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The Tasks of Agonism and Agonism to the Task: Introducing 'Chantal Mouffe: Agonism and the Politics of Passion'

Paulina Tambakaki

Over the course of several decades, the work of Chantal Mouffe has been influential for a variety of disciplines. From politics and sociology to cultural studies, geography, architecture and art, Mouffe's work has been key to exposing (the limits of) dominant narratives and critiquing dominant theories. Partly because of the subversive force of her work – as a result of her very confrontation of the thorny question of antagonism; partly because of the realist overtones of her engagements with the accounts of dominant theorists – from Jürgen Habermas's rationalist perspective, Anthony Giddens' third way politics and, more recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's strategy of exodus (to name just a few); and partly because of her agonistic take on the themes of pluralism and democracy, Mouffe's work has been pivotal as a springboard of critique. Alluring to scholars uncomfortable with 'the way things are', Mouffe's insights into hegemony (with Antonio Gramsci), difference and enmity (with and against Carl Schmitt) have been a most useful lens to challenging and disarticulating mainstream modes of thought.

But there is another reason behind the interdisciplinary appeal of Mouffe's work. Working from a post-structuralist and, crucially, a postmarxist perspective, endearing (or not) to an interdisciplinary Left, Mouffe's work has been key to eliciting debates about other ways of *doing* politics. Agonism lies at the centre of such debates. Balancing (the need for) unity with (the need for) plurality; (the defence of) democracy with (the inescapability of) conflict; and (the mobilisation of) dissensus with (the construction of discourses and projects that encourage) democratic renewal, Mouffe's account of agonism sketches out the tasks of politics and, in so doing, it stirs interdisciplinary discussions over their contours. Certainly, foreclosed from such discussions is the possibility of arriving at a non-antagonistic, non-hegemonic type of politics. However, this conceptual impossibility, far from inviting nihilism or conformism, attests to and heightens the role of politicization. Politicization, in the form of agonistic struggle, unsettles conformism, while counter-hegemonic politics, triggered by agonistic struggles, dispels the lures of nihilism. Astutely attuned, then, to the dangers and circularities of politics, to the threats and risks involved in politics, Mouffe's work skilfully entangles a defence of agonism with insights into the inescapability of antagonism, theorizations of hegemony with the mapping out of a counter-hegemony, and calls for unity with robust arguments for

openness. In the end, Mouffe's work sets out a challenge. It challenges the readers to reflect on what it means to work with(in) *and* against politics.

This volume takes up Mouffe's challenge. Seeking to reflect on her account of politics as agonistic, all contributors to the volume probe deep into its underlying tenets and engage 'agonistically' with Mouffe's oeuvre. The forms of this engagement differ. Some contributors seek to expand the disciplinary, geographical or theoretical limits of agonism (Ostoya, Purakayastha, Machin, Devette). Other contributors seek to accentuate these limits by enquiring into some of its key components, such as the ideas of passion and antagonism (Mihai, Jones, Wenman). And yet other contributors seek to defend these very limits by skilfully drawing out their contemporary relevance (Stavrakakis; Decreus, Lievens and Braeckman). Out of these engagements, three interesting themes emerge. The first theme concerns Mouffe's version of agonistic pluralism (and, inevitably, her focus on antagonism); the second concerns her concept of passion; and the third concerns the very topical idea of counter-hegemonic politics, and the prospect of articulating a counter-hegemonic discourse to neoliberalism. In her response to the contributors, Chantal Mouffe takes on board these themes and she insightfully explains further her conception of passion, along with the very notion of agonism (including its differences from the project for a radical and plural democracy).

The remainder of this introduction has a twofold objective. The first objective is to introduce and isolate Mouffe's particular version of agonism. Given that Mouffe is not the only theorist who insists on the contestatory nature of politics, it is important to start the volume by placing her account of the *agon* within the context of other similar conceptualisations – so as to set out its distinctiveness and import. To this end, the next section discusses William Connolly's and James Tully's conceptions of the *agon* and, in so doing, seeks to frame the discussion of Mouffe's version of agonism that develops throughout the volume. My second objective is more ambitious. By singling out and exploring the three main themes that the contributors raise – agonism/antagonism, passion and counter-hegemonic politics – I seek to explain, and indeed defend, not just the relevance of Mouffe's work, but its *continuing* relevance. To this end, the three themes that I engage with in the second section serve a dual role. On the one hand, they flesh out what I consider to be Mouffe's more important interventions. On the other, they serve as an introduction to the topics that the contributors to the volume pursue. The last section of this introduction presents the structure and content of these contributions in more detail.

