity into the social. Mouffe and Laclau remark: 'if *all* the differential features of an object have become equivalent, it is impossible to express anything *positive* concerning that object; this can only imply that through equivalence something is expressed which the object *is not*. (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 128). By consequence, negativity/antagonism becomes a social reality; or better, a social field is constituted by separating its fabric into two or more opposing sides which are only to be discerned indirectly, existing *besides* one another, as 'two paratactical series of equivalences' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 132). It is these relations of full equivalence that are conceived of as constitutive of the social: '[...] The non-constitutivity – or contingency – of the system of differences is *revealed* in the unfixity which equivalences introduce. The *ultimate* character of this unfixity, the *ultimate* precariousness of all difference, will thus show itself in a relation of total equivalence, where the differential positivity of all its terms is dissolved.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 128).

Yet, equivalence is an ambiguous relation; in order to have two equivalent terms they must both relate to one another through identity (i.e. not be completely different), but can neither be completely identical with one another. Hence, the juxtaposition of objectivity and negativity/antagonism concerns the constitutive outside of the political; antagonism is the necessary limit that guarantees the contingent articulations of identity. As shown above; identity should not be understood as a positive term. However, and because Mouffe and Laclau stress the mutual subversion of objectivity and negativity, neither should identity be understood as

being fully negative/antagonistic. In this respect they remark : 'This allows us to formulate the following conclusion: if society is never transparent to itself because it is unable to constitute itself as an objective field, neither is antagonism entirely transparent, as it does not manage to totally dissolve the objectivity of the social.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 129).

It is with this conclusion that Mouffe and Laclau simultaneously introduce their thoughts on radical democracy. A *radical democratic* society is characterized by the constant struggle between contingently formed political entities that hover between positivity and negativity, between positive identity and antagonism. Central to their understanding of radical democracy as a form of political relation is the overdetermination of discursive political identities by the presence of the field of discursivity. This results in their idea of nodal points; gravitational centers around which political identities condense, but which are always already subverted by its relations to the general field of discursivity. As such, identity is caught between autonomy and dependence. However, as soon as the surplus inherent in the field of discursivity dissolves, either through positive or negative relations that are constituted once and for all, hegemonic articulation is no longer a possibility. Mouffe and Laclau note: 'Thus, the two conditions of a hegemonic articulation are the presence of antagonistic forces *and* the instability of the frontiers which separate them.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 136).

By consequence, social order is not constituted by necessity and the interaction between fully formed political subjectivities. Rather, a radical democratic order is contingent and relies on the establishment of hegemonic formations, or, the establishment of relations of (partial) equivalence between different stances within the political. Resulting from the incessant struggle over the boundaries of the political, hegemony is a process in which the 'sedimentation' of a certain politico-cultural order is performed through the construction of alliances. Yet, and this is where the normative aspect of Mouffe and laclau becomes evident, in order to prevent the sedimentation of a constructed hegemony, they develop their account of radical democratic politics and 'counter-hegemony'. This is not without normative implications: 'We will speak of *democratic* struggles where these imply a plurality of political spaces, and of *popular* struggles where certain discourses *tendentially* construct the division of a single political space in two opposed fields. *But it is clear* (italics, ed.) that the fundamental concept is that of 'democratic struggle' and that popular struggles are merely specific conjunctures resulting from the multiplication of

equivalence effects among the democratic struggles.’ (Mouffe&Laclau 1985; 137). As such, the whole project of *Hegemony and socialist strategy* is aimed at destabilizing received chains of equivalence, which are necessarily articulated at the expense of others. Counter-hegemonic formations function as a counterweight to these dominant alliances and try to ‘expand and increase the complexity of political space’ (Mouffe and Laclau, 1985; 130). This increase is at the core of Mouffe’s normative conception of political philosophy as contributing to the emancipation of groups excluded by dominant forms of hegemony. In the following section I will elaborate on the interaction between *democratic* and *popular* struggles.

4

Up to now we have looked at the political ontologies of Gilles Deleuze and Chantal Mouffe, explaining their ways of thinking and emphasizing the normativity inherent in their thought. In the following two sections I will look at the manner in which both authors think of liberalism and democracy in a more specific way.

In her later work Mouffe moves away from explicit (neo-)Marxist thought and enters into debate with a number of thinkers on the subject of liberal-democracy. Here again, her line of thinking is fuelled by the perceived necessity of arguing with tradition. Against dominant strains of liberalism, Mouffe enters the debate on liberal-democracy by focusing on its 'democratic' aspect. Whereas in the liberal tradition this part of the conjunction is often assumed tacitly and ultimately derived from liberal principles, Mouffe discerns, in the works of Carl Schmitt, an independent democratic logic. Rethinking this tradition leads Mouffe to acknowledge a paradox in the coupling of liberalism and democracy.

