

Paula Biglieri and Gloria Perelló*

The Names of the Real in Laclau's Theory: Antagonism, Dislocation, and Heterogeneity

Introduction

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe opened the way towards Post-Marxism with the publication of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* in 1985. With his theoretical development, Ernesto Laclau has become one of the most outstanding theorists regarding the relation between political thinking and psychoanalysis, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis.

This work is aimed at analyzing such relation. Theoretical tools of psychoanalysis are used to locate the implicit postulates in Laclau's work. However, it is worth clarifying that it is not the objective of this work to search for the main elements of Lacanian theory in Laclau's work; i.e. the following questions are not intended to be answered: Where is the object *a* in Laclau's theory? Where is the master-signifier located? Where is the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real? It is not possible to establish a point to point correspondence between the two theories. From our perspective, this comparison would be senseless because they are two different theoretical stances, and do not require further explanation if tackled from linguistics: each element acquires signification with regard to the relation it establishes with the other elements within a given structure. Therefore, as they are two different works, it is impossible to institute a point to point relation. Moreover, the characteristics of Lacan's work differ from Laclau's, becoming impossible to compare. For example, in Lacan's work, several theories are included but they do not constitute a system, and they can only be understood regarding the specific problem where they emerged. But in Laclau's work, a certain intention of systematicity can be seen.

47

The present work is aimed at reading Laclau from a psychoanalytical viewpoint in order to locate the underlying postulates. Three fundamental aspects may be distinguished in Laclau's theory: antagonism, dislocation, and heterogeneity.

* University of Sun Martin, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Antagonism

With *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* in 1985, Laclau and Mouffe began a prolific theoretical production that was soon called Post-Marxism. In that book, after reviewing and deconstructing Marxism, the authors provide the conceptual keys to escape from essentialism, i.e. the notions of antagonism and hegemony.

In order to build their theory, Laclau and Mouffe propose as an ontological principle the understanding of the social as a discursive space. Therefore, the idea of social structuration responds to a rhetorical model. Their idea of discourse not only refers to linguistic elements (the oral or written word) but to any relation of signification. “Synonymy, metonymy, metaphor are not forms of thought that add a second sense to the primary, constitutive literality of social relations; instead they are part of the primary terrain itself in which the social is constituted.” (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 110). Thus, they postulate that the discursive field superimposes the field of social relations which are considered as such because they have and produce meaning.

Laclau and Mouffe define discourse as a “structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice”. This definition leans towards Foucault’s idea of discursive formation as regularity in dispersion. But, by rejecting the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, Laclau and Mouffe distance themselves from it. Also, while they follow Derrida in order to generalize the concept of discourse by saying that “the absence of transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely”, they distance themselves from him when they turn to psychoanalysis. This distancing was later reaffirmed by Laclau when he elaborated the concept of heterogeneity, which, from our perspective, may be compared to the Lacanian *surplus-jouissance* (this idea will be analysed in detail at the end of this article).

48

Therefore, if everything is the play of differences, we are located in the domain of radical contingency where every identity is relational because each element is what the other is not. But this infinite play requires a certain fixation so that meaning may be produced. If we remain within a constant displacement of elements, we would face such a dispersion of meaning that signification would be impossible – like psychotic thinking. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe introduce Lacan’s

concept of *point de capiton* or nodal point, which, in their own terminology, is called the empty signifier, i.e. the signifier or particular element that assumes the structurally 'universal' function within a discursive field. That element allows a certain suture or fixation – always partial – of the play of signification so that the signifier chain can acquire some meaning. The concept of articulation is understood as: “a practice instituting the nodal points which partially fix the meaning” (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 113).