Mouffe's Version of the *Agon* Within the Context of Agonistic Theory

Two main assumptions are central to the field of agonistic theory to which Mouffe's work contributes. The first is that democratic life presupposes incompleteness, uncertainty and openness rather than consensus or harmonious coexistence. The pluralism of value systems and conceptions of the good that is constitutive of democratic politics, according to agonistic theorists, always involves frontiers between 'us' and 'them', relations of identity/difference which cannot be resolved

through appeals to common reason and which effectively prevent finality and the completion of the democratic ideal. The second, related, assumption is that to protect this pluralistic openness that exemplifies democratic life, (constitutive) differences and disagreements need not just to be acknowledged and affirmed, but also expressed agonistically. Agonistic contestations, then, expose and challenge relations of subordination for agonistic theorists and, by so doing, they ensure that democratic politics remains dynamic and alert to instances of closure. In Honig's words, contestatory practices 'challenge existing distributions of power, disrupt the hegemonic social, and proliferate political spaces when they interrupt the routine, predictability, and repetition on which [...] dominant patterns of private realm identity depend'.¹ Therefore, contestations – *agons*, not conflicts – play a double role in the agonistic perspective. First, they channel disagreements between constitutive differences; second, they challenge given distributions of power, normalizations and naturalizations. Yet how do these contestations play out in different versions of agonistic theory? Addressing this question is the aim of this first section.

By indicating the different ways in which Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly and James Tully (the three leading theorists of agonism) conceive of the *agon*, this section seeks to contextualize Mouffe's version of agonistic pluralism and in the process highlight its distinctive place within agonistic theory as a whole. To this end, the question that the section addresses concerns the meaning of the *agon*: what does it exactly mean to engage in an agonistic practice? For Mouffe, who distinguishes between agonism and antagonism, and reserves the name agonism for the specifically democratic (and therefore limited) form of struggle, agonism involves a confrontation between adversaries. Precisely because adversaries share something in common, the 'grammar of democratic life', their struggle and confrontation does not take on an extreme, violent form. The very commonality they share serves as the limiting and moderating element in their confrontation (which explains, in turn, the emphasis that Mouffe places on the left/right distinction).

By contrast, William Connolly,² another leading theorist of agonism, prefers to speak of agonistic respect – rather than 'agonistic democracy' or 'agonistic politics'.³ Agonistic respect, he argues, is a civic virtue that leads political actors who cultivate it to express and negotiate their constitutive differences and disagreements in a respectful and self-limiting manner. Through a process of cultivation that involves practices of self-remaking, according to Connolly, political actors come to terms with the agony of existence – with the anxiety or uncertainty that pervades the contest between identity and difference. More importantly, political actors come to experience this agon(y) differently, not as threat to identity-formation (and thus as something to resent), but as intrinsic to processes of identity-formation (and therefore as something to affirm and channel respectfully). This 'requirement' for self-remaking at the heart of the idea of agonistic respect reveals, in turn, that agonism in the case of Connolly does not straightaway denote a tamed form of strife, as is the case for Mouffe, who suggests that agonism, by virtue of its distinction from antagonism, is in itself a moderate type of conflict. Instead, the *agon* that Connolly draws attention to means contest only, and therefore needs the cultivation of the virtue of respect as the dimension which regulates and limits its eruption, because what the virtue of respect does is to give root to 'an ethic of care for life', an ethical

attitude of interacting with difference that draws its source from an appreciation of the diversity constitutive of life. Therefore, subjects who cultivate such an ethic of care, and take on board this larger perspective on life, develop an awareness of the contingency, interdependence and contestability of their different value systems. In so doing, they moderate their response to the conflicts that erupt as a result of these differences, and they politicize – contest and disrupt – differences that have become naturalized or hegemonic.

