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## ***Laclau and Žižek On Democracy and Populist Reason***

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### **Critique of Essence**

The heated and long-standing debate on the politics of democracy and populism between Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek re-emerged in a series of remarkable articles in *Critical Inquiry*.<sup>1</sup> Laclau's *On Populist Reason* (2005) appeared after the French and Dutch ambivalent "no" to the ratification of the EU constitution in the spring of 2005 and inaugurated this round of discussions. This text and the disputes following it provide important indications that the question surrounding populism represents a cleavage within the "post-Marxist" tradition itself.

The foundation of this tradition was strengthened for the most part with the resurgence of interest in Antonio Gramsci's hegemonic "war of position" in *The Prison Notebooks*.<sup>2</sup> Indications of Laclau's clear debt to Gramsci and even Louis Althusser can be found in both his early *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977), and even later in the collaborative work with Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985).<sup>3</sup> Together Laclau and Mouffe in their collaborative project outlined what came to be a key moment in post-Marxist theory fixated on the concept of hegemony or what they called "radical democracy". Laclau and Mouffe purported to outline a socialist theory of the sort capable of discerning links between New Social Movements,

most importantly with reference to a deconstructed and formalized notion of the revolutionary working class. In their account this class becomes a purely formal social formation without any necessary content. They argued that there is no essence to social struggle and we ought not search for one. The central claim contained in the theory of articulation and strategic linking of disparate movements was polemically pitched against many tenants of “old” Marxism (Luxemburg, Bernstein, Lukács, for example), including various attempts to reduce politics to something else, such as ideological struggle, Marxist science, pure politics, or economics.<sup>4</sup> They argued that the working class as one subject position among others should not necessarily be thought of as the *a priori* revolutionary vehicle simply because of a presupposed alienated relation to the mode of production. In this sense they sought to challenge the “theoretical determinism” inherent in many forms of Marxist thought, arguing that there ought to be important recognitions of the strategic potentials for new formations of ideological resistance fighting for hegemonic articulation in various struggles, such as anti-racism campaigns, anti-sexist struggles, ecological justice, peace protests, and so on. In short, they were speaking of the concrete potentials yet to be realized of thinking strategically *with* New Social Movements emerging in the 1970s.

In “radical democracy,” theorists and those interested in a theory of politics identify democratic struggles broadly and not solely by relation to economics and capital accumulation, an identification that the early Laclau claimed is much closer to that of fascism. The latter is the identification of “a single contradiction between monopoly capitalism and the rest of society”.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, from early on in his now long and ongoing career, Laclau insists that even though the working class has been historically designated as the principal revolutionary class because of its alienated relation to capital, especially towards the end of the democratic nineteenth century, he argues this was primarily a historical and contingent event in the history of Marxism that does not necessarily hold in the twentieth century after the rise of fascism.<sup>6</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe collaborated to expand upon this basic point, arguing that radical democracy itself is overdetermined by the *discursive opposition* to a whole host of contingent injustices and relations of subordination. They argue that this strategic consideration of overdetermination should not simply be reduced to questions of capital accumulation, the base/superstructure binary, or to anti-capitalist “economism” or trade unionism, irrespective of questions of political organization.<sup>7</sup> Following and simultaneously extending Rosa Luxemburg’s conception of multiple points of articulation<sup>8</sup>, they proposed “symbolic overdetermination as a concrete mechanism for the unification of these struggles.”<sup>9</sup> This collaborative work sought to “open Marxist thinking” to develop concrete socialist theory free from determinism and spontaneism and once again capable of recognizing the contingent linkages between formerly independent social struggles.<sup>10</sup> However, according to this thinking based on a renewed relation between strategy and tactics<sup>11</sup>, this was a tall order because it claimed that strategic “linking” between contingent movements and struggles would create space for potentially even large-scale

social movements to be constructed against the thrust of determinist economic forces. They attempted to renew ways of understanding the specificity of “the political” at the “ontic” or lived level by clearly defining the terrain of ideological struggle as the critique of essentialism.<sup>12</sup>

Independently, Laclau’s early work was novel for its theoretical break with the class determinism he detected in many early twentieth-century and, later, Cold War “abstract formalities”. He argued that this form of thought abstracted crucial differences between specific communist and fascist regimes, for example, and was furthermore characterized by a typology of the individual as an “atomized” individual in relation to “an undifferentiated mass”<sup>13</sup>. For Laclau, this was a grave theoretical error. In regards to the theories of “totalitarianism”, he writes:

