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Chapter 1

Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis

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This book responds to the explosion of interest in the concept of discourse and discourse analysis in the humanities and the social sciences.[1] However, it takes a different tack to the prevailing currents of research. To begin with, the emphasis of each chapter is on the application of discourse theory to empirical case studies, rather than the technical analysis of discourse viewed narrowly as speech or text. In so doing, each contribution works creatively within Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's research programme in discourse theory as elaborated over the last fifteen years. This programme comprises a novel fusion of recent developments in Marxist, post-structuralist, post-analytical and psychoanalytic theory.[2] Moreover, while this theoretical approach fully endorses contemporary critiques of positivist, behaviouralist and essentialist paradigms, it is not content to remain at a purely theoretical level. Nor does it eschew important questions of method and epistemology neglected by over-hasty dismissals of science and rationality. Instead, it seeks, where possible, to find points of convergence with these approaches, and endeavours to put forward plausible and empirically justifiable explanations of the social and political world.[3]

More specifically, this newly emerging approach is directed at the analysis of key political issues in our contemporary world. This is especially important because those contributing to 'the new discursivity' have, with some notable exceptions, neglected a

range of traditional topics in political theory and political science.[4] For instance, while a recently published reader on discourse analysis includes contributions from leading sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists, noting approvingly the way in which discursive methods have been applied to broader social processes, there are no essays on political analysis.[5] Hence there is little or no examination of populist and nationalist ideologies; the discourses of new social movements; the political construction of social identities; the forms of hegemonic struggle; different logics of collective action; the formulation and implementation of public policy; and the making and unmaking of political institutions; not to mention the traditional topics of political science, such as voting behaviour and political decision-making.[6]

While it is impossible to do justice to the immense changes in our contemporary condition, it is possible to discern a number of paradigm cases of politics in our increasingly globalised world. Taken randomly, the signifiers 'Rwanda', 'Kosovo', 'the European Union', 'Tienanman Square', 'Nelson Mandela', 'global warming', 'the Third Way' and the 'New World Order' bear witness to a rapid explosion of radical ethnic and national identities, the emergence of new social movements, and the appearance and dissolution of founding political myths and collective imaginaries. Issues of identity formation, the production of novel ideologies, the logics of social movements and the structuring of societies by a plurality of social imaginaries are central objects of investigation for discourse theory. Together they constitute the matrix of empirical and theoretical questions addressed by the various essays included in this volume. Each of the chapters presents original research on carefully delimited questions opened up by discourse theory. While they range considerably in their geographical and historical focus and scope, they are unified by their attempt to grapple with some of the central issues of our times. Moreover, they use a shared language of explanation and interpretation, and aim to

develop the conceptual infrastructure in ways that will enable the examination of comparable cases. In so doing, each contribution locates the issue investigated within existing approaches to the topic, introduces and articulates new explanatory concepts within the overall parameters of discourse theory, and produces conclusions that advance our understanding of the contemporary world.

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The aim of this introductory chapter is to outline the basic contours of the theoretical framework informing this book. It comprises four parts. We begin by setting out the key assumptions of discourse theory. We then trace the emergence and constitution of discourse theory by examining the way this research programme has distinguished itself from the dominant approaches in social science research. In the third part we present the basic concepts and logics of the approach, and how they have been applied in the different chapters of the book. Finally, we outline the conceptual and thematic organisation of the various contributions to the volume.

The underlying assumptions of discourse theory

Discourse theory assumes that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is conferred by historically specific systems of rules. Consider for instance a forest standing in the path of a proposed motorway. It may simply represent an inconvenient obstacle impeding the rapid implementation of a new road system, or might be viewed as a site of special interest for scientists and naturalists, or a symbol of the nation's threatened natural heritage. Whatever the case, its meaning depends on the orders of discourse that constitute its identity and

significance. In discourses of economic modernisation, trees may be understood as the disposable means for (or obstacles to) continued economic growth and prosperity, whereas in environmentalist discourses they might represent essential components of a viable eco-system or objects of intrinsic value and beauty. Each of these discourses is a social and political construction that establishes a system of relations between different objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify. In our example these subject positions might be those of 'developers', 'naturalists', 'environmentalists' or 'eco-warriors'. Moreover, a political project will attempt to weave together different strands of discourse in an effort to dominate or organise a field of meaning so as to fix the identities of objects and practices in a particular way.

As a first approximation, then, discourse theory investigates the way in which social practices articulate and contest the discourses that constitute social reality. These practices are possible because systems of meaning are contingent and can never completely exhaust a field of meaning. In order to unpack and elaborate upon this complex set of statements, we need working definitions of the categories of discursivity, discourse, and discourse analysis.[7] The discursive can be defined as a theoretical horizon within which the being of objects is constituted. In other words, all objects are objects of discourse, as their meaning depends upon a socially constructed system of rules and significant differences.[8] This idea of the discursive as a horizon of meaningful practices and significant differences does not reduce everything to language or entail scepticism about the existence of the world. On the contrary, it circumvents scepticism and idealism by arguing that we are always internal to a world of signifying practices and objects. It thus views as logically self-contradictory all attempts to escape and conceptualise this world from an extra-discursive perspective.[9] As Laclau and Mouffe put it in a frequently quoted passage:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ''natural phenomena'' or ''expressions of the wrath of God'', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.[10]

In other words, to use Heidegger's terminology, human beings are 'thrown into' and inhabit a world of meaningful discourses and practices, and cannot conceive or think about objects outside of it.[11]

We take discourse or discourses to refer to systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects.[12] At this lower level of abstraction, discourses are concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution, which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political frontiers between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In addition, therefore, they always involve the exercise of power, as their constitution involves the exclusion of certain possibilities and a consequent structuring of the relations between different social agents.[13] Moreover, discourses are contingent and historical constructions, which are always vulnerable to those political forces excluded in their production, as well as the dislocatory effects of events beyond their control.[14]

'Thatcherism' as analysed by Stuart Hall and others is an example of what we mean by a political discourse.[15] Hall demonstrates how the construction of Thatcherist discourse involved the articulation of a number of disparate ideological elements. These included

traditional Tory values about law and order, 'Englishness', the family, tradition and patriotism, on the one hand, and classical liberal ideas about the free market and 'homo economicus' on the other. Moreover, he shows how these elements were linked together by establishing a clear set of political frontiers within the Conservative Party and its supporters (between the so-called 'Wets' and 'Drys'), and between those who supported the crisis-ridden discourse of social democracy and those who wanted its radical restructuring. Where Hall differs from our approach is in his retention of the ontological separation between different types of social practice, whether understood as ideological, sociological, economic or political. Discourse theorists, by contrast, affirm the discursive character of all social practices and objects, and reject the idea that ideological practices simply constitute one area or 'region' of social relations. Thus for instance the distinctions between political, economic and ideological practices are pragmatic and analytical, and strictly internal to the category of discourse. This is worth stressing because it distinguishes our approach from those approaches to political analysis that use the concept of discourse, but regard discourses as little more than sets of ideas or beliefs shared by policy communities, politicians or social movements.[16]