James Tully strongly agrees with this idea of politicizing – contesting and disrupting – naturalized differences.⁴ Like both Connolly and Mouffe, Tully places contestation at the heart of democratic politics and he stresses the constructive role that dissent and disputations play in political life. Moreover, much like Connolly and Mouffe, Tully is concerned with democratic openness, and with this concern comes a focus on the ways in which citizens participate in conversations that secure cooperation while leaving space for dissent. However, unlike Connolly and Mouffe, Tully emphasises dialogical participation; that is, the ways in which practices of civic freedom – practices of having a say and modifying the rules of the democratic game – challenge practices of governance. With this emphasis on the pair practices of freedom/practices of governance, a somewhat different understanding of agonism comes to the fore. Although Tully's mode of the *agon* certainly involves dissent and contestation, this is a 'lighter' type of *agon*. Since Tully closely follows Foucault's understanding of agonism and outrightly excludes from his conception of the *agon* the risk of confrontation, he ends up confining agonism to power/freedom relations (like Foucault), to that space between domination at one end and confrontation at the other. This reveals, in turn, that what agonism precisely refers to in the case of Tully is the provocations, frictions and modifications that arise between governance and freedom.

Therefore, what we notice here is three different, yet related, conceptions of the *agon*, which do not only promise a different kind of agonistic struggle but also carve out a different space for the development of this struggle: the *agon* as confrontation that involves adversarialism, left/right distinctions and an institutional setting (Mouffe); the *agon* as contest limited by the virtue of respect, which enables the passage from a perspective of difference to a perspective of life (Connolly); and the *agon* as friction and provocation, key to modifying games of governance/ment (Tully). In the light of these three rich conceptions, the question arises: what is exactly the particular import of Mouffe's version of the *agon*? The next section answers this question. It identifies and discusses the three most important contributions of Mouffe's version of agonism.

Mouffe's Interventions

Antagonism and Agonistic Pluralism

As we have already seen, pluralism – of value systems and conceptions of the good – serves as an anchoring point for all agonistic theorists. Seeking to expose closures and naturalisations that threaten democratic openness, agonistic theorists place their

focus on *agon(s)* as modes of challenging the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’, and as vehicles for channelling (and thus limiting the intensity of) conflicts that arise from constitutive differences. For Mouffe, in particular, pluralism, approached in Weberian terms, is axiomatic not simply of liberal democracy (or, to be precise, of what is valuable in the articulation between liberalism and democracy), but also, at a different level, of the agonistic struggle itself: while plural values – conflicting and often irreconcilable – show the need for agonism, for a different way of negotiating ever present conflicts, agonism, in turn, nourishes and protects democratic pluralism.

To be sure, this interrelation between democratic pluralism and agonism (often reduced to mean conflict) appears today as somewhat unquestionable – especially when we consider ever-growing attempts by deliberative theorists to devise mechanisms for addressing conflicts that arise in the process of deliberative initiatives; ever-growing calls to institutionalise and, therefore, tame conflicts in state and non-state structures; and an ever growing literature seeking to apply agonistic insights into a variety of areas.⁵ What is less self-evident in this ‘shift’ to conflict and to acknowledging its omnipresence in politics are the lofty tasks that the recognition of agonistic (and not simply conflictual) plurality often implies for democratic politics.

Constitutive of socio-political relations, and not just institutions, as conventional political science would have it, agonistic plurality envelops existential, formative differences (key to processes of political subjectification) and, inevitably, raises the stakes for the ways that democracies respond to the existential conflicts that arise from within.⁶ By calling on democracies to embrace conflicts that are at once productive and challenging, inescapable and vital to ventilating politics, agonistic theory goes a long way to showing how this can be achieved when it suggests moderation and limitation through the very concept of the *agon*. But there is a difference between agonistic theory as a whole and Mouffe’s work in particular. Whereas all agonistic theorists ‘societalise’ and politicise conflicts, drawing out their creative potential, Mouffe more distinctively democratizes such conflicts – by insisting on their transformation *to agons* (not just their moderation and limiting *as agons*). To this end, Mouffe’s emphasis on the concept of antagonism is key.