For Hannah Arendt, one of the most sophisticated exponents of this tendency [to consider the individual as separate from her “social belonging”], modern totalitarianism arises linked to three essential historical processes: the suppression of the nation State and the emergence of imperialism, the crisis of the class system and its values, and the atomization of the individual in modern mass society. The ideological meaning of this method is clear: it is a sub-product of the cold war which tended to abstract formal features common to both types of regime in order to assert the substantial identity between fascism and communism [...] One of the consequences of this type of approach has been the theoretical inadequacy of analyses of fascism on the part of bourgeois social scientists; in moving within the framework of purely formal “identities” between totally different regimes, they have been able to do no more than accumulate classifications and subclassifications which are purely descriptive and devoid of all theoretical interest.<sup>14</sup>

Laclau’s point was far reaching in its challenge to reductionism in social and political thought. He argued that tendencies of this sort in thinkers as diverse as Arendt, Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, along with many others in that generation of leading social thinkers, was brought about by the fact that they were *contemporaneous* with the historical phenomena that they set out to analyze. For Laclau, this contemporaneity effectively made for an abstract reliance on reductive typologies and unarticulated identity constructions that in fact reduced the complexity of the events of fascism, often reducing it to communism and vice-versa. For Laclau, these methodologies needlessly collapsed any significant distinction between communism, fascism, and totalitarianism, making for abstract reliance on “the framework of purely formal ‘identities’ between totally different regimes”<sup>15</sup>. Laclau’s point of course was that important *differences* were effaced due to a reliance on typographic methodologies and what he would later clarify as an ill-conceived conception of identity in several of the writings from the early 1990s compiled in *Emancipation(s)* (2007 [1996]).

As the debates played out throughout the 1980s in the context of a growing suspicion of “essentialism” still lingering after Althusser, rivaled only by the Habermas-Foucault debate that tended to marginalize the theoretical impact of Lacan’s work<sup>16</sup>, Laclau and Mouffe constructed their antifoundational theory of hegemony that would be affectively attentive to difference and the complex social formations of collective identities. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* they write:

the terrain of hegemonic recomposition carries a potential for the democratic expansion and deepening of socialist political practice. Without hegemony, socialist practice can focus only on the demands and interests of the working class.<sup>17</sup>

Although it can often be unclear as to how Laclau and Mouffe's subsequent work relates to "socialist strategy" *per se* – in that there is no reason why socialism should be prioritized as an essential normative component of struggle – the concept of hegemony along with antagonism has been one of the main pillars of their thought and something that gained an enormous amount of influence in social and political thought. Laclau and Mouffe seek to relativize the role of class analysis in socialist political strategy, and, instead, assert the constitutive role of radical democracy and the contingency of social struggle in socialist practice, including social movements theory/practice. This is perhaps a search to find a basis for socialist identity that is not produced solely as a relation to the mode of production, a conception they reject. Instead, the entire category of identity itself has to be rethought and reconstituted in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first and thus the movement away from class analysis signals not something that is simply bleak or disabling for the left. Rather, the decline of class analysis makes room for the possibility of new, unanticipated subject positions, including novel possibilities for democratic politics<sup>18</sup>.

This was obviously an affront to certain strains of Marxism strongly attached to class analysis. In many ways, then, the theory of radical democracy put forth by Laclau and later with Mouffe stressed the *post* in post-Marxism, which I argue emerged in the 1970s as a critique of reductionism in social and political thought.<sup>19</sup> On this basis, these authors together argued that it is possible, in the face of impossibility, to fight unjust hegemony in the name of a politics of counter-hegemonic resistance. Resistance does not exist everywhere but on the contrary must be fought for through articulation with other like-minded movements. Laclau and Mouffe do have something that resembles a normative political theory, one that outlines a specific politics of emancipation<sup>20</sup>. However, as I have already stressed, they refuse to posit any theoretical *a priori* subject position of resistance to the injustices of inequality. The space of resistance must be actively created. Let us turn to the work of Slavoj Žižek as a response to the intervention made by Laclau and Mouffe.