Mouffe discerns a paradoxical relation between the inclusive ethics underlying political liberalism and the exclusive nature of political democracy. Following Carl Schmitt she notes: 'Schmitt asserts that there is an insuperable opposition between liberal individualism, with its moral discourse centered around the individual, and the democratic ideal which is essentially political, and aims at creating an identity based on homogeneity.' (Mouffe, 2005A; 39). The conjunction of liberal-democracy breaks down into two elements. On one hand Mouffe discerns political liberalism, a strain of thought that in fact should not be labeled *political* for it actually describes a moral framing of what ought to be considered politically. On the other hand she distinguishes *political* democracy. The tension between both conceptual domains derives, according to Schmitt, from the differences between the way in which the boundaries of the political are thought. Liberalism constitutes an attempt to apply a universal, all-inclusive model of morality onto the political, whereas democracy cannot be thought of in the absence of recognizable limits to who do and do not belong to a political community. Thus, democracy is necessarily accompanied by a logic of in- and exclusion that is irreconcilable with liberal tenets. Mouffe remarks: 'The logic of democracy does indeed imply a moment of closure which is required by the very process of constituting the

'people'. This cannot be avoided, even in a liberal model; it can only be negotiated differently. [...] One of the main problems with liberalism – and one that can endanger democracy – is precisely its incapacity to conceptualize such a frontier' (Mouffe, 2005A; 43). This liberal incapacity leads to the elimination of the political people, which as we have seen above is constituted by its necessary antagonistic limit. Consequently, according to the liberal stance, politics, as the way of dealing with incommensurable struggles between conceptions of the good, evaporates and is replaced by a managerial style of governance. A good example of such a liberal approach is John Rawls' conception of the political, on which Mouffe remarks: 'What Rawls presents as political philosophy is simply a specific type of moral philosophy, a public morality to regulate the basic structure of society. [...] there is no room for a notion of the political common good' (Mouffe 2005B, 56). The end of the political also signifies the end of democracy, thought of as the radical political relation described in the previous section.

This entrance into the debate on liberal-democracy seems to do away with the conjunction altogether; liberalism and democracy negate one another and cannot be reconciled. Yet, though Carl Schmitt takes this course, Mouffe also appreciates the positive contribution of liberal political philosophy to thinking about democracy; its emphasis on pluralism. Consequently, she agrees on the importance of recognizing the tensions between liberalism and democracy, Mouffe criticizes Schmitt for the way in which he draws the boundaries of the political community. The people (*das Volk*), as understood by Schmitt, coincides a great deal with organicist conceptions of what a 'wholesome' society consists of. In order to guarantee the homogeneity of the people, Schmitt relies on a 'substance' shared by all of the citizens belonging to the people before they actually become *a* people. Mouffe disapproves of this non-political *a priori* of the political people and, correctly, points out that the insistence on something over and above the actual political union renders Schmitt's account of democracy irreconcilable with a radical account of democracy. If the people is presented as 'a *factum* whose obviousness could ignore the political conditions of its production' (Mouffe, 2005A; 54), then the democratic logic is unable to account for radical democracy in which the identities existing within the plural people are open to change. Thus, the democratic as well as the liberal logic, relate in a similar way to the ontological foundation of politics as developed in *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. Both theories propagate a conception of the political which is irreconcilable with the two conditions of hegemonic articulation/radical democracy; 'the presence of

antagonistic forces *and* the instability of the frontiers which separate them.' (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985; 136). Liberalism denies antagonism by conceiving of society as an objective field of positively defined identities (individuals/citizens), whereas the democratic logic à la Schmitt amounts to denying any fluctuations of the boundaries of popular identities.

Both approaches fail to account for a liberal type of democracy. However, in commenting on the liberal-democratic paradox Mouffe avoids its dissolution (as she accuses both Rawls and Schmitt of doing). Instead, she takes both traditions at face value and tries to make them communicate. This communication results in her 'solution' to the paradox: agonistic liberal-democracy. She proposes to think of liberal-democracy as a field of tension in which a constant struggle over the boundaries and the substance of the political is taking place through agonistic politics. As such, the paradox is not solved by abstraction but made political by emphasizing agonistic interaction.