Discourse analysis refers to the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms. This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organisations and institutions – as 'texts' or 'writing' (in the Derridean sense that 'there is nothing outside the text'[17]). In other words, empirical data are viewed as sets of signifying practices that constitute a ' "discourse" and its "reality" ',[18] thus providing the conditions which enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices. This enables discourse theorists to draw upon and develop a number of techniques and methods in linguistic and literary theory commensurate with its ontological assumptions.[19]

These include Derrida's 'method' of deconstruction, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical approaches to discourse analysis, the theory of rhetoric and tropes, Saussure's distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles of language, the Jakobsonian concepts of metaphor and metonymy as developed by Lacan, and Laclau and Mouffe's logics of equivalence and difference.[20]

One question that arises in this regard concerns the application of discourse theory to empirical cases. From a discourse theory perspective, this problem is crystallised around the need to avoid the twin pitfalls of empiricism and theoreticism. Put briefly, while discourse theorists acknowledge the central role of theoretical frameworks in delimiting their objects and methods of research, thus rejecting crude empiricist and positivist approaches, they are concerned to prevent the subsumption of each empirical case under its own abstract theoretical concepts and logics. In other words, instead of applying a pre-existing theory onto a set of empirical objects, discourse theorists seek to articulate their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research.[21] The condition for this conception of conducting research is that the concepts and logics of the theoretical framework must be sufficiently 'open' and flexible enough to be adapted, deformed and transformed in the process of application.[22] This conception excludes essentialist and reductionist theories of society, which tend to predetermine the outcome of research and thus preclude the possibility of innovative accounts of phenomena. It also rules out the organic development of the research programme as it tries to understand and explain new empirical cases.

Discourse theory and mainstream approaches to political analysis

The emergence and development of discourse theory has been stimulated by a number of perceived weaknesses in existing paradigms of social science research. However, while it

rejects simplistic behavioural, rationalist and positivist approaches, it endeavours to draw critically upon Marxist, social constructivist, and interpretative models of social science research, such as those inspired by Max Weber. It thus offers novel ways to think about the relationship between social structures and political agency, the role of interests and identities in explaining social action, the interweaving of meanings and practices, and the character of social and historical change. To begin with, discourse theory challenges the class reductionism and economic determinism of classical Marxism. By radicalising Gramsci's and Althusser's reworking of Marxist conceptions of politics and ideology, and drawing upon post-structuralist critiques of language, it deconstructs the Marxist ontology in which all identity is reduced to a class essence, and introduces a relational conception of discourse.[23] In so doing, discourse theory conceives of society as a symbolic order in which social antagonisms and structural crises can not be reduced to essential class cores determined by economic processes and relations.[24] It also implies that all ideological elements in a discursive field are contingent, rather than fixed by a class essence, and that there is no fundamental class agency or political project that determines processes of historical change in an a priori fashion. Instead, discourse theory puts forward an alternative conceptual framework built around the primacy of political concepts and logics such as hegemony, antagonism and dislocation.

In addition, by drawing on hermeneutical critiques of behaviouralism, discourse theory opposes the crude separation of socially constructed meanings and interpretations, on the one hand, and objective political behaviour and action on the other. Following the writings of Weber, Taylor, Winch and Wittgenstein, discourse theory stresses that meanings, interpretations and practices are always inextricably linked.[25] However, discourse theorists are not just concerned with the way in which social actors understand their particular worlds, in which case the object of research would be to comprehend social actions by empathising with

the agents who act. As discourses are relational systems of meaning and practice that constitute the identities of subjects and objects, attention is focussed more on the creation, disruption and transformation of the structures that organise social life. A consequence of this hermeneutical orientation is that theory cannot be separated wholly and objectively from the reality it seeks to explain, as theoretical practices are themselves partly constitutive of (and shaped by) the social worlds in which the subjects and objects of research find themselves. At least in the social sciences, this means that there is a weakening of the once sacrosanct distinction between objective scientific explanations and subjective hermeneutical descriptions and understandings.[26]

Discourse theorists also reject rationalist approaches to political analysis, which presume that social actors have given interests and preferences, or which focus on the rational (or irrational) functioning of social systems. In these conceptions of politics, the actions of agents can both be explained and predicted by reference to individual calculations of economic self-interest,[27] or relations of power and domination can be inferred from the failure of social agents to recognise and act upon their 'real interests'.[28] Similarly, social systems are either assumed to consist of functionally interrelated elements, or are intrinsically contradictory entities that are constantly crisis-ridden and transformed in predetermined ways. As against these approaches, discourse theorists stress the historical contingency and 'structural impossibility' of social systems, and refuse to posit essentialist conceptions of social agency. Instead, agents and systems are social constructs that undergo constant historical and social change as a result of political practices. Indeed, a major task of the discourse theorist is to chart and explain such historical and social change by recourse to political factors and logics.

Finally, discourse theory stands firmly opposed to positivistic and naturalistic conceptions of knowledge and method. It firmly rejects the search for scientific laws of society and politics grounded on empirical generalisations, which can form the basis of

testable empirical predictions.[29] Moreover, it opposes naïve conceptions of truth, in which the only test of theories and empirical accounts is against an unproblematical objective reality.[30] As we have already suggested, discourse theory takes its lead from interpretative methods of social inquiry in which emphasis is placed on understanding and explaining the emergence and logic of discourses, and the socially constructed identities they confer upon social agents. This does not, however, entail an 'anything goes'[31] approach to the generation and evaluation of empirical evidence made in its name. While the truth or falsity of its accounts are partly relative to the system of concepts and logics of discourse theory used (as in any other empirical inquiry), the ultimate tribunal of experience is the degree to which its accounts provide plausible and convincing explanations of carefully problematised phenomena for the community of social scientists. Lastly, as against the charges of relativism that are sometimes levelled at the programme,[32] it also rejects the rigid separation of facts and values, accepting that the discourse theorist and analyst is always located in a particular historical and political context with no neutral Archimedean point from which to describe, argue and evaluate.[33]