A nodal point makes possible this fixation of the signifier's displacement – although always precariously. And this partial fixation takes place because the nodal point is so only if it is overdetermined. Laclau and Mouffe took the concept of overdetermination from Althusser, borrowed while modifying it according to Freud's early works. In fact, Althusser postulated that there is nothing within the social that is not overdetermined as a way of expressing that the social order is consistent with the symbolic order. Therefore, it lacks a founding principle. However, he reintroduces a renewed form of essentialism by affirming the existence of an overdetermination by the economy in the last instance. The latter idea is unacceptable for Laclau and Mouffe because it would mean going back to the binary pair essence-accident, but in a Marxist format: material base-superstructure, where the relations of production (which are located in the material base) have the final word. Furthermore, it erases all the complexity involved in the overdetermination: “If the economy is an object which can determine any type of society in that instance [the last instance], this means that, at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination. If society has a last instance which determines its laws of motion, *the relations between the overdetermined instances and the last instance must be conceived in terms of simple, one-directional determination by the latter*” (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 99).

Crucial here is Lacan's returning to Freud, more specifically, to Freud's concept of overdetermination in his famous text *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). There, he inverts the binary opposition waking state-dream in which Descartes had established the supremacy of the waking state and dismissed the dream as a waste. Freud proposes a hermeneutics without an ultimate foundation from a two-level topology: the manifest content (the text that the dreamer remembers when he wakes up, characterized by being meagre, paltry, and laconic) and the latent content (the dream-thoughts, characterized by being copious, varied,

and extensive). The dream work consists in transferring the latent contents to the manifest contents, that is, the transference of elements from one text to the other (from the text of the dream to the conscious text). But, what is at work there such that a copious, varied, and extensive text turns into a meagre, paltry, and laconic one? The dream work, says Freud, the unconscious translates one text into another through the mechanisms of condensation and displacement. But this does not mean, strictly speaking, that something is lost during that translation operated by the unconscious. That could only be deemed so if we consider a point to point translation. But what Freud shows is that the unconscious works in a different way, such that several elements remain condensed and others are displaced. “The fact that is at issue in this explanation can be expressed differently by saying: each element of the dream content (that is, the text we remember) appears as overdetermined, being the substitute of multiple dream-thoughts” (Freud, 1900: 291). But what do Laclau and Mouffe take from Freud’s ideas? Mainly the existence of another logic which is not controlled by the principle of non-contradiction, that is, the logic of articulation. The nodal points – which refer to articulation – are the elements where the largest amount of associative chains converges. In other words, they are the overdetermined elements, that is, the elements that condense the highest amount of dream content by mere association. Therefore, the empty signifiers are overdetermined elements because they condense elements from different associative chains, and anchor, always precariously, certain meaning.

50

With respect to the concept of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concept of overdetermination in order to analyze identity, totality, and hegemony. A hegemonic articulation takes place when a particular element assumes at a certain moment the representation of a totality which is entirely incommensurable with regard to itself. This element assumes such representation because it was overdetermined when condensing the highest amount of associative chains. Thus, not only a certain fixation of meaning is obtained, but also a certain idea of totality can be accessed through the mediation of such particularity which assumes the representation of universality. That is, the hegemonic articulations suppose suturing effects. A hegemonic relation articulates the differences through an element (which has become a nodal point or empty signifier, etc.) that assumes the representation of the totality. Furthermore, it embodies a certain configuration which is no more than a sutured order, since the suture

indicates the impossibility of the fixation of an order as a coherently unified totality.

The field of differences or divisions in constant movement will always be excessive without the possibility of the fixation of an order as a coherently unified totality. That is, the order would never embrace the totality of differences or divisions. Thus, the openness of the social is constitutive because such excess of the social prevents the closure of the order as a unified or full totality. The social as such cannot be more than a failed attempt to 'domesticate' the field of differences. A hegemonic articulation is the only possibility to create a precarious order where there is not one. This explains the famous phrase: "The social is articulation insofar as 'society' is impossible" (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 114).

