

LACLAU AND MOUFFE, HEGEMONY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY

CONTEXT: new social movements of the 1960s make class reductionism, economism, and essentialism no longer viable

GRAMSCI AND HEGEMONY are mobilized as the most promising way to grapple with the pluralist challenge—but importantly, he is mobilized as heir to a rich tradition of Marxist thought that is not reducible to the Second International

REJECT: notions of totality, essence, universality, fixity, unitary founding principles, nature, transcendental order and meaning. Reject notion of society as a sutured whole. Reject privileged points of rupture in politics, rejection of privileged agents to carry out politics (esp. working class). Reject unitary, self-contained, and fixed subject (esp. a necessary class character to hegemony). Reject necessary links among struggles. Reject the idea that hegemonic articulations have fixed centers of power. Reject the idea that observed facts are temporarily out of sync with underlying essences. Reject determinism and teleological view of history. Reject necessity in political action. Reject any *a priori* agenda, identity, or interests for political agents. Reject any “final resolution of conflicts,” any “fully inclusive ‘we’” xvii

Any such representation (of unity, of totality, of underlying essence, of universality, etc.) is always merely a **CLAIM**, a political assertion of what is not in fact there. Any social order is a ‘precarious attempt to domesticate the field of differences’ 96.

RADICAL DEMOCRACY is an acceptance of radical pluralism, that is, an acceptance of the Deleuzian insistence. A recognition of the ineradicability of difference, that pluralism is the foundation of political life. It involves an agenda to deepen and broaden the democratic revolution, to struggle discursively over the definition of values like **liberty** and **equality** 174. It is a struggle against inequality 160, an opposition to subordination 154, a linking up of equalitarian equivalences 158. It aims to transform the existing relations of power through the disarticulation of the existing hegemonic ensemble that organizes power and a rearticulation of a new hegemonic ensemble, a “new popular hegemonic bloc” 72. The construction of ‘the popular’ as a unified pole. But democracy is not a positive agenda that can form the basis for the articulation of a new hegemony. It recognition and affirmation of multiplicity and the need to articulate merely sets the field for hegemonic politics. But it does not itself constitute “a viable project for the reconstruction of specific areas of society” 189. It may be that a concept like ‘the right to the city’ or ‘inhabitation’ could be part of such positive reconstitution of the social. Democratic **rights** in this context are pressed with respect for rights of other subordinated groups (and against the rights of dominant groups); they are rights claimed and exercised *collectively*. And they would be a terrain of struggle to discursively redefine existing rights and claim new ones. The subject of democracy, of course, is not a unitary sovereign people (a la Lummis); it is rather what we might call an articulation of popular struggles, one that achieves “an unstable equilibrium” between democratic and hegemonic impetuses 189.

EMBRACE: partiality of the social; undecidability; the constructed, unstable, struggled-over, and overdetermined character of identity and subject; all centers, autonomies, fixities, dominations, etc. are always *partial*, never total; the irreducibility of difference; the ubiquity of power; the ineradicability of conflict; the contingent character of political history; the potential value of liberal-democratic ideas; all social forces can articulate with others in diverse ways; we cannot predict how democratic politics will play out; the proliferation of multiple identities, conflicts, struggles; the constant displacement of centers, of concentrations, of regularities.

Underlying these proceedings, even if they do not refer to it, is a **DELEUZIAN** insistence that being is difference and that unity/sameness is forged out of the fact of diversity—that observed diversity is not a surficial, apparent face of an underlying, primary, and constitutive unity. Diversity is, rather, being itself: it is irreducible, it cannot be put back together again, led back to an originary source.

As a result, politics is a rhizome: there are no privileged points of access, no trunks or tap roots from which all politics must flow. And so anti-capitalism, while it is necessary, is not privileged or originary.

HEGEMONIC ARTICULATION: None of the rejection of totality and embrace of partiality means they accept a multiplicity of unconnected local struggles, or that power is totally and evenly dispersed. Rather they advocate the partial reorganization of the social into hegemonic articulations. Various elements (individuals, groups, movements, etc.) articulate with each other (through forging **equivalence**). In doing so, they are partly redefined by their articulation to others. This articulation is cemented by a political idea (ideology, consciousness, G’s ‘collective will’), a hegemonic principle that is collectively **forged** (largely by the articulating elements acting together 87). That principle is not preexisting and discovered by analysis. The elements are not pre-given, they do not link up discretely such that they remain distinct (and can delink and return to their previous form). Nor do they entirely dissolve into a transcendental whole. Each is overdetermined by the others; each is both internal and external to the others, and to the larger entity. Articulation is the process that (partly) forms political subjects and identities. Articulation occurs through **discourse** (a structured coherence), and discourses are the result of articulating practices. “Elements” are emplaced in the discourse, and thus become “moments” in the structured whole. But this process is never complete, never final. Articulated hegemonies (Lacan’s ‘nodal points’) fix meanings, subjects, relations, agendas, identities, etc. They produce ‘a relatively stable system of differences’ 143. They construct a social identity by linking up diverse elements and expelling opposing ones 165. But they are always partial (they confront other hegemonic forces), they are always unstable, they are always subject to challenge. What hegemonic articulation implies, then is collective action to reorganize power relations—to deconcentrate existing concentrations, and reconcentrate power into new formations. Diverse resistance becomes collective action when an external discourse (e.g. liberty or equality) subverts the legitimacy of existing relations of power.

OVERDETERMINATION involves ‘a critique of every type of fixity through an affirmation of the incomplete, open, and politically negotiable character of identity.’ ‘The presence of some objects in the others prevents any of their identities from being fixed’ 104. Political identity is never entirely determined by relations with others, by what is **outside**. It is also never entirely determined by the self, by what is **inside**. That is overdetermination. This is their opening to insist, which they do often, that elements are not fully constituted when they articulate, nor are they unchanged by articulating to a hegemonic bloc.

ANTAGONISM is a hard one. It is the outcome of the acceptance of a social that is never fully sutured. An affirmation of the **partial**, fragmented, fact of the social, which is riven with **frontiers**. Antagonism is not necessarily conflictual, just difference-acknowledging. However, of course, difference can be constructed as conflictual. Chains of equivalence can construct an understanding of the social as divided into two distinct, hostile camps. Since every hegemonic articulation is partial, since it can never totally encompass the social such that it sutures society, there are always other, antagonistic hegemonic forces outside the articulation.

EQUIVALENCE: when total, is the cancellation of all difference. At the same time, it can never be total. It is always partial, so that elements are brought into a coordinated relation, but never dissolved into each other, or into a transcendental whole. Thus any existing relation of equivalence involves two elements being-the-same-and-remaining-distinct. All hegemonic articulations involve **partial** equivalence, where autonomy and fusion are both partly achieved. L+M counterpose **autonomy** and equivalence, as opposite ideal types. Example: discursively constructing inequality as illegitimate makes it possible to construct all forms of inequality as equivalent 155. EG making a relation of subordination into a relation of oppression and domination.