The basic concepts and logics of discourse theory

Articulation, discourse, nodal points and empty signifiers

As we have intimated, discourse theory investigates the way social practices systematically form the identities of subjects and objects by articulating together a series of contingent signifying elements available in a discursive field. Moreover, while discourse theory stresses the ultimate contingency of all social identity, it nonetheless acknowledges that partial fixations of meaning are both possible and necessary.[34] In this way, it provides an account of social change that neither reduces all discontinuity to an essential logic, nor

denies any continuity and fixity of meaning whatsoever. Besides the concept of discourse itself, Laclau and Mouffe introduce four basic categories in order to account for this conception of identity. These are the categories of articulation, elements, moments and nodal points. To begin with, Laclau and Mouffe argue that all identity emerges through the articulation or rearticulation of signifying elements. Hence they define <u>articulation</u> as 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice'. <u>Discourse</u> is 'the structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice'. <u>Moments</u> are the 'differential positions' that 'appear articulated within a discourse', whereas <u>elements</u> are those differences that are 'not discursively articulated' because of the 'floating' character they acquire in periods of social crisis and dislocation.[35]

Nevertheless, Laclau and Mouffe's affirmation of both the ultimate contingency and the partial fixity of meaning leaves them with something of a paradox. If all social forms are contingent, if 'the transition from ''elements'' to ''moments'' is never complete',[36] how then is <u>any</u> identity or social formation possible? A first response to this problem involves the introduction of the concept of <u>nodal points</u> to account for the structuration of elements into a meaningful system of moments, into a discourse.[37] Nodal points are thus privileged signifiers or reference points ('points de capiton' in the Lacanian vocabulary[38]) in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning or 'chain of signification.' In communist ideology, to take an example used by Zizek, a number of pre-existing and available signifiers ('democracy', 'state', 'freedom', and so forth) acquire a new meaning by being articulated around the signifier 'communism', which occupies the structural position of the nodal point. Thus, due to the intervention of this nodal point, these elements are transformed into internal moments of communist discourse. Democracy acquires the meaning of 'real' democracy as opposed to 'bourgeois' democracy, freedom acquires an

economic connotation and the role and function of the state is transformed. In other words, their meaning is partially fixed by reference to the nodal point 'communism'.[39]

Drawing on some of these insights, Steve Bastow's chapter on inter-war French fascism and the neo-socialism of Marcel Deat shows how essentialist and ideal-typical explanations fail to provide an adequate characterisation of Deat's neo-socialist discourse. They thus foreclose a clear understanding of how neo-socialists could end-up collaborating with Nazi Germany during the second world war. By contrast, he emphasises that the various mutations of Deat's neo-socialism in the 1930s comprised a contingent and unstable articulation of disparate elements, each organised around a different nodal point. He shows, moreover, how the tensions in these articulatory configurations help us to explain the crisis and changing nature of the discourse during the late 1930s and 1940s.

In his more recent work, Laclau has further developed the logic of discursive structuration by introducing the category of the 'empty signifier'. As we have already noted, in discourse theory the social field can never be closed, and political practices attempt to 'fill' this lack of closure. As Laclau puts it, 'although the fullness and universality of society is unachievable, its need does not disappear: it will always show itself through the presence of its absence'.[40] In other words, even if the full closure of the social is not realisable in any actual society, the idea of closure and fullness still functions as an (impossible) ideal. Societies are thus organised and centred on the basis of such (impossible) ideals. What is necessary for the emergence and function of these ideals is the production of empty signifiers. In order to illustrate this paradoxical statement Laclau uses the Hobbesian example of the state of nature as a condition of radical social disorder and disintegration:

[I]n a situation of radical disorder ''order'' is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various

political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function.[41]

Thus, the articulation of a political discourse can only take place around an empty signifier that functions as a nodal point. In other words, emptiness is now revealed as an essential quality of the nodal point, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success.

Although Laclau uses the example of order, other signifiers can function in a similar way. Generalising the argument, he argues that 'any term which, in a certain political context becomes the signifier of the lack, plays the same role.' 'Politics', he continues, 'is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers'.[42] Numerous chapters in this volume deploy the category of an empty signifier in their analyses. In Chapter 4 of this volume, Anthony Clohesy shows how the term 'justice' performs the role of an empty signifier in Irish Republicanist discourse. He argues that it is precisely because of the emptiness of this vital signifier in this discourse that different political strategies were able to confer different meanings and connotations onto the evolution of Republicanist discourse. This enables him to trace out the overall trajectory of Republicanism, and show the remaining aporias within its evolving discourse and strategy.

The primacy of politics[43]

However, this solution - the conceptualisation of nodal points and empty signifiers - still begs the question as to the emergence and constitution of these partial fixations. It is here that Laclau and Mouffe affirm the primacy of the political dimension in their social ontology.

Discourses and the identities produced through them are inherently political entities that involve the construction of antagonisms and the exercise of power. Moreover, because social systems have a fundamentally political character, they are always vulnerable to those forces that are excluded in the process of political formation. It is around this set of processes that Laclau and Mouffe seek to erect a political theory of discourse. In so doing, they introduce the concepts of social antagonism and hegemony, as well as the logics of equivalence and difference, each of which needs greater examination.

The construction and experience of social antagonisms are central for discourse theory. At the outset, social antagonisms introduce an irreconcilable negativity into social relations. This is because they reveal the limit points in society in which social meaning is contested and cannot be stabilised. Antagonisms are thus evidence of the frontiers of a social formation. As Aletta Norval discusses in the concluding chapter, they show the points where identity is no longer fixed in a differential system, but is contested by forces which stand outside - or at the very limit - of that order.[44] In so doing, their role is formative of social objectivity itself.[45] As they cannot be reduced to the preconstituted interests and identities of social agents, the construction of antagonisms and the institution of political frontiers between agents are partly <u>constitutive</u> of identities and of social objectivity itself. In this way, the construction and contingent resolution of antagonistic relations precludes the possibility of necessary and determining logics operating in history and society. In Lacanian terms, antagonisms disclose the <u>lack</u> at the heart of all social identity and objectivity.[46] The space of the social is thus revealed as a field that can never be closed or constituted as an objective full presence: 'The limit of the social must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence. Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality.'[47] It is this central impossibility which, as we have

already pointed out, makes necessary the production of empty signifiers, a production which in turn makes possible the articulation of political discourses, of partial fixations of meaning.

What are social antagonisms in Laclau and Mouffe's perspective? They insist that social antagonisms occur because social agents are <u>unable</u> to attain fully their identity. Thus, an antagonism is seen to occur when 'the presence of [an] "Other" prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution.'[48] This 'blockage' of identity is a mutual experience for both the antagonising force and the force that is being antagonised: 'Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonises me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent it being fixed as full positivity.'[49] Given this, the task of the discourse analyst is to explore the different forms of this impossibility, and the mechanisms by which the blockage of identity is constructed in antagonistic terms by social agents.