There are two closely related reasons why Mouffe’s emphasis on antagonism – rather than simply agonism – constitutes one of her most important contributions to debates about democratic pluralism more broadly, and agonistic pluralism more particularly. Both reasons attest to the ways in which Mouffe’s version of agonistic pluralism democratizes socio-political conflicts. The first reason is obvious enough. Antagonism is *not* agonism. Hence agonism, precisely because it differs from antagonism, becomes a clear task and, more notably, a specifically democratic task. Throughout her work, Mouffe’s ample references to the left/right distinction give us sufficient ideas as to what this task consists in. The second reason is closely related. Antagonism, in contrast with the innocent term ‘difference’, is a strictly political dimension. Mouffe insists on the political and ineradicable dimension of antagonism, the moment that us/them differences *become* antagonistic and, in so doing, that is, in so politicizing difference (in a step further from other agonistic theorists), she furnishes agonism with a distinctively democratic – and, ultimately,

more demanding – flair. For the reason that agonism, the mobilisation of contesting interpretations of democratic projects and discourses that citizens identify with, requires, after all, work – *constructive* work. Antagonism, for its part, does not. It is an ontological dimension, ever present and inescapable – far from subsuming (agonistic) politics through its explicit (or distorted) expression, it triggers the work and tasks of this politics anew.

Mouffe's insight into the interplay between agonism and antagonism, initially valuable in discussions of pluralistic and democratic openness, shows its full force today that more and more theorists lament the end of (left) politics and critique – because contestatory discourses have become co-opted to a hegemonic status quo.⁷ By distinguishing between democratic contestation and political conflict, Mouffe submits that there is conflict, but potentially little critique – if by 'critique' we do not simply understand acts of 'undoing', of exposing and challenging hegemonies, or acts of dissensus and contestation (which is where most agonistic theorists stop short), but also acts of 'doing', of constructing counter-hegemonic projects and, therefore, of being agonistic by virtue of such acts of construction. Thus the apt question that Mouffe's work poses to current debates is not why there is no critique, but why there is no (left) *stirring* of the struggle. Yet to stir the struggle, according to Mouffe, we need frontiers and passion. This brings us to the second contribution of her work that I here single out as most important.

Passion

Passion is an intriguing concept in Mouffe's writings for several reasons.⁸ One reason has to do with the way in which Mouffe approaches passion in her account of agonistic pluralism. Although passion arises at the level of identity formation for her, and describes the way in which political identities become constituted (through their affective identification with a common system of reference), passion for Mouffe is neither something personal (as many enquiries into passion would have it) nor something expendable (as rationalist accounts of politics suggest). Rather, collective and necessary, passion grounds democratic practice, according to Mouffe, and in so doing, it both defines and drives this practice. Passion defines democratic practice, because it captures the type of (necessary) tie or bond that develops among democratic citizenries; that is, all those identifications – practices and discourses – that at one and the same time constitute collectivities *and* unite citizenries. Therefore, understood as a way of identifying (with liberty and equality) that is affective enough to constitute political subjects and strong enough to unite, passion in Mouffe's writings serves to shape democratic practice – and the common system of reference that such practice requires. But passion does more than 'frame-shaping' in Mouffe's work. As a way of identifying with the democratic grammar, passion infuses commitment into democracy, and commitment does not just drive the democratic contestations that Mouffe makes the case for (insofar as it consolidates allegiance to the shared framework that secures the agonistic struggle), but also it carves out an alternative way of practicing politics that eludes the overt focus on rationalism and proceduralism of much political theorising. Grounded in the commitment to democracy (that is, passion), more than in rational justifications for

democracy, democratic practice emerges as ongoing, as a specific way of living. Sustained by commitment (by passion rather than reason), democratic practice resists procedural blueprints and exceeds attempts to confine it to the formal mechanisms of institutional politics. This is one reason why Mouffe's account of passion intrigues, as well as inspires: her focus on the associational effects of passion explains both *why* and *when* there is agonistic practice.