This concept of hegemony is closely related to the concept of antagonism. Firstly, Laclau and Mouffe define antagonism as the "limit of all objectivity" (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 122). That is, antagonism, far from being an objective relation, shows the limits of objectivity. It is the experience of the limit of order. The possibility of a hegemonic construction exists precisely because of the existence of antagonism. Without antagonism, 'society' would be possible as a unity without fissures, a coherently unified totality constituted by full identities. Then, the possibility of 'the social' as a hegemonic relation would simply be eliminated. "Antagonism, far from being an objective relation, is a relation wherein the limits of every objectivity are shown – in the sense in which Wittgenstein used to say that 'what cannot be said can be shown'. But if, as we have demonstrated, the social only exists as a partial effort for constructing society – that is, an objective and closed system of differences – antagonism, as a witness of the impossibility of a final suture, is the 'experience' of the limit of the social. Strictly speaking, antagonisms are not internal but external to society; or rather, they constitute the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself" (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 122). It is well known that this definition of antagonism was highly appreciated at that time by Žižek (1990), who stated: "It is not an accident that the basic proposition of *Hegemony* – 'society does not exist' – evokes the Lacanian postulate '*la Femme n'existe pas*' (Woman does not exist). The real achievement of hegemony is crystallized in the concept of social antagonism: far from reducing all reality to a kind of language-game, the socio-symbolic field is conceived as structured around a certain traumatic impossibility, around a certain fissure that cannot be symbolized. In short, Laclau and Mouffe have, so

to speak, reinvented the Lacanian notion of the Real as impossible; they have made it useful as a tool for social and ideological analysis” (Žižek, 1990: 249). What Žižek is saying, and we agree, is that Laclau and Mouffe’s great achievement was to conceive the idea of antagonism as the limit of all objectivity, that is, the reformulation of Lacan’s idea of the real as impossible. In other words, the antagonism is conceived as a traumatic kernel around which the order is structured (the socio-symbolic field), i.e. the social.

It was also Žižek who highlighted a second definition of antagonism given by Laclau and Mouffe: “But in the case of antagonism, we are confronted with a different situation: the presence of the ‘Other’ prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution” (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 122). Žižek points out a problem here because this definition of antagonism is tied to the idea of the subject that Laclau and Mouffe took from Foucault. And Foucault’s notion of subject-positions has as a hidden implication which is, at some point, the illusion of fullness. Žižek claims, then, that with such Foucauldian argument, Laclau and Mouffe intend to attack “the notion of the *subject* as a substantial, essential entity, given in advance, dominating the social process and not being produced by the contingency of the discursive process itself; against this notion, they claim that what we have is a series of particular subject-positions (feminist, ecologist, democratic, etc.) the signification of which is not fixed in advance: it changes according to the way they are articulated in a series of equivalences through the metaphoric surplus which defines the identity of every one of them” (Žižek, 1990: 250). The difficulty lies in that “the subject-position is a mode of how we recognize our position of an (interested) agent of the social process, of how we experience our commitment to a certain ideological cause. But, as soon as we constitute ourselves as ideological subjects, as soon as we respond to interpellation and assume a certain subject-position, we are *a priori, per definitionem* deluded, we are overlooking the radical dimension of social antagonism, that is to say, the traumatic kernel symbolization of which always fails” (Žižek, 1990: 251). Žižek is saying that if antagonism is also defined by “the presence of the ‘Other’ [that] prevents me from being totally myself”, a possible defeat of that ‘other’ (enemy) would lead to an abolition of antagonism and, consequently, my identity would be fully constituted and a substantial subject would appear. However, we are able to escape from the substantial subject if we consider the following postulate: “it is not the external enemy who is preventing me from achieving identity

with myself, but every identity is already in itself blocked, marked by an impossibility, and the external enemy is simply the small piece, the rest of reality upon which we 'project' or 'externalize' this intrinsic immanent impossibility" (Žižek, 1990: 252).