To illustrate this conception, let us consider the clash between local residents and the Manchester Airport authority over the building of a new runway, as presented by Steven Griggs and David Howarth in this book.[50] In this micro-political analysis of popular protest, they argue that it was the failure of the local residents' normal means of influencing public policy via lobbying and the Public Inquiry - consonant with their 'Middle England', middle class identities - that galvanised their opposition to the runway project and led them to form unusual alliances with militant environmentalists and 'eco-warriors'. Similarly, those who favoured the building of the runway accused their opponents of preventing the economic regeneration of Manchester and of jeopardising 50 000 jobs in the North-West region. Both sets of opponents perceived each other as 'blocking' their respective identities and interests, and drew upon divergent ideological resources to construct this mutual hostility. In this highly simplified and condensed illustration, we see that social antagonism arises because of the

inability of differently located social agents to achieve their respective identities – 'residents and homeowners', 'Airport managers and business entrepreneurs' - rather than a clash of pre-existing forms of positive identification. The protest action, and its possibility of being extended into other spheres of society, results in the establishment of a political frontier separating the two sides, while simultaneously constituting different modes of identification.

Logics of equivalence and difference

In order to account for the construction of social antagonisms, Laclau and Mouffe must provide an understanding of the ways in which antagonistic relations threaten discursive systems. If this is to be shown, then a place must be found for the existence of a purely negative identity. In other words, they must theorise an identity that cannot be integrated into an existing system of differences. To do so, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the logic of equivalence. This logic functions by creating equivalential identities that express a pure negation of a discursive system. For instance, in her account of the Mexican revolutionary mystique Rosa Buenfil argues that the Mexican revolution can be understood as an overdetermination of different social movements organised around a mystical discourse. She argues that this was made possible because 'the people' were able to weaken their internal differences and organise themselves as 'the oppressed', by opposing themselves to a series of others. In this way, the government, the incumbent President, the Church, landlords and entrepreneurs were made equivalent to one another by being presented as 'the oppressors' of the people.

If the logic of equivalence functions by splitting a system of differences and instituting a political frontier between two opposed camps, the logic of difference does exactly the opposite. It consists in the expansion of a given system of differences by dissolving existing

chains of equivalence and incorporating those disarticulated elements into an expanding

order. Whereas a project employing the logic of equivalence seeks to divide social space by

condensing meanings around two antagonistic poles, a project employing a logic of difference

attempts to weaken and displace a sharp antagonistic polarity, endeavouring to relegate that

division to the margins of society.[51] Kevin Adamson's careful examination of Romanian

politics after the revolutionary events of 1989 shows how the mutation of revisionist

socialism into a distinctive social democratic ideology involved the transformation of

signifiers associated with neo-liberal transition discourse. Thus elements such as the 'market'

and 'privatisation' were gradually incorporated into a fledgling social democratic discourse,

and were organised around the powerful metaphor of 'the transition'. This fundamentally

challenged the dominant neo-liberal interpretation of transition from socialism to democracy.

Similarly, David Howarth's examination of the transformation of Black Consciousness

discourse into the non-racial democratic discourse of the UDF and the ANC in South Africa

during the late 1970s and early 1980s shows how this process occurred against the backdrop

of the ruling National Party's strategy of transformism.[52] In this quintessential logic of

difference, the National Party sought to expand its bases of consent by differentially

incorporating 'Indians', so-called 'Coloured's and certain categories of 'urban blacks' into the

dominant order by offering them certain political, social and economic concessions. In so

doing, the South African state endeavoured to disarticulate the growing political alliances

between these groups, thus weakening the anti-apartheid opposition.

These examples should not lead to the conclusion that the logics of equivalence and

difference are mutually exclusive. There is always a complex interaction between the two, just

as there is a play between identity and difference, and universality and particularity.[53] This is

demonstrated in Neil Harvey and Chris Halverson's chapter on the singular experience of

women's struggles in the Zapatista movement. They show that the Zapatista movement not

only poses a challenge to the Mexican state by articulating a radical anti-government identity, but it also enables marginalised groups within the indigenous communities to contest exclusionary practices and open up spaces of differences within the collective identity. As they argue, 'the significance of Zapatista discourse is given not only by its radical anti-government position, but rather by the numerous ways in which indigenous men, women and children are able to appropriate it for their particular and shared struggles against injustice.' While their chapter can be understood in terms of logics of equivalence and difference, it also points toward the possibility of a different conception of politics. This conception would not be reducible to questions of hegemony, power and violence, but asserts instead the irreducible nature of singular experience, the limitations of any totalizing discourse and, consequently, the possibility of disarmament and coexistence, or what Derrida has called a 'politics of friendship'.

Subject positions, dislocation and political subjectivity

In discourse theory, questions surrounding the way social agents 'live out' their identities and act – questions that pertain to the concept of subjectivity - are of central importance. In this regard, discourse theorists distinguish between subject positions and political subjectivity in order to capture the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure, on the one hand, and to account for the agency of subjects on the other. In order to locate the emergence of this conception in Laclau and Mouffe's writings, it is useful to consider their views in relation to Althusser's influential theory of the subject. Drawing on Freud and Lacan, and opposing perspectives such as phenomenology, empiricism or rational choice theory, which view the subject as an originator of its own ideas and values, or endowed with essential properties such as rationality, Althusser insists that subjects are constructed - 'interpellated' or 'hailed' as he

puts it - by ideological practices. In other words, individuals acquire an identity of who they are and their role in society by being positioned in certain ways by a whole series of unconscious practices, rituals, customs and beliefs, with which they come to identify.[54] According to Laclau and Mouffe, however, Althusser's account is inadequate in two respects. Firstly, ideological practices are regarded as a 'relatively autonomous' region of a social formation, a proposition that runs counter to the idea of discourses including all types of social practice. Secondly, subjects are constituted by ideological practices, which are in turn determined by underlying social structures. This strongly reduces the autonomy of social agents to the mere effects of pre-existing social structures.

In other words, while Laclau and Mouffe accept Althusser's critique of a unified and self-transparent subject - a subject which is the source of its own ideas and actions - and thus accept that the identities of subjects are discursively constructed, they do not affirm the deterministic connotations of Althusser's theory. By contrast, they distinguish between subject positions and political subjectivity.[55] Drawing on Foucauldian themes, the former category designates the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure.[56] Rather than a homogenous subject with particular interests, this means that any 'concrete individual' can have a number of different subject positions. A particular empirical agent at any given point in time might identify herself, or be simultaneously positioned, as 'black', 'middle class', 'Christian', and a 'woman'.[57] If the concept of subject position accounts for the multiple forms by which agents are produced as social actors, the concept of political subjectivity concerns the way in which social actors act. In other words, in order to go beyond the privileging of the structure over the agent in structuralism without recourse to a voluntaristic privileging of the agent, as is evident in different currents of methodological individualism, Laclau argues that the actions of subjects emerge because of the contingency of those discursive structures through which a subject obtains its identity.