This line of reasoning is reminiscent of the logic of hegemony in that it considers antagonism to be the constitutive element of the political and considers the formation of alliances as constitutive of politics. *The democratic paradox* (2005) can be considered an exercise in the type of positive communication between the liberal and the democratic logic. Here Mouffe focuses on the way in which the valuable elements of both conceptual registers can be used to develop a conception of the people as plural, yet relatively closed. Her solution lies in a return to politics through the rediscovery of the political; recognizing multiple antagonisms at the core of democracy, she insists on agonistic politics in order to construct relatively stable boundaries to the multiplicity that is the people. Mouffe remarks: 'I consider that it is only when we acknowledge the dimension of 'the political' and understand that 'politics' consists in domesticating hostility and in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations, that we can pose what I take to be the central question for democratic politics. [...] The crucial issue is to establish the us/them decision in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy.' (Mouffe, 2005A; 101).

Mouffe tries to strike a balance between both logics. Or, she recognizes the importance of establishing a certain equilibrium between struggle and consensus; too much consensus and the political evaporates, too much struggle and 'the result can be the crystallization of collective passions around issues which cannot be managed by the democratic processes [...]' (Mouffe, 2005A; 104). Moreover, the status of this equilibrium is related to the survival of

civility: agonistic politics takes place within a field of 'adversaries' rather than 'enemies'. Mouffe remarks: 'To accept the view of the adversary is to undergo a radical change in political identity. [...] *Antagonism* is the struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is the struggle between adversaries.' (Mouffe, 2005A; 102/3). The corresponding change in political relations, from antagonism to agonism, is acted out in Mouffe's concept of 'commonality' (Mouffe, 2005A; 55). The domain of democracy-as-commonality is constituted by 'conflictive consensus', or a struggle over the precise content of the shared principles of liberty and equality, or diverse conceptions of citizenship. As such Mouffe claims: 'Coming to terms with the hegemonic nature of social relations and identities, it [agonistic politics, ed.] can contribute to subverting the ever present temptation existing in democratic societies to naturalize its frontiers and essentialize its identities.' (Mouffe, 2005A; 105). Mouffe hereby accommodates the tension between liberal pluralism and democratic exclusion and has designed an interesting position in political philosophy.

Yet, I would like to question the adequacy of this solution to the overarching normative aim of her type of emancipatory agonism, which, as described by Fossen: 'identifies democracy with challenging the relations of subordination.' (Fossen, 2008, 387). By arguing in favor of an agonistic conception of hegemony, based on politics as the means to exert influence over and to bring about changes in the field of discursivity, Mouffe's solution does not fully live up to its emancipatory ideals. In summary: agonistic power relations are connected to the widely shared but conflictive consensus and represent all those citizens that are included within the boundaries of the political community. However, and here is where Mouffe goes wrong, a society cannot be solely described by the distinction between those who are respectively in- and outside of that society (us/them). Even if this boundary is prone to constant renegotiation, as Mouffe advocates, it is renegotiated only by those voices that are allowed to be heard in the politics of which the agonistic hegemony consists. As such, by focusing on politics as '[...] the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence[...]' (Mouffe, 2005A; 101), Mouffe introduces a threshold to politics which excludes democratic minorities; those groups that do not take part in the struggle between competing conceptions of citizenship. Thus, in order to live up to its normative stance, the focus of emancipatory agonism would have to shift from the emancipation of those who are both included in and belong to a certain group united by their citizenship, to a focus on those who

are included, numerically, but do not belong to the community in the sense that they are represented, or counted when it comes to political influence/decision making. In order to develop an account that opens up politics to the interest of these groups outside the arena of politics, or to make the boundaries of the people even more porous, I would like to draw attention to the work of Gilles Deleuze.