The second reason concerns Mouffe's focus on the dissociative effects of passion that often threaten agonistic confrontations. Indeed, astutely attuned to passions' Janus face, their associative and dissociative effects, Mouffe insists throughout her work on the need to tame passions, to transform inescapable antagonisms into agonisms. Through references to democratization, to the construction of democratic outlets for the expression of antagonisms and, crucially, through her focus on the multiplication and, ultimately, pluralization of passions (which ensures that no single frontier becomes the locus of a dangerous antagonism), Mouffe offers ways of warding off passions' dissociative effects. Yet, she does not undermine these effects (because, after all, there is a need for agonism), nor does she seek to eliminate them (because passions that attach to ever-present antagonisms are also impossible to eradicate). Instead, Mouffe calls for their taming, that is, for their public expression and, inevitably, moderation through democratic and, paradoxically, institutional channels – given her references to the left/right distinction.

This is, in the end, what I argue is pivotal in Mouffe's engagement with passions: working *with* passions entails working *within* politics. Not only because politics, that is, frontiers, arise out of passions, since their associative and dissociative effects trigger and intensify friend/enemy distinctions (which explains why Mouffe works *with* passions), but also because it is politics, that is, partisan politics that at one and the same time moderates and mobilizes these frontiers (which explains, in turn, why Mouffe engages passions from *within* politics). But to what end does an agonistic politics mobilize frontiers, politicizations that arise out of passions' associative and dissociative effects? The third apt contribution of Mouffe's work is that the mobilization of passions serves not just to consolidate the agonistic struggle, the democratization of dissensus, but also the construction of counter-hegemonies. Which is to say that agonism is potentially another way of setting off counter-hegemonic politics, and counter-hegemonic politics arises out of, and needs, agonism. It needs democratic passion.

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony

Mouffe's emphasis on the need for counter-hegemonic politics, and what this need precisely entails (a strategy of 'engagement with', rather than 'withdrawal from' representative politics) is a topic that she develops in her two most recent books, *On the Political* and *Agonistics*.⁹ Of course, the very idea of a counter-hegemony goes hand in hand with the theory of hegemony that Mouffe developed together with Ernesto Laclau in their magnum opus *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. The key suggestion of this theory is that hegemonic practices, which are necessary for the institution of social objectivity (because social objectivity never exists as pure

presence for Laclau and Mouffe), both determine the formation of a common order, by articulating and excluding different possibilities, and permeate this order by presenting as ‘natural’ that discourse which, in repressing other alternatives, has produced some common project. Therefore, if hegemonic articulations (and thus practices of ‘naturalisation’) are part and parcel of all socio-political orders, then such hegemonisations can be challenged by the production and pursuit of counter-hegemonic projects. Hegemony does not simply disappear, insist Laclau and Mouffe; it is replaced by another hegemony, a counter-hegemony. But what does a counter-hegemonic politics exactly consist in? The answer to this question carries particular weight today, as neoliberalism, a hegemonic discourse, forecloses possibilities of thinking and acting differently.

Mouffe explains: ‘the aim of a counter-hegemonic intervention is not to unveil ‘true reality’ or ‘real interests’, but to re-articulate a given situation in a new configuration’.¹⁰ Re-articulation then, together with disarticulation (what Mouffe often refers to as the ‘double moment of disarticulation/re-articulation’), is one salient aspect of her conception of counter-hegemonic politics. While disarticulation refers to the moment of contesting the sedimentations of the given order, exposing their ‘unnaturalness’ and challenging the ‘common sense’ that they establish (by repressing other alternatives), re-articulation captures the moment of politically constructing the alternative to the hegemonic order. Re-articulation is, in other words, the moment of politicisation for Mouffe, when discontent (and disaffection) infuse into mobilizations around opposing political discourses, when a variety of demands turn into claims that challenge existing power constellations (through the creation of chains of equivalence) and when unity emerges out of frontiers. Therefore, adversarial politics informs counter-hegemonic interventions according to Mouffe (insofar as the identification of clear adversaries sets off a counter-hegemony), and counter-hegemonic interventions envelop adversarialism (insofar as they involve agonistic engagements with representative institutions).