This presupposes the category of <u>dislocation</u>, which refers to the process by which the contingency of discursive structures is made visible.[58] This 'decentring' of the structure through social processes such as the extension of capitalist relations to new spheres of social life[59] shatters already existing identities and literally induces an identity crisis for the subject. However, dislocations are not solely traumatic occurrences. They also have a productive side. 'If', as Laclau puts it, 'on the one hand they threaten identities, on the other, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted'.[60] In other words, if dislocations disrupt identities and discourses, they also create a lack at the level of meaning that stimulates new discursive constructions, which attempt to suture the dislocated structure. In short, it is the 'failure' of the structure, and as we have seen of those subject positions which are part of such a structure, that 'compels' the subject to act, to assert anew its subjectivity. As Yannis Stavrakakis argues in his account of the emergence of Green ideology, this ideological form emerges as a response to the dislocation of radical discourses during the late 1960s. The crisis of the left creates a lack of meaning and a need for rearticulation of the radical tradition. One of the dominant versions of this rearticulation took place around the nodal point 'nature' which during the same period - and due to the severity of the environmental crisis - emerged as the <u>point de capiton</u> of a newly emerging paradigm regulating the relation between humans and their environment.

Returning to our discussion of agency, the political subject is neither simply <u>determined</u> by the structure, nor does it <u>constitute</u> the structure. Rather, the political subject is forced to take decisions - or identify with certain political projects and the discourses they articulate - when social identities are in crisis and structures need to be recreated. In Lacanian terms, the emergence of political subjectivity is the result of a lack in the structure. It is this lack in the structure that 'causes' subjects to identify with those social constructions that seem capable of suturing the rift in a symbolic order. In short, it is in the process of this

identification that political subjectivities are created and formed. Once formed and stabilised they become those subject positions which 'produce' individuals with certain characteristics and attributes.

The two chapters by P. Sik-Ying Ho and A. Kat-Ta Tsang, and Jason Glynos provide an overview of the play between lack and identification by focussing on one of the areas in which the politics of subjectivity seems of the utmost importance, namely, that of sexual identity. By examining the emergence of lesbi-gay identities in Hong-Kong, Ho and Tsang show how identifying with particular names, with new subject positions, constitutes the first step in asserting a new sexual identity. In his chapter, Jason Glynos suggests how Lacan breaks with a biological versus social constructivist dichotomy in conceptualising sexual difference. Methodologically, he takes contemporary theoretical discussions on sexual identity as themselves the empirical base upon which he sets Lacanian categories to work. Lacan's categories of the imaginary, real and symbolic are deployed in a way that allows him to, firstly, reframe standard theoretical debates on sexual identity and, secondly, to suggest an alternative way of formulating sexual difference.

Hegemony, myths and imaginaries

Thus far we have outlined the basic ontological assumptions and conceptual innovations underpinning discourse theory, and have stressed the centrality of dislocations and social antagonisms in forming the political identities of social subjects. We now need to consider the concept of hegemony, which is also central to discourse theory. For discourse theory, hegemonic practices are an exemplary form of political activity that involves the articulation of different identities and subjectivities into a common project, while hegemonic formations are the outcomes of these projects' endeavours to create new forms of social order from a

variety of dispersed or dislocated elements. As we have noted, this conception radicalises

Gramsci's concept of hegemony. As against Lenin's conception of hegemony, in which a

vanguard party has the historically determined role of engineering temporary class alliances in

order to conduct revolutionary struggle, Gramsci understands hegemony to be the articulation

of different forces by the working class, in which the proletariat transcends its corporate

interests and represents the universal interests of 'the people' or 'nation'. In short, for

Gramsci hegemony is not simply an instrumental political strategy, but a general political

logic involving the construction of a new 'common sense' - what Gramsci calls 'intellectual,

cultural and moral leadership' - that can structure an emergent 'historical bloc'.[61]

In developing their conception, Laclau and Mouffe deconstruct the remaining

essentialist assumptions in Gramsci's texts. These are his insistence on the role of a

'fundamental social class' in bringing about social change, and his commitment to 'a decisive

nucleus of economic activity' structuring all societies, both of which imply that society is a

self-enclosed totality whose character is determined and comprehended by objective laws of

history.[62] As we have already noted, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse is predicated on

the ultimate impossibility of societal closure, a condition that makes articulatory practices and

political agency possible. In order for there to be hegemonic practices, Laclau and Mouffe

stipulate two further conditions. These are the existence of antagonistic forces, and the

instability of the political frontiers that divide them.[63] Thus, hegemonic practices presuppose a

social field criss-crossed by antagonisms, and the presence of elements that can be articulated

by opposed political projects. The major aim of hegemonic projects is to construct and

stabilise the nodal points that form the basis of concrete social orders by articulating as many

available elements – floating signifiers - as possible.[64]

These examples show that no discourse is capable of completely hegemonising a field

of discursivity, thus eliminating the experience of dislocation and the construction of

antagonisms. However, it would be incorrect to conclude at this high level of abstraction that all discourses are equally successful or unsuccessful in their attempts to achieve hegemony. In this respect, Laclau introduces the conceptual distinction between myths and social imaginaries. In both cases the background against which these formations emerge is that of structural dislocation. Let us first examine the case of myth. At the outset, Laclau points out that the 'condition for the emergence of myth ... is a structural dislocation'.[65] Myths construct new spaces of representation that attempt to suture the dislocated space in question. Their effectiveness is essentially hegemonic, as they involve the formation of 'a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements'.[66] From their emergence until their dissolution, myths can function as a surface of inscription for a variety of social demands and dislocations. However, when a myth has proved to be successful in neutralising social dislocations and incorporating a great number of social demands, then we can say that the myth has been transformed to an imaginary.[67] A collective social imaginary is defined by Laclau as 'a horizon' or 'absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility', and he gives examples such as the Christian Millennium, the Enlightenment and positivism's conception of progress as evidence of these social phenomena.[68]

Many chapters in this collection utilise these ideas about hegemony in producing their accounts. In the first chapter of the book, Sebastian Barros and Gustavo Castagnola analyse the long-term effects of the crisis of Peronist hegemony between 1955 and 1973. They show how the initial framing of political identities in Peronist discourse, in which popular sectors were incorporated into the dominant order, turned the political arena into a battlefield of competing political forces each attempting to impose their own particular and irreconcilable demands. The presence of these particularistic identities precluded the formation of a common social imaginary and obstructed the emergence of a stable hegemonic formation in Argentinian politics during the period. Using a similar logic, Nur Betul Celik shows how new

antagonisms and dislocations have eroded the hegemony of Kemalist discourse in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s. She examines the emergence and changing nature of Kemalist hegemony since the 1940s showing how its ambiguous character has both restricted the rules of the political game, while making possible the construction of alternative political identities. As she shows, the dissolution of this hegemonic formation carries both the possibility of greater democratisation and the emergence of more authoritarian and anti-democratic political forces. For his part, in Chapter 11 of the book, Howarth examines the crucial discursive shift in oppositional discourse to the apartheid regime in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. He argues that the change from Black Consciousness ideology to democratic non-racialism can at an archaeological level be explained by the failure of the Black Consciousness Movement to transform its myth of 'Black Solidarity' and 'Black Communalism' into a viable collective social imaginary that could structure the emergence and consolidation of a post-apartheid order. Instead, he shows how the dislocatory experience of the Soweto uprisings in 1976, and the 'post-Soweto' realignment of political forces from 1977 until mid-1986, resulted in the emergence and consolidation of a proto-democratic imaginary under the auspices of the United Democratic Front and its allies.