Mostly known for a rather abstract contribution to political philosophy, both Paul Patton (2005/2007) and Jeffrey Bell (2003) re-describe Deleuze as a political philosopher concerned with actual events and driven by a normative concern for emancipation. Bell, for instance, remarks on the similarity of Deleuzian and Rawlsian thought: ‘To the extent that social assemblages produce hierarchies of entrenched power that predetermine the hopes and expectations of what one can do and become [...] Deleuze shares Rawls’ efforts to critique and undermine the effectiveness of such entrenched powers.’ (Bell, 2003; 21). Furthermore, and coinciding with Mouffe’s critique of Rawls, he notes: ‘What Deleuze does not agree with, however, is Rawls’ basic premise that whatever solution one attempts must assume the already existent identity of society as a “closed system.” (Bell, 2003; 21). Yet, Deleuze insists, as Mouffe does through the concept of commonality, on the importance of a *certain kind* of stability concerning power relations. Every state-apparatus and its subsequent society can only exist by virtue of the solidification of certain aspects on which the people agree (a popular *territory*) and will, ultimately, be destroyed by the complete lack of consensus. However, in contrast to Mouffe, Deleuze focuses on the importance of non-political forces to the subversion of the status of a given democracy. Whereas Mouffe’s conception of the political is focused on emancipation through participation in democratic politics and as such directed only at the inside of the political, Deleuze emphasizes the importance of democracy’s outside. To strive for emancipation, to create new conditions of democratic justice, means to become a revolutionary democrat. This does not involve sharing in a consensual balance and thereby obtaining access to a political arena. On the contrary: ‘To instill creativity into our lives, to become revolutionary [...] involves breaking with the flow of communications, interrupting them, so that one might instill a question that has transformative (i.e., revolutionary) potential.’ (Bell, 2003; 28). Moreover, this insistence on non-political critique becomes of utmost importance as: ‘societies [...] seek to ward off the creative function by claiming that they themselves are the true source of creativity.’ (Bell, 2003; 26).

In this respect I believe it is informative to look at yet another concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari; the war-machine,

introduced and explained in the twelfth chapter of *Mille plateaux*. On page 438 they remark: '[...] the exteriority of the war-machine to the State-apparatus reveals itself everywhere, but remains difficult to think. It is not enough to affirm that the machine is exterior to the apparatus, one has to arrive at thinking the war-machine itself as a pure form of exteriority, whereas the apparatus of State constitutes the form of interiority that we habitually take as model, or according to which we have the habit to think.'⁴ (Deleuze&Guattari, 1987; 438). Its 'pure form of exteriority' positions the war-machine on the plane of consistency, whereas the apparatus of State is positioned on the plane of organization. Accordingly, the difference between the war-machine and the State is linked to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of bodies in terms of intensive forces rather than in terms of an extensive organism (see section 2). It is important to stress the significance of the distinction between in/extensive assemblages in addressing Deleuze's ideas on democracy. Intensive relations are necessarily differential. Moreover, the differentiability of intensive relations should not be understood as difference constituted by pre-existing forms of identity, and establishing the possibility of a dialectical subsumption of one to the other. On the contrary difference is conceptualized as 'difference-in-itself': 'Difference is the state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction. We must therefore say that difference is made, or makes itself, as in the expression 'make the difference' (Deleuze, 1994, 28). The war-machine is a figure of this type of 'unilateral distinction', of making-a-difference. The war-machine is a self-positioning assemblage that exists besides that apparatus of State. As such it is the paradigmatic figure of micropolitics and exists alongside macropolitics as its virtual reservoir of lines of flight/becomings. Deleuze&Guattari: 'On the level of lines of flight, the assemblage that traces them is of the war-machine type. The mutations refer to this machine, which certainly does not have war as its object, but the emission of deterritorializing quanta, the passage of mutating fluxes (in this sense every creation passes through a war-machine.' (Deleuze&Guattari 1987; 280). By consequence, the difference between the planes on which both entities are positioned becomes clearly visible; the apparatus of State consists of actual multiplicities on the plane of organization,

⁴ Translated from French: '[...] l'extériorité de la machine de guerre par rapport à l'appareil d'État se révèle partout, mais reste difficile à penser. Il ne suffit pas d'affirmer que la machine est extérieure à l'appareil, il faut arriver à penser la machine de guerre comme étant elle-même une pure forme d'extériorité, tandis que l'appareil d'État constitue la forme d'interiorité que nous prenons habituellement pour modèle, ou d'après nous avons l'habitude de penser.

whereas war-machines are constituted by virtual multiplicities, or 'mutating fluxes'.

Moreover, as was also noted in section two, Deleuze and Guattari's ethics of deterritorialization consists of the *multiplication* of differential connections. The war-machine does exactly that. Patton, who has renamed it 'metamorphosis machine', remarks: 'As an apparatus of capture, the state-form represents a purely quantitative or linear model of increase of power. [...] By contrast, the metamorphosis machine represents a more qualitative or multi-dimensional model of increase of power.' (Patton, 2000; 111). Deleuze and Guattari themselves note on the transformative power of war-machines: 'War-machines constitute themselves against apparatuses that appropriate the machine [...] they put forward connections, in the face of the great conjunctions of apparatuses of capture or of domination.' (Deleuze&Guattari, 2000; 527). As such, the war-machine is a continuously deterritorializing assemblage, whereas the State tries to secure its territory. This distinction corresponds to the division between democracy as given in history and becoming-democratic as event.