Broadly speaking, we agree with Žižek's argument. Although, it is important to point out that with respect to their concept of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe clarified that even though the idea of hegemonic articulation opens the possibility of separately specifying the identity of the articulated elements, such identities are also precarious because it is impossible to anchor the meaning of the elements to an ultimate literality. Therefore, not only an order is open, but also the elements comprising the hegemonic chain are open because they cannot constitute themselves as full and closed identities. Furthermore, it is important to note that Laclau and Mouffe consider subject-positions to be tinged by the logic of overdetermination, implying that each subject-position is always overdetermined by the others. Thus, each subject-position acquires an open and incomplete character showing the "politically negotiable character of every identity" (Laclau/Mouffe, 1985: 131). Therefore, not only a particular social force (a political identity) is conceived as an open identity, but also the elements which comprise it are also open elements, with the impossibility of constituting themselves as full or closed identities.

If we are interested in this last definition, this is because it opens the possibility of interpreting, from Lacan's perspective, antagonism as an effect of the real in the imaginary. This is the first turn in the development of Laclau's theory – shared with Mouffe until this point. Here, Laclau emphasizes the imaginary, i.e. he problematizes antagonism in terms of the imaginary. It is worth remembering that, for Lacan, the imaginary is defined as the place of the Ego par excellence, with its phenomena of illusion governed by the *Gestalt* laws. The register of the imaginary is essentially related to the image, to the representation (insofar as what is presented again instead of an absence), to the attempt at the synthesis, unification, or closure of meaning.

Thus, the definition of antagonism as "the presence of the 'Other' [that] prevents me from being totally myself" implies some manner of inscription of the traumatic real, constitutive of every identity. The possibility of establishing a frontier which delimits a 'self' and 'others' is a way of 'representing the irrepresent-

able'. We will consider Laclau and Mouffe's definition of antagonism by turning to Wittgenstein. They define it as a 'testimony' of the impossibility because it is a relation that shows the limits of all objectivity insofar as "what cannot be said can be shown". And here we focus on the testimony function and the term 'showing'. They both definitely belong to the order of the image, that is, strictly speaking, to the register of the imaginary.

At this point, we would like to introduce the metaphor of the mirror that Lacan used to understand the constitution of the Ego. Identities can only constitute themselves through their relation with the other, with what it is not. Thus in all the cases, the configuration of the identity implies the establishment of a difference, and the success of its affirmation lies in its capacity to exclude the other. But at the same time, the identity depends on the definition of the other for its constitution. Therefore, a specular relation necessarily expresses an antagonistic relation, insofar as "the presence of the 'Other' [that] prevents me from being totally myself". Thus, because of the impossibility of an identity constituting itself as closed, I constitute my presence through identification with the other. This other who acts as a mirror lets me know of my presence, but at the same time, it threatens it.

Therefore in this *mise en scène* of the rivalry with the other, antagonism is constitutive of the identity. The latter will distinguish its presence by exclusion, in order to differentiate itself from the pure separation of elements. Antagonism represents this specular relation leading to the establishment of the identity which, in its precariousness, sees itself threatened because its existence depends on the presence of the other.

Dislocation

From the publication of *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (1990), a second turn in Laclau's theory can be identified. It is characterized by the radicalization of the concept of antagonism and the abandonment of Foucault's notion of subject-positions. In addition, Laclau took into account the above-mentioned Žižek's objections and introduced the concept of dislocation (1990), i.e. the failure of the structure to close as such. Every identity (and social object) is dislocated per se because it depends on an outside that denies it and, at the same time, is its condition of possibility. Since the field of identities is relational

because the social subjects do not constitute themselves in a purely external way (the ones from the others), the identities can never constitute themselves fully, but they form a system impossible to become closed, which always depends on the determined outside that constitutes it.