Organisation of the chapters

To conclude this introduction we need to say a few words on the nature of the individual chapters, their particular ordering and the way they function within the overall logic of the book. They can be classified in a variety of ways depending on the concepts and theorists to which they refer, their specific objects of study, and the particular style of their exposition. While the different chapters all use discourse theory as a common language of interpretation, each concentrating on a limited number of concepts and

logics, this perspective is often combined with a particular stress on Lacanian theory, Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian archaeology/genealogy, or some other theoretical tradition. The Lacanian influence is evident in the chapters by Glynos and Stavrakakis, while the Derridean influence is easy to discern in the contributions of Harvey and Halverson, Clohesy and Norval. A more Foucauldian emphasis is visible in the chapters by Ho and Tsang, and Howarth. Other chapters have attempted to articulate discourse theory with more mainstream theories of politics. Thus Howarth and Griggs draw upon different theories of collective action in the rational choice and social movement fields, while Bastow challenges and incorporates certain conceptions of the history of ideas to analyse his particular object.

While we have already indicated the way in which particular concepts are variously deployed in the different chapters, the chapters are also focussed around their specific objects of investigation. One group of chapters is focussed on the emergence and formation of new discursive formations. Thus Bastow's account of Marcel Deat's 'Third Way' concentrates on the specificity of this new discursive articulation, whereas Stavrakakis explores the dislocatory conditions of possibility for the constitution of Green ideology. Clohesy provides a careful analysis of the changing contours of Republicanist discourse in Northern Ireland, while Adamson examines the forging of socialist democracy in Romania. A further grouping is organised around the themes of identities and subjectivities. Griggs and Howarth focus on the central role of group identities in enabling residents and eco-warriors to overcome their collective action problems, while Glynos shows the impossibility of constructing gendered sexual identities because of the inherent lack in any symbolic order. Ho and Tsang examine the construction of new forms of sexual identification and subjectivity in Hong Kong. A third series of papers are focussed around the role of social movements and political agencies. Buenfil examines

the logic of the Mexican revolution focussing on the formation of a revolutionary subjectivity, whereas Harvey and Halverson examine the logic and effects of the Zapatista movement on the Mexican collective imaginary. A final set of papers is concerned specifically with questions of hegemony, especially the emergence, formation and dissolution of collective imaginaries. The papers by Celic, Barros and Castagnola belong to this group.

Although not present in all the chapters, another organising logic is the particular spatial and regional context in which the chapters are located. Some chapters concentrate on a set of issues specific to Latin American politics. Hence Barros and Castagnola reconstruct the impact of Peronist populism in Argentine politics, Buenfil-Burgos traces the contours of the Mexican Revolutionary Mystique, and Harvey and Halverson examine the impact of the Zapatista movement on Mexican politics. Other contributions situate their analyses in a context of peripherality. For instance, Celik examines the failure of Kemalist hegemony at the margins of the Europe Union, whereas Adamson explores the question of transition in Eastern Europe by considering the case of Romania. Ho and Wang, and Clohesy are concerned with the formation of discourses and identities in Hong Kong and Northern Ireland respectively, both areas that occupy a liminal position to their respective metropoles.

A final principle of organisation concerns the different levels of analysis of the different chapters. Here the division is largely binary, as most chapters consist either of macro-level investigations of discourses at the national and regional levels, or are concerned with the micro-level analysis of particular identities and events. The essays examining the long-term emergence and formation of discourses and collective imaginaries operate at the macro-level of investigation, whereas chapters that explore the actions and effects of new social movements, or the production of new forms of

subjectivity in restricted geographical and historical contexts clearly fall into the micro-

level category. It is clear then that this collection is open to multiple readings, something

which shows the ability of discourse theory to articulate itself with a multitude of

analytical dimensions and to provide a challenging recasting of political analysis as it is

traditionally known.

Notes

[1] A cursory glance at current debates in academic disciplines as diverse as social psychology, history, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, international relations, cultural studies and literary criticism shows a proliferation of studies that deploy the concept of discourse and the methods of discourse analysis. Moreover, there has been a spate of new journals, handbooks and textbooks devoted entirely to the development and application of discourse theory and analysis in the social sciences. See, inter alia, E. Burman and I. Parker (eds), Discourse Analytic Research (London, Routledge, 1993); D. Campbell, Writing Security (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992); T. van Dijk (ed), Handbook of Discourse Analysis (London, Academic Press, 1985) 4 Volumes; T. van Dijk (ed.), Discourse Studies (London, Sage, 1997) 2 Volumes; J.George, Discourses of Global Politics (Boulder, Lynne Riener, 1994); P. Hall, Cultures of Inquiry (Berkeley, California Press, 1998); S. Hall (ed), Representation (London, Sage, 1997); J. Milliken, 'The study of discourse in International Relations,' European Journal of International Relations, Vol 5:2, pp. 257-286; A. Munslow, Discourse and Culture (London, Routledge, 1992); J. Potter and M. Wetherell, Discourse and Social Psychology (London, Sage, 1987); H. White, Tropics of Discourse (Baltimore, John Hopkins, 1978). Journals devoted solely to the analysis of discourse include Discourse and Society, Discourse Studies, and Discourse Processes. Amongst the new textbooks, see D. Macdonnell, Theories of Discourse (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986); S. Mills, Discourse (London, Routledge, 1997), G. Williams, French Discourse Analysis (London, Routledge, 1999)

[2] For broad overviews of this research programme, see D. Howarth, 'Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', in E. Scarborough and E. Tanenbaum (eds), Research Methods in Social Science, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 268-93; J. Torfing, New Theories of

Discourse (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1999); A. M. Smith, Laclau and Mouffe (London, Routledge, 1998).

[3] For an interesting discussion of the convergences and divergences of different theoretical paradigms, see M. Lichbach, 'Social theory and comparative politics', in M. Lichbach and A. Zuckerman, (eds), Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 239-276.

[4] N. Fairclough, Discourse and Social Change (Cambridge, Polity, 1992).