As shown at the end of section two, the process of becoming-democratic is, according to Deleuze, the a-historical condition of counter-actualization of democratic states of affairs. The reformulation of democracy's internal conceptual elements is considered to be a pure event with a revolutionary, even utopian impact on the actual social fabric. Deleuze and Guattari: 'The word utopia therefore designates *the conjunction of philosophy, or of the concept, with the present milieu* – political philosophy.' (Deleuze&Guattari, 1994; 100). Thinking about the concept of revolution they note: 'As concept and as event, revolution is self-referential or enjoys a self-positing that enables it to be apprehended in an immanent enthusiasm without anything in states of affairs or lived experience to tone it down [...]' (Deleuze&Guattari, 1994; 101). As such, a conceptual reworking of the connection between democracy and liberalism is supposed to be a philosophical enterprise with revolutionary aspects driven by a conceptual war-machine that exists outside any given democracy. Deleuze and Guattari remark: 'The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist.' (Deleuze&Guattari; 1994, 108) Yet, as is shown by the status of the war-machine: 'This people and earth will not be found in our democracies. Democracies are majorities, but a becoming is by its nature that which always eludes the majority.' (Deleuze&Guattari, 1994; 108).

By denouncing the role of the majority in democracy, Deleuze and Guattari might be taken to be profound anti-democrats. However, this would be to misstate the type of majority they are referring to. As demonstrated above, the whole philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari consists of two different ontological modalities. The same goes for the notion of majority, which can mean; a) the numerical/quantitative majority and b) the qualitative majority. The latter describes the type of majority that is bound up with their conception of micropolitics as the intensive process of deterritorialization. Such a majority is always already traversed by virtual lines of flight. Or, a qualitative majority is always already caught up in the process of becoming, not of a becoming-minority but of a *becoming-minoritarian*. As such, Deleuzian emancipation consists not of the emancipation of minorities by emphasizing/increasing their status within politics, rather emancipation/empowerment consists of intensifying relations of becoming already there, yet existing virtually on an ontological plane that forever remains outside of history. Hence, emancipation is not only a process of historical politics (or the creation of chains of equivalence), but is to be considered mainly as a conceptual challenge. Patton remarks: 'To the extent that Deleuzian micropolitics refers to a different order of political activity, it represents a departure from representative politics tout court. It is not that it proposes an alternative to the politics of majority will formation, but rather that it operates alongside or below the realm of democratic deliberation.' (Patton 2005; 6). For Deleuze and Guattari, exactly those excluded from the political process dispose of the powers needed to transform democracy in a process of becoming-minoritarian. Consequently, if any actual liberal-democracy is to be open to change it cannot deny its virtual reservoir of metamorphosis.

6

The distance that Deleuze creates between a given democracy and its democratic virtuality is reflected in his thoughts on the constant transformation of democracy; the process of becoming-democratic consists of applying a conceptual reservoir to actual social settings. For Chantal Mouffe goes the same; the social is never limited to its empirical manifestations, but always already contains a constitutive surplus that includes the potential for change. As such, both philosophers consider democratic states of affairs in relation their conceptual remainder, and accordingly to its future emancipation/transformation. Moreover, according to both philosophers, the conceptual surplus that always accompanies the actual social fabric should not be considered as the ideal image of a perfect democracy that nevertheless remains inaccessible in reality. On the contrary, though the conceptual surplus that is constitutive of future democracies is forever inaccessible, it is not so because of imperfections in empirical reality, but because of its conceptual impossibility. Mouffe acknowledges this conceptual impossibility of democracy; the concept of a perfect, harmonious democracy undercuts the idea of democracy itself, as struggle is constitutive of the democratic relation (Mouffe, 2005A; 137). In line with Derrida she argues for the emancipatory value of the idea of a 'democracy to come', whose alterity 'makes true democracy⁵ not only inaccessible as a conceivable telos, but inaccessible because it is inconceivable in its very essence, and hence in its telos.' (Mouffe, 2005A; 136). Deleuze and Guattari also denounce the idea of 'perfect democracy' as a regulative idea(I). Though they do speak of the utopian vocation of philosophy as the creative production of concepts, these concepts are immanently utopian and always related states of affairs and as such 'inconceivable in their very essence'. Patton remarks on Deleuzoguattarian utopianism: 'This must be understood as an immanent utopianism that does not simply posit an ideal future but rather connects with lines of flight or resistant forces present in but stifled by the present milieu, extending these and taking them to extremes [...]' (Patton, 2007; p. 12).