One of the key ways of considering the specificity of the dislocation concept is to conceive it as the source of freedom. In this respect, Laclau points out: "Dislocation is the source of freedom. But this is not the freedom of a subject with a positive identity – in which case it would just be a structural locus – rather it is a freedom of a structural fault which can only construct an identity through acts of identification" (Laclau, 1990: 60). From this quotation we may deduce two key issues. First of all, the structure is already dislocated and that structural gap is considered as a source of freedom because there are no structural determinations for the subject. For this reason, the structural gap is the place of the subject, the moment of decision beyond the structure. Secondly, and as a consequence of the previous point, Laclau's notion of subject acquires specificity at this juncture of his work because he abandons Foucault's idea of subject-positions, present in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, and establishes a precise differentiation between the notions of subject, identity, and identification. Thus, there would be no positive identity; the subject could only have access to something similar to identity through identification.

Dislocation would be, then, the place of the subject in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, the place of an absence where the subject equals "the pure form of the structure's dislocation, of its ineradicable distance from itself" (Laclau, 1990: 60). As a consequence, and based on Lacanian theoretical tools, we may claim – regarding the subject in this second stage of Laclau – that it is no longer a matter of subject-positions as imaginary identifications, but a subject constituted by the lack. In short, from the arguments involved in the abandonment of the notion of subject positions, the subject of the lack emerges and, as a result of the radicalization of the notion of antagonism, the relevance of dislocation comes up.

What is the difference between antagonism and dislocation, then? The answer is found in the words of the author: "The idea of constructing, of living the experience of dislocation as antagonistic, based on the construction of an enemy, already assumes a moment of discursive construction of the dislocation which

makes possible its domination, in some way, in a conceptual system which is in the base of certain experience [...]. Then, in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, I attempted to develop a notion of negativity to deepen the moment of dislocation, previous to every form of discursive organization, or discursive overcoming, or discursive suture of that dislocation” (Laclau, 1997: 126). In the previous point, we define antagonism as designing what cannot be said, or as a testimony of impossibility. Thus, antagonism is already a way of giving meaning to what is impossible to symbolize, and as to showing, it is an imaginary manner of inscription of what continues to elude. To define a specular frontier between friends and enemies, an antagonistic relation as a limit to objectiveness implies doing something with the traumatic kernel inherent in every identity. In the dislocation concept, instead, we find a radical exclusion between the ‘real’ and the ‘symbolic’. In this case, dislocation appears deprived of the possibilities opened by the symbolic order. Dislocation not only defies its capture by the ‘symbolic’, but it keeps itself in an outwardness without law. The dislocation means that it cannot be operated with the symbolic on the real.

To sum up, we identify as the second turn of Laclau’s theory the disjunction between the ‘real’ and the ‘symbolic’ which is implied in the notion of dislocation.

Heterogeneity

In his last book, *On Populist Reason* (2005), Laclau focuses on an inspiring reflection about populism. He introduces a key innovation that determines the third turn of his theory: the concept of heterogeneity.

56

Laclau’s notion of populism refers to ‘people’ as *plebs* that claim to be the only legitimate *populus*. That is, a partiality (the *plebs*, the least privileged) that wants to function as the totality of the community (the *populus*, the people as the abstract name of such community). Thus, populism appears when a part is identified with the whole and there is a radical exclusion within the communitarian space. In other words, in a populist articulation an equivalential relation needs to prevail, among a plurality of social demands. It puts into play the figure of the ‘people’ and establishes an antagonistic frontier between ‘us, the people’ and ‘them, the enemies of the people’. Then, the ‘people’ of populism emerge due to the impossibility of every order (objectivity, identity, etc.) to close itself as