[5] A. Jaworski and N. Coupland (eds), The Discourse Reader (London, Routledge, 1999). See also C. Willing (ed.), Applied Discourse Analysis (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1999).

[6] While political analysts using the concept of discourse address these issues, they do not do so from what we call a discourse theory perspective.

[7] A further elaboration of these distinctions and definitions can be found in D. Howarth Discourse (Buckingham, Open University Press, forthcoming).

[8] E. Laclau and C, Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (London, Verso, 1985), p. 107.

[9] This reasoning takes its lead from Heidegger's concept of 'the world', as developed in Being and Time, and the later Wittgenstein's ideas of 'forms of life', which he elaborates in The Philosophical Investigations. See M. Heidegger, Being and Time (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1973); L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953). See also M. Barrett, The Politics of Truth (Cambridge, Polity, 1991), pp. 76-77.

[10] Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 108.

[11] See S. Mulhall, Heidegger and *Being and Time* (London, Routledge, 1996).

[12] This builds, of course, on Michel Foucault's definition of discourses as those 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.' See M. Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (London, Tavistock, 1972), p. 49.

[13] See T. B. Dyrberg, The Circular Structure of Power (London, Verso, 1997).

[14] E. Laclau, New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time (London, Verso, 1990), pp. 31-36.

[15] See S. Hall, The Hard Road to Renewal (London, Verso, 1988). See also A. M. Smith, New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[16] See, inter alia, P. Hall (ed.), The Political Power of Economic Ideas (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980); P. John, Analysing Public Policy (London, Pinter, 1999), pp. 144-66; G. Majone, Evidence, Argument, and Persuasion in the Policy Process (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989); A. Weale, The New Politics of Pollution (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 57-60. G. Majone, 'Public policy and administration: ideas, interests and institutions' in R. Goodin and H. D. Klingermann, A New Handbook of Political Science (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 610-627.

[17] J. Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1974), p. 158.

[18] J. Derrida, 'But, beyond … (Open letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)', Critical Inquiry 13 (1986), p. 165.

[19] The fact that these methods and techniques are relative to the underlying assumptions of discourse theory is true of all social science research no matter how supposedly neutral and objective.

[20] See Howarth 'Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', pp. 284-8; Y. Stavrakakis, Lacan and the Political (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 57-59 and 76-78.

[21] In this respect, discourse theorists meet up with other methods of reading and research. Derrida, for instance, speaks of the 'singularity' of each deconstructive reading, which cannot

be reduced to any general theory and 'method' of deconstruction. See M. B. Naas,

'Introduction: for example', in J. Derrida, <u>The Other Heading. Reflections on Today's Europe</u>

(Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. vii-lix. The enactment of each

deconstructive reading is also evident in Foucault's 'genealogies' of punishment, subjectivity

and sexuality. Each genealogy is seen as a specific 'history of the present' designed and

executed around a present set of concerns that provoke an inquiry into <u>how</u> these issues

became problematic, and <u>how</u> their particular form can be dissolved and transfigured. See M.

Foucault, <u>Discipline and Punish</u> (London, Allen Lane, 1977), pp. 30-1.

[22] This condition is directly analogous to the later Wittgenstein's critique of a mechanical

application of rules. See H. Staten, <u>Wittgenstein and Derrida</u> (Lincoln, University of Nebraska

Press, 1984).

[23] This movement is evident in the overall trajectory of Laclau and Mouffe's writings. Thus,

in <u>Politics and Ideology and Marxist Theory</u> Laclau develops an internal critique of Marxist

theory, by sketching out an area of social relations not subject to the all-encompassing laws of

Marxism. However, their later writings represent a far more radical critique of Marxist theory.

In <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, they position themselves explicitly on a post-Marxist

terrain and abandon the underlying ontological and epistemological foundations of classical

Marxism. These arguments are then elaborated in Laclau's <u>New Reflections on the Revolution</u>

<u>of Our Time</u> and deployed in Mouffe's <u>The Return of the Political</u>. They are also evident in

the two authors' more recent collections of essays, which include <u>The Making of Political</u>

<u>Identities</u>, <u>Deconstruction and Pragmatism</u>, <u>Emancipation(s)</u> and <u>The Challenge of Carl</u>

<u>Schmitt</u>. See E. Laclau (ed.) <u>The Making of Political Identities</u>, (London, Verso, 1994); E.

Laclau, <u>Emancipation(s)</u> (London, Verso, 1996); C. Mouffe, <u>The Return of the Political</u>

(London, Verso, 1993); C. Mouffe (ed.), <u>Deconstruction and Pragmatism</u> (London,

Routledge, 1996); C. Mouffe (ed.), <u>The Challenge of Carl Schmitt</u> (London, Verso, 1999).

[24] This is in keeping with the post-structuralist claim that the connection between the signifier (the sound-image) and the signified (concept) is internal to language and can never be fixed in an ultimate fashion. Because of this, social identities can never be fully determined, but are organised around the 'play' of different signifiers.

[25] See C. Taylor, 'Interpretation and the sciences of man', in idem, Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Volume 1, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985); P. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, Second Edition (London, Routledge, 1990); L. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. While post-behaviouralists are now inclined to reject a complete separation of fact and theory, they remain committed to the view that theories can be tested by an independent empirical reality, and that there is a fundamental division between 'facts', theories and values. See D. Sanders, 'Behavioural analysis' in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds) Theory and Method in Political Science (Houndmills, Macmillan, 1995).

[26] There have been numerous attempts in the philosophy of science to separate objective explanations from subjective interpretations. These range from naïve verificationism to Popper's more sophisticated falsificationism. However, as Thomas Kuhn, Richard Bernstein and Fred Dallmayr demonstrate, these attempts to draw boundaries on the supposed objectivity of science flounder because they misunderstand the nature of scientific practice, and because they misrepresent the human and social sciences. See R. Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983); F. Dallmayr and T. McCarthy (eds), Understanding and Social Inquiry (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1977); T. Kuhn, 'Natural and human sciences' in D. Hiley, J. Bohman and R. Shusterman (eds), The Interpretative Turn (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991).

[27] For a classic statement of this model of politics, see M. Olson, The Logic of Collective Action (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965).

[28] S. Lukes, Power (London, Macmillan, 1974).

[29] For a classic statement of this conception of science, see C. Hempel, Aspects of Scientific Explanation ((New York, Free Press, 1965).

[30] For a clear critique of the correspondence theory of truth, see Chalmers What Is This Thing Called Science? Second Edition, (Buckingham, Open University Press, 1982).

[31] The phrase is of course Paul Feyerabend's and appears in his Against Method (London, Verso, 1975), p. 296.

[32] See N. Geras, Discourses of Extremity (London, Verso, 1990).

[33] See Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism, Part 2; C. Mouffe, The Return of the Political, pp. 14-18.