In this tight synthesis between counter-hegemonies and power politics, between agonistic encounters and disarticulations/re-articulations, lies, I would argue, one of Mouffe’s most apt insights into the nature of contemporary politics. This is the idea that power nexuses, the ever-presence and re-emergence of hegemonies that constitutes an inescapable feature of politics, call for contestation, to be sure, but *also* for politicization and, crucially, (re)involvement – (re)involvement *with* loci of power (such as representative institutions) and *against* loci of power, seeking their radical transformation. *Pace*, then, much of the literature enthralled by ‘revolutionary’ shifts to post-hegemony and post-representation (in the wake of the Occupy movements and the indignados), Mouffe takes a sober stance. She tells us that to radically transform society today, to replace the neoliberal hegemony with a counter-hegemony, there is no simple – immanent – way out, other than confronting its institutions, those state and democratic institutions that are all the more complicit in the promotion of neoliberalism and the stronghold of its hegemony. Or as Mouffe clearly puts it: ‘in order to challenge neoliberalism [...] it is not enough to organise new forms of existence of the common, outside the dominant capitalist structures, as if the latter would progressively ebb away without

any confrontation'.¹¹ By thus seeking to transform these institutions, suggests Mouffe, not only do we set and delimit a political task, but also, by expanding the sites and actors involved in this task, we *construct* discourses and projects that, in *opposing* (not rejecting) what is currently at hand, open the way for the discursive articulation of a new hegemony, for a counter-hegemony.

Yet an objection arises at this point: can it be argued that by insisting on re-articulation, on the agonistic confrontation with representative institutions, Mouffe undermines the challenge and task ahead? I would suggest that by entwining agonism with representation, and counter-hegemony with discursive and necessarily representative channels, Mouffe concretizes, democratizes, and indeed, paradoxically, radicalizes the political task ahead. She concretizes the task because she identifies the vehicle for the agonistic and counter-hegemonic struggle: the *production* of an opposing discourse to the given constellation of power – and as we already know from Mouffe's oeuvre, discourse-production involves decisions, acts of power, exclusions and frontiers. In short, it presupposes something more than the spread and visibility of contestation. Although visibility is certainly important, as the Occupy movements attest to, it is not sufficient if the aim is to construct a counter-hegemonic politics. To this end, an opposing – adversarial, rather than simply antagonistic – discourse is key, particularly today. Indeed, Mouffe's account of agonism (a struggle among adversaries that agree on the basics of liberal democracy, yet disagree on their interpretations) tallies well with her case for democratic representation in *Agonistics* (insofar as she urges the defence of basic representative institutions *and* opposition to their workings), and shows that the concrete political task that she sets is also a democratic one: it develops on the constitutive terrain of representation and it seeks to challenge it from within. Because it is precisely what happens within representative democracies today that concerns Mouffe – the way that representative institutions work is the problem, not representation per se. Mouffe explains:

What is at stake is a profound dissatisfaction with the existing order. If so many people [...] are now taking to the street, it is because they have lost faith in traditional parties and they feel that their voices cannot be heard through traditional political channels. [...] Understood as refusal of the post-political order, I suggest that current protests can be read as a call for a radicalisation of liberal democratic institutions, not for their rejection. What they demand are better, more inclusive forms of representation. To satisfy their desire for a "voice", existing representative institutions have to be transformed and new ones established, so as to create the conditions for an agonistic confrontation where the citizens would be offered real alternatives. Such a confrontation requires the emergence of a genuine left able to offer an alternative to the social liberal consensus dominant in centre-left parties.¹²

To be sure, this is not the type of radical left that denies power, seeking a 'real democracy' somewhere else, in the local and the common. It is a radical left that

acknowledges the ever-presence of power, engages with power, and seeks to radically transform its institutions from within. Is this 'within' a problem? In reopening the question of what it means to be radical, Mouffe's work not only constitutes a powerful intervention in contemporary debates, but also urges us, yet again, to rethink the meaning of radical politics today.