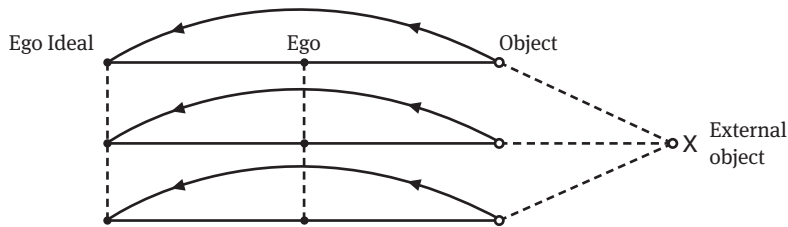
a completely coherent and unified sameness. The 'people' of populism is part of the unachievable search for the fulfilment of the community. As a consequence, the 'people' implies a radical frontier because its own presence is the effect of antagonism, constitutive of the social order. So, "without this initial breakdown of something in the social order, there is no possibility of antagonism, frontier, or, ultimately, people" (Laclau, 2005: 113).

Furthermore, another key issue that Laclau introduces in this stage of his theoretical development is the dimension of affect in the figure of the 'people'. The introduction of this dimension means that the basic proposition of Laclau and Mouffe, i.e. 'society is impossible', gains new scope. That is, the 'people' constitute themselves from the 'impossibility of the society'. How do we understand this statement in the third stage of Laclau's theory? The social order is not presented as something homogeneous; there is nothing in common among the members of the social field because the nature of the subject is the impossibility of relation. Precisely what constitutes a multiplicity of heterogeneities of a community is the impossibility of the social relation: the common ground is the impossible, the heterogeneous, the real. If there is an affective tie it is because this relation is impossible. In short, as there is no relation, there is an affective tie. We will now analyze the affective dimension.

Laclau incorporates the affective dimension, using as a primary source Freud's book *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921). In contrast to the Hobbesian theoretic model, the constitution of the people surpasses the figure of the leader as a transcendent element which gives meaning to what is represented, as is shown in Freud's above-mentioned book (Freud, 1921: 110) and reintroduced by Laclau in *On Populist Reason* (Laclau, 2005). But are we denying the notion of transcendence in the argument of Laclau about the people? No, but we have to analyze what kind of transcendence Laclau refers to, based on psychoanalysis.

The diagram in *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* presents a formula of the constitution of a mass of people with a leader. Freud shows the centrality of affect (identification and infatuation) in this articulation, since the identification tie, which is established among the members of the mass, is possible due to a relation of the idealization of a leader by each member. Freud states that a mass that has a leader is "a number of individuals who have substituted one and

the same object for their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego. This condition admits graphic representation”:



(Freud, 1921: 109–110)

The text and the graphic show the relations among the elements that are part of the articulation. Each of the unbroken parallel lines is one of the members of the mass, and in each line, the following instances are represented: the ego ideal, the ego, and the object¹. At the same time, in the dotted lines the ‘libidinal tie’ is observed: among the egos by identification and among the ego ideals by infatuation with the leader. However, these libidinal ties are possible because each subject has renounced directly sexual satisfaction in relation to the object of the drive since the investiture of an ‘external object’ (it renounces the sensual love tendency). Thus, every directly sexual satisfaction is excluded and the subject remains tied to the ‘external object’ by drives that are inhibited in their sexual aim (the tender emotional trend), referring to the idealization or being in love. According to the direction of the arrows in the graphic above, there is a kind of logical counterclockwise movement: the satisfaction of the ego is renounced; the external object is invested, having taken the place of the ego ideal (idealization) and the concomitant identification of the egos as well.

58

In Freud’s graphic, we can find a kind of knot which expresses the affective bonds established in a mass of people. This knot is relevant for our analysis because it shows a key element: those small objects which have no bonds connecting each other, however, are those that make articulation possible. (Notice that in the graphic there is no line of dots traced among them and their centre is

¹ On the symbolic, imaginary, and real character of these instances, see: Biglieri, P. and Perelló, G., ed., (2007), and Perelló, G. (2006).

empty). These objects – similar to the Lacanian object *a* – anticipate something that can be called ‘transcendence’. So, from a Lacanian perspective, we can assert that this transcendence is not ontological. Or, speaking specifically about ontology, we should say the ontology of the ‘real’.