[34] As Laclau and Mouffe insist: 'The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations - otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning. If the social does not manage to fix itself in the intelligible and instituted forms of society, the social only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object. Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre.' See Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 112.

[35] Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 105. Thus, for example, the constitution of Green ideology can be understood as the articulation of a number of pre-existing elements ('direct democracy', 'decentralisation' etc.) into a new configuration that transforms their meaning ('direct democracy', for example, previously articulated in anarchist or other radical discourses, now becomes 'Green democracy'), simultaneously producing the moments of a new discursive ensemble (Green ideology)This hypothesis is further explored in Y. Stavrakakis, 'Green Ideology: A Discursive Reading', Journal of Political Ideologies, 2:3

(1997). No such discursive articulation is final. The new meaning that elements acquire by being articulated in a discourse is contingent, and not the revelation of their previously hidden or essential meaning. There is no transcendental signified limiting the field of signification, as discursive articulation is only limited by the availability of signifiers (elements) and the creativity of the political forces involved in the articulatory practice. However, the fact that there can be no definitive fixation of meaning does not mean that the social is reduced to a chaotic post-modern universe. Partial and temporary fixation is the condition of possibility for the constitution of social reality.

[36] Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 113.

[37] 'The practice of articulation … consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning' as Laclau and Mouffe argue (Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 113). In this respect Laclau and Mouffe's analysis of discourse is compatible with that of Claude Lefort when he describes the function of ideological discourse as an attempt to organise social life around the metaphor of a centre (C. Lefort, The Political Forms of Modern Society (Cambridge, Polity, 1986), pp. 218-219. There are also certain affinities with the morphological analysis of ideology introduced by Michael Freeden in 'Political Concepts and Ideological Morphology' (Journal of Political Ideologies, 2:2, 1994; See also his Ideologies and Political Theory (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996)) as well as with the articulation of a psychoanalytic (Lacanian) theory of ideology by Slavoj Zizek. For an introduction to Zizek's analysis of ideology, see The Sublime Object of Ideology (London, Verso, 1989), 'Between symbolic fiction and fantasmatic spectre: towards a Lacanian theory of ideology', Analysis, 5 (1994), 'Introduction: the spectre of ideology', in S. Zizek (ed.) Mapping Ideology (London, Verso, 1994) and 'Invisible ideology: political violence between fiction and fantasy', Journal of Political Ideologies, 1:1 (1996). See also A. J. Norval's 'The

things we do with words: contemporary approaches to the analysis of ideology', <u>British Journal of Political Science</u> (forthcoming, 1999).

[38] See J. Lacan, <u>The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses 1955-6</u> ed. J.-A. Miller (London, Routledge, 1993).

[39] Zizek, <u>Sublime Object of Ideology</u>, p. 102.

[40] E. Laclau, <u>Emancipation(s)</u> (London, Verso, 1996), p. 53.

[41] Laclau, <u>Emancipation(s)</u>, p. 44.

[42] Laclau, <u>Emancipation(s)</u>, p. 44.

[43] In Laclau and Mouffe's more recent work there is sometimes a tendency to differentiate between politics and the political. For a brief account on the nature of this distinction, which falls outside the scope of this introductory chapter, see Stavrakakis, <u>Lacan and the Political,</u> pp. 71-75.

[44] See Howarth, 'Discourse Theory and Political Analysis', pp. 274-78. For a further example of this logic, see D.E. Apter and N. Sawa, <u>Against the State</u> (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984).

[45] See A. J. Norval, 'Frontiers in question', <u>Acta Philosophica</u>, 2 (1997) 51-76.

[46] This dual constituting and destabilising role means that the concept of antagonism has strong resonances with Derrida's notion of a 'constitutive outside'. In his deconstructive readings of metaphysical texts, Derrida shows how the privileging of certain poles of key binary oppositions - essence/accident, mind/body, speech/writing - are predicated on a simultaneous relation of exclusion and dependence. That is to say, efforts by writers and philosophers in the Western tradition to prioritise one pole of the dialectic is shown to fail in that the dominant term <u>requires</u> that which is excluded for its identity, thus problematising a clear hierarchical relation between the two.

[47] Laclau and Mouffe, <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 127.

[48] Laclau and Mouffe, <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 125.

[49] Laclau and Mouffe <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 125.

[50] See also S. Griggs, D. Howarth and B. Jacobs, 'Second runway at Manchester', <u>Parliamentary Affairs</u>, 51: 3, (1998), pp. 358-69.

[51] The different modalities of political frontiers involving the logics of equivalence and difference are discussed in Aletta Norval's concluding chapter of this volume.

[52] In this respect also see A. J. Norval, <u>Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse</u> (London, Verso, 1996), especially chapter 4.

[53] See W. E. Connolly, <u>Identity\Difference</u> (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991). See also D. Howarth, 'Complexities of Identity/Difference', <u>Journal of Political Ideologies</u>, 2: 1 (1996), pp. 51-78.

[54] L. Althusser, 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses' in L. Althusser, <u>Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays</u> (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 127-186.

[55] Compare Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, pp. 60-61; Laclau and Mouffe <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, pp. 114-122; Laclau, E. and Zac, L. (1984). 'Minding the gap: the subject of politics', in E. Laclau, <u>The Making of Political Identities</u> (London, Verso, 1994).

[56] Laclau and Mouffe, <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 115.

[57] This notion of a dispersion of subject positions does not mean a complete separation of positions in that various subjectivities can, and are, articulated together into discourses which hold different positions together in a contingent unity. A socialist, populist or nationalist discourse may try, for example, to weld various subjectivities together into an overdetermined subject position, thus modifying the meaning of its component parts.

[58] Laclau, E. (1990). <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, pp. 39-41.

[59] This is the example used by Laclau throughout <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>.

[60] Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, p. 39.

[61] A. Gramsci, <u>Selections from the Prison Notebooks</u>. eds. Hoare, Q. and Nowell-Smith, G. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), pp. 181-182.

[62] Gramsci, <u>Selections</u>, pp. 161.

[63] Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 136.

[64] Laclau and Mouffe, <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 112. According to Laclau and Mouffe, 'a social and political space relatively unified by the institution of nodal points and the constitution of tendentially relational identities' is called a 'hegemonic formation', a concept which shares strong affinities with Gramsci's idea of a historical bloc. See Laclau, E. and Mouffe, <u>Hegemony and Socialist Strategy</u>, p. 136; Gramsci, <u>Selections</u>; A. Showstack Sassoon, <u>Gramsci's Politics</u>, Second Edition (London, Hutchinson, 1985), pp. 119-125.

[65] Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, p. 61,

[66] Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, p. 61.

[67] Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, p. 64.

[68] Laclau, <u>New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time</u>, p. 64.