⁵ Translation modified. Actual quote reads 'friendship' instead of 'democracy'.

Yet, despite the remarkable similarities between their philosophies, I believe the introduction of agonistic politics obscures this convergence. In her book *The democratic paradox*, Mouffe sees transformation as the incessant political struggle over the limits of democracy as internal to that same struggle and is thus deprived of the possibility of critically assessing the boundaries of democracy. Deleuze on the other hand develops a concept of democracy that is open to external critique and leads to the continuous transformation of the limits of democracy itself, for instance by the coming about of war-machines. Furthermore, this insistence on outside critique becomes of utmost importance as all hegemonic formations (also forms of *democratic hegemony*) tend to circumvent creative change exactly by positing itself as the agent of creative change. Thus, any given hegemonic formation contains an internal resistance against the creation of new hegemonic conditions and is structurally undermining emancipatory changes. Mouffe's conception of democracy-as-commonality, in which consensus is always traversed by struggle, is vulnerable at this point. Though she acknowledges that commonality is not simply a neutral threshold of the political, but an active agent in shaping political aspiration and discourse (thus functioning as a Foucauldian historical a priori to the validity of any claim uttered in the realm of the political), she does not seem to follow up on this by stepping outside of the discourse and look at the state of a democracy from another perspective. As such, though flexible in relation to historical context, the threshold of the political, as described by Mouffe, is also characterized by rigidity (hegemony) as to who do and do not belong to a given political situation. This tendency towards self-defensive contraction that, I believe, characterizes any modern political democracy is something to be dealt with and broken down from outside the realm of politics. It is here that Deleuze seems to provide the means of overcoming the limitations of agonistic politics vis-à-vis the normative stance that Mouffe has taken. Daniel Smith remarks: 'A truly 'normative' principle must not only provide norms for condemning abuses of power, but also a means for condemning norms that have themselves becomes abuses of power [...]. An immanent process, in other words, must at one and the same time, function as a principle of critique as well as a principle of creation.' (Smith, 2003; 308). This does, in conclusion, not mean that I am arguing for a renewed inclusive and non-political liberal-ethical conception of politics, neither for a conception of the political that is characterized by the kind of continuity that Mouffe's conception of hegemony seems to allow for. Rather, I think the focus of emancipatory democratic theory should lie on a conception of the political that is open to non-represented forces and as such liable to

go through both the breakdown of a given democratic situation and a subsequent restart in renewed democratic conditions.

Wordcount: 8275.

Bibliography

- Bell, Jeffrey, "Between Individualism and Socialism: Deleuze's Micropolitics of Desire," presented at the Association for Political Theory, Inaugural Conference, Grand Rapids, Michigan, October 17, 2003. Available at: <http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/micropolitics.pdf>
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Difference & Repetition*, Columbia university press, 1994, New York
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix, *Mille plateaux*, Les éditions de minuit, 1987, Paris
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix, *Anti-Oedipus*, Athlone press, 1984, London
- Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix, *What is philosophy?*, Verso, 1994, London
- Fossen, Thomas, *Agonistic critiques of liberalism. Perfection and emancipation*, in *Contemporary Political Theory*, 7 (4), 2008, p. 376-394
- Howson, Richard, *From ethico-political Hegemony to Postmarxism*, in *Rethinking Marxism*, 19:2, pp. 234-244
- Mouffe, Chantal, *The democratic paradox*, Verso, 2005 (A), London
- Mouffe, Chantal, *The return of the political*, Verso, 2005 (B), London
- Mouffe, Chantal & Laclau, Ernesto, *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, 1985, Verso, London
- Patton, Paul, *Deleuze and the political*, Routledge, 2000, London
- Patton, Paul, Vortrag ins Institutscolloquium des Philosophischen Instituts der Freien, Universität, Berlin, am Donnerstag, den 15. November, 2007. Available at: <http://www2.hum.uu.nl.proxy.library.uu.nl/cfh/publications/downloads/files/political-normativity-deleuze.pdf>
- Patton, Paul, *Deleuze and Democracy*, In *Contemporary Political Theory* (2005) 4, 400–413
- Smith, Daniel, *Deleuze and the liberal tradition: normativity, freedom and judgment*, in *Economy and Society*, 32:2, pp. 299-324