What does the ontology of the real mean? To understand the manner in which ‘reality’ is instituted, as well as its foundations and meanings – problems that belong to the field of ontology, we reintroduce Lacan’s reference to the “unconscious cause” that appears in Seminar XI. There, Lacan states that every effect is submitted to the pressure of a “causal order” as long as it is a “lost cause”, i.e. a cause inherently an empty space. In other words, that the unconscious cause is inherently an empty space means that it is neither a being nor a non-being. This unconscious cause is defined as an interdiction. Lacan says in a cryptic way, “the prohibition that brings to being an existant” (Lacan, 1979: 128). According to Miller², to put into play a negative entity, a nothing that, however, is not nothing, that is like a call to being, introduces a rupture in the plane of immanence. This rupture is a determining factor for the emergence of the Lacanian subject. With respect to any plane of immanence – real, vital, or merely in terms of what is given – putting into play that negative entity opens a transcendent distance, the possibility to go beyond (in reference to Freud’s notion of “beyond the pleasure principle”). In other words, it is what elsewhere Miller called Lacan’s structure with a beyond: there is a beyond of everything that is given. In addition, this concept introduces what Miller names a “transfactual dimension”, which is essential in Lacan (Miller, 2006: 213).

In view of this we could, we claim that the subject in Laclau is a headless subject³. Precisely because transcendence, as is observed in Freud’s graphic and in

² “The setting in motion of such a negative entity – a nothing, yet a nothing that is not precisely nothing, that is a kind of call to being – introduces in fact (while determining the birth of the Lacanian subject and the destruction of the Hartmannian ego in psychoanalysis) a decisive break at the plane of immanence (expression taken from Deleuze) whether it is real, biological, natural, or merely given. With respect to every real, vital entity, to set into motion such a negative entity opens a transcendent distance, a beyond. It is even the principle that last year or two years ago I called in Lacan the structure with a beyond; there is a beyond of everything that is given. And this introduces what I called a transfactual dimension – essential in Lacan” (Miller, 2006: 213).

³ The notion of a headless subject is taken from Lacan (2003:188), referring to the way of expressing the drive, because the drive is articulated in terms of tension, outlining the edges in a

Laclau's work, is not located in the place of the leader; instead, it is placed in a beyond, in a foundation that is not (exactly) a foundation. As a consequence, we can speak of a 'headless subject' to illustrate Laclau's figure of the people.

Thus, we hold the figure of a 'headless subject' because, from our perspective, Laclau's great finding in *On Populist Reason* (2005) is that, when analyzing the problems of populism, he specifies the notion of heterogeneity. The author manages to circumscribe this notion, distinguishing it from the concept of antagonism, and taking it beyond the idea of dislocation. The heterogeneity is defined by the detour of the people and ends at the centre of his theoretical proposal: "the brake involved in this kind of exclusion is more radical than the one that is inherent in the antagonistic one: while antagonism still presupposes some sort of discursive inscription, the kind of exteriority we are referring to now presupposes not only an exteriority to something within a space of representation, but to the space of representation as such. I will call this type of exteriority social heterogeneity" (Laclau, 2005: 176).

The antagonism that underlies discourse already assumes some form of inscription, as contingent, but at the same time necessary, for the construction of the system. The heterogeneous, instead, is not inscribed; it is the real as a waste product from the process of signification. That is to say, from now on we are considering the real not only in its relation to antagonism, but mainly to the heterogeneous or, in psychoanalytic terms, as a *surplus-jouissance*. The heterogeneous is not placed in the 'inside' or the 'outside'. It is placed at a point of extimacy. Using this neologism, Lacan means that the most intimate is located on the outside and announces its presence as a strange body that recognizes a constitutive rupture of the intimacy (Miller, 1987).