Structure and Content

All contributors to the volume engage in the task of probing deep into Mouffe's conception of politics, by focusing on either agonistic pluralism, the politics of passion or radical democracy.

Matthew Jones, in 'Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Project: Passions and Participation', focuses on Mouffe's version of agonistic pluralism, and fleshes out its strengths over Habermas's and Rawls's liberal conceptions of politics. Jones argues that Mouffe's account certainly grapples better with 'difference' and its expression in public life, offering invaluable insights into the 'nature' of political conflicts and exclusions. However, it struggles with questions of unity. Although unity, as allegiance to the democratic grammar, both grounds and triggers agonism, the very transition to agonism (from antagonism) is especially demanding, argues Jones.

Mihaela Mihai, in 'Theorising Agonistic Emotions' also takes issue with the shift from antagonism to agonism. However, she does so from a different perspective to that of Jones. Mihai is concerned with Mouffe's concept of passion, which she argues relies on a weak constructivist theory of affect. Seeking to sketch (and affirm) the contours of this theory that Mouffe's account of passion presupposes, Mihai engages in 'an exercise of theoretical reconstruction' and develops the idea of agonistic emotions. Mihai intentionally uses the term 'emotions' to highlight that democratic affect is subject to judgement – and thus open to reasoning. Antagonistic emotions, argues Mihai, then become transformable by agonistic encounters and call for responsibility – along with the availability of discourses that citizens identify with. Mihai concretises her argument by paying special attention to indignation and hope.

Hope for political change, for re-interpreting and, therefore, challenging dominant, hegemonic ways of thinking is what Purakayastha and Ostoya draw out and focus on in their engagement with Mouffe's work. More specifically, Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha argues in 'Postcolonial Agonistic Demo-crazy: Artivism and Mestiza Pluralism as the Dissensual Politics of the Governed' that Mouffe's account of agonistic pluralism can contribute to post-colonial studies by facilitating its re-radicalisation. To this end, Purakayastha brings into focus *Dalit* aesthetics, and he shows how this envelops Mouffe's approach to critical artivism. Although Mouffe, argues Purakayastha, does not directly engage with the Third World, Third World discourses and aesthetics serve as domains of resistance and agency, and in so doing, they have the potential to contaminate and be contaminated by Mouffean concepts.

Ostoya, in ‘Against the Inertia of Disillusionment’, shares Purakayastha’s defence of critical activism as a vehicle of resistance and change. But there is a difference: Anna Ostoya is an artist. Therefore, in her contribution to the volume, she uses herself ‘as a case study of an art practitioner who believes in art as a means of changing the world’, and she explains what it is exactly that she finds helpful in Mouffe’s account of adversarial politics.

Adversarial politics, and its fleshing out, serves as Amanda Machin’s focus in ‘Mouffe, Merleau-Ponty and Others: The View From Somewhere.’ Seeking to develop a dialogue between Mouffe’s focus on agonism/antagonism and Merleau-Ponty’s attention to embodiment, Machin explores the ways in which ‘accounts of embodiment align with and strengthen accounts of antagonism’, and the reverse. Machin argues that a sharper attention to the body, which facilitates and disturbs collective identifications (when it reproduces ‘us’/‘them’ antagonisms), can inform and strengthen Mouffe’s conceptualisation of the passage from antagonism to agonism.

Mark Wenman confronts Mouffe’s concept of antagonism and, in particular, the implications of her selective appropriation of Carl Schmitt’s notion of the political. In his contribution to this volume, entitled ‘On the Risk and Opportunity in the Mouffean Encounter with Carl Schmitt’, Wenman argues that Schmitt’s account of the political cannot be forthrightly used for the left-wing purposes that Mouffe has in mind. Yet Wenman neither rejects Mouffe’s selective appropriation of Schmitt, nor Schmitt’s work as a useful learning resource. Rather, seeking to avoid the authoritarian conservatism that informs Schmitt’s concept of the political (a conservatism that he suggests Mouffe’s appropriation is ‘not sufficiently insured against’) and thus strengthen the left-wing appropriation of Schmitt, Wenman emphasises, among other things, the need to connect the moment of agonism with the ‘construction of a militant form of universalism’.