60

It is in this sense that the 'people' in Laclau can be considered as a structure with a beyond. The transcendence is not located in the place of the leader; it is located beyond it, in the nothing that, however, is not nothing. For that reason, we claim that the figure that corresponds to 'people', as it is presented by Laclau, is that of the 'headless subject', as far as it is anchored in an empty transcendence. To use Laclau's terminology, the place of the transcendence is

topology where what is produced in the course of the drive is a circuit around an absence.

heterogeneity, not only a radical difference. More precisely and to use psychoanalytic concepts, heterogeneity refers to *surplus-jouissance*.

In conclusion, in this third turn of Laclau's theorization, we understand the heterogeneity as a real not only in its dimension of a lack in the symbolic order – as could be conceived in the dislocation notion – but in its dimension of pleasure.

Corollary

We have analyzed Laclau's work from a perspective that introduces elements of psychoanalysis and determined three stages: a first stage that corresponds to the centrality of the concept of antagonism, which represents the solution of the imaginary order to the impossibility of society, and in this respect, as the imaginization of the real that prevents and makes possible the systematicity of the signification system. In the second stage, Laclau's theory is organized from his idea of dislocation as an expression of the disjunction between the symbolic and the real, as the constitutive impossibility of the symbolic to deal with the real. And finally, the third stage is characterized by the concept of heterogeneity, as the *surplus-jouissance*. Heterogeneity emerges as a waste product of the reason that supports the configuration of the 'people', involving the affective dimension; like a lost cause that drives the social knotting.

The progressive idea of thinking of these three concepts as evolutionary stages of a theoretical development may emerge as a reflective temptation. However, we claim that these three elements should not be considered as one surpassing the other, i.e. as dislocation surpassing antagonism and heterogeneity surpassing dislocation. Instead, these three concepts together should be placed in the same theoretical field, because all of them arise as a consequence of Laclau having dealt with different problems throughout his work. Each of these concepts is useful for considering different problematics. For example, antagonism is useful for thinking about the specular other, not as the different or the Other, but in terms of the constitution of self, i.e. allowing the construction of a certain identity, at least, by identification. The concept of dislocation, by contrast, is useful? Insofar as it shows the limits of the symbolic order in dealing with the real. Thus, the deficiencies of what is instituted to solve a lack impossible to articulate can be evidenced. In fact, dislocation questions the blind confidence in the institutional possibility of overcoming the obstacles and romantic pro-

posals of consensus. Finally, heterogeneity can help us reflect upon subjective responsibility, according to Lacan's notion of 'lost cause', highlighting this time the double meaning of cause: as a cause that should be defended, and as what causes, as a foundation. On the one hand, the lost cause is a failed cause because, in the best of cases, it never fulfils itself completely. On the other hand, it is a lost cause because, in contrast to what academic knowledge teaches us, "if the cause is taken away, its effect will disappear" (*Ablata causa tollitur effectus*). For Laclau, the effects appear in the absence of the cause. These two meanings of 'lost cause' imply that there is no certainty regarding the starting points or destinies because there are no ultimate foundations to start from and give meaning. In line with this concept, there are no final aims established *a priori* which can be achieved in a complete (and finished) way. Therefore, such 'lost cause', as a function of the impossible, does not involve powerlessness, paralysis, or resignation. It implies "an experience that intends to transform the absent foundation into cause" (Alemán, 2009: 14), that is to say, it implies an ethical position because, when considering the 'lost cause', "there will always be something missing or excessive. In short, there will always be a real insisting on not being inscribed" (Lacan, 1988: 82). And this absence of certainties evokes a call to become involved in political struggles and to adopt an ethical posture. So the call to political militancy can be linked to the fact that we do not have anything guaranteed in advance, we do not know how events will develop and, as it is not possible to establish the path towards a reconciled society in a transparent and certain way – in addition to society always being impossible, we do not know to where this incessant irruption of the real into the symbolic-imaginary order may lead us; and finally, this call to militancy lies in the inextricable nature of heterogeneity.

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