In her own way, Pascale Devette considers further the articulation between universalism and plurality. By putting Mouffe’s approach to conflict in conversation with Camus’ ‘ethics of revolt’, Devette suggests in ‘Plural Democracy and Plural Humanism: A Dialogue Between Chantal Mouffe and Albert Camus’ that it is in the articulation and, indeed, balance between the universal and the particular (that one finds both in Mouffe and Camus) that the radical and creative potential of democratic praxis lies.

In contrast with Devette’s focus on Mouffe’s earlier work on agonistic pluralism in *The Return of the Political*, the remaining two contributions to the volume engage with Mouffe’s latest work, *Agonistics*. Both engagements seek to flesh out the relevance of Mouffe’s insights into counter-hegemonic politics for contemporary debates on post-hegemony and horizontal politics. In particular, Yannis Stavrakakis, in ‘Discourse Theory, the Post-hegemonic Critique and Mouffe’s Politics of Passions’, brings into focus and critiques recent arguments for post-hegemony (Scott Lash, Richard Day and Beasley-Murray). He identifies the limits of the ‘post-hegemony’ accounts, which make the case for immediacy, and he suggests that by ignoring Mouffe’s account of passions, the idea that ‘the discursive

theory of hegemony is also an affective theory of hegemony', such accounts find themselves in a cul-de-sac.

More sympathetic to the case for immediacy, or at least, more sympathetic to the activist rather than theoretical defence of immediacy, Decreus, Lievens and Braeckman draw attention to the symbolic dimension of recent protests (particularly the Occupy movements), and they argue that their focus on immediacy cannot be easily dismissed. Of course, Mouffe, in *Agonistics*, criticises these new movements from a strategic perspective, as Decreus, Lievens and Braeckman affirm. However, the movements' experimentation with new ways of collective identity-formation not only attests to the importance of Mouffe's (and Laclau's) insights into modes of counter-hegemonic politics (or, better, it can be explained through Mouffe's and Laclau's lens), but it also puts these insights to the test. Thus Decreus, Lievens and Braeckman ask, in 'Building Collective Identities: How New Social Movements Try to Overcome Post-politics': is it easy to define an adversary today? If not, then symbolic and aesthetic interventions in public space create and recreate the condition for (ant)agonistic distinctions.

In her response to the contributors, Chantal Mouffe clarifies her account of agonistic politics and, notably, she explains its relation to radical politics and the role that the politicisation of passions plays therein.

Notes

¹ Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.352.

² See particularly William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference. Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); and William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

³ Connolly explains: 'I prefer to speak of agonistic respect folded into a positive ethos of political engagement, rather than "agonistic democracy" or "agonistic politics". Some ideals of agonistic democracy are at odds with the pursuit of deep, multidimensional pluralism, to the extent they reflect the spirit of Carl Schmitt more than that, say, of Michel Foucault. The difference is one of ethos, sometimes brought to the same ontology of politics'. See 'An Interview with William Connolly', in *The New Pluralism: William Connolly and the Contemporary Global Condition*, eds. David Campbell and Morton Schoolman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p.315.

⁴ See James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key Vol.I. Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key Vol.II. Imperialism and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵ See for example, John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Global Politics: Discourse and Democracy in a Divided World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Stephen Macedo ed., *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ed Wingenbach, *Institutionalising Agonistic Democracy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); and Alexander Keller Hirsch ed., *Theorizing Post Conflict Reconciliation: Agonism, Restitution and Repair* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁶ On this angle of the debate, namely, the challenge that agonistic pluralism posed to conventional political science, see Mark Wenman, 'What is Politics? The Approach of Radical Pluralism', *Politics* 23:1 (2003), pp.57–65.

⁷ Among many others who discuss 'leftist melancholia' see Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (New York: Verso, 2011); and Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

⁸ For an excellent account of the questions that Mouffe's concept of passion opens see Mihaela Mihael's contribution to this volume.

⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013), p.71.

¹⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, p.79.

¹¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, pp.115–116.

¹² Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics*, pp.119–120.

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