### **The Žižekian moment**

Žižek's early work both entered into the terms of debate set by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and simultaneously problematized it by marking the terrain to accomplish (or, at minimum, gesture towards) a significant departure from it. Žižek emerged on what at first glance appeared to be the post-Marxist scene shortly after the collaborative work of Laclau and Mouffe with a dramatic plea for a return to the critique of ideology. Laclau wrote a well-known preface to Žižek's first book in English, *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), strongly endorsing it as

an important contribution to social and political thought coming out of the “Slovenian Lacanian school”<sup>21</sup>. Written before the fall of state Communism, Žižek’s book largely celebrated the intervention made by Laclau and Mouffe’s project of radical democracy, which is confirmed by the many positive references to it contained in the book. His strategy at the time (and in some ways ever since) was to use a particular interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory with a focus on enjoyment or Lacan’s conception of *jouissance* in conjunction with a “return to Hegel” and German Idealism. This is complicated business to say the least.

It is well worth noting that over a decade later, in 2002, Žižek published an extensive forward called “Enjoyment within the Limits of Reason Alone” to the second edition of his second major book publication in English, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (2008 [1991])<sup>22</sup>. I rely heavily on this fascinating book published in 1991 and the autobiographical forward in what follows. I find these texts in particular useful tools to understand the main issues of debate because they provide important indication of how Žižek himself would make sense of the early phase of his own career, and how the consequences of this reflexivity called for a break with the project of radical democracy itself. Most importantly for the purposes of my argument, he effectively distanced himself from many of the claims made in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, which is evidenced most succinctly by the very first paragraph of the 2002 forward to *For they know not what they do*: “Even today, my attitude is: those how do not want to talk about *For they know not what they do* should remain silent about *The Sublime Object*” (Žižek 2008: xi). This, I argue, provides a challenge to those who want to stubbornly stick to the supposed purity of Žižek’s early work in *The Sublime Object* and thus seek to basically ignore the contributions of the rest of his writings (such as Laclau himself)<sup>23</sup>.

In *For they know not what they do* [hereafter TK] Žižek suggests a reflexive rethinking of his former reliance on democracy in the abstract in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* [hereafter SO]. Secondly, Žižek rejects any strong complicity with the critique of totalitarianism in the work of thinkers such as Claude Lefort or Hannah Arendt. Žižek essentially rejects the formalism of these thinkers that he understands as a consequence of their liberalism. This was a huge shift in that the question of democracy and critique of totalitarianism lurked around nearly every corner of the main argument in *SO*. In the 2002 preface written for *TK*, Žižek writes with his familiar and seemingly unending energy:

And it is because *The Sublime Object* misses the ridiculous inadequacy of the object that it remains caught in the ethics of pure desire personified in the figure of Antigone voluntarily accepting her death: at this moment, when she throws herself towards the Thing, getting burnt by its rays, we witness the suicidal *éclat* of her sublime beauty in the proximity of the lethal Thing. This is the ultimate fascinating gesture of femininity which is also clearly discernable in Sylvia Plath’s last poems – the gesture of taking flight like a reborn Phoenix, leaving all the inert load of the social substance behind [...] This fierce virgin, miraculously delivered of the inertia of caged existence, finding her ultimate fulfillment in death – *this* is

phallus as the signifier of desire; *this* is what Lacan means when he claims that in contrast to men, who *have* phallus, women *are* phallus. No wonder Ted Hughes – a “phallocentrist” if ever there was one – praised Plath’s suicidal breakthrough: in the gesture of breaking out (of the patriarchal symbolic order), *the phallus appears* in the guise of its opposite: of the Women whose fantasmatic figure combines three incompatible features – a pure virgin, a mother, and a ferocious man-eating murderess. In this precise sense the underlying ethical position of the *Sublime Object of Ideology*, in its very focus on the figure of Antigone, remains “phallogocentric”<sup>24</sup>.

This remarkable passage reveals Žižek’s stance at its most dramatic. His eventual rejection of an ethics of death or “pure desire” – “a gesture of taking flight like a reborn Phoenix” in phallogocentric figures like Antigone<sup>25</sup> -- creates the conditions for a political challenge to the status of democracy as a formal category of legitimation. This also calls for a reflexive rethinking of the contributions that the *Sublime Object* really made. He continues:

This philosophical weakness is closely linked to the remainders of the liberal-democratic political stance: *The Sublime Object* oscillates between Marxism proper and praise of “pure” democracy, including a critique of “totalitarianism” along the lines of Claude Lefort. It took me years of hard work to identify and liquidate these dangerous residues of bourgeois ideology clearly at three interconnected levels: the clarification of my Lacanian reading of Hegel; the elaboration of the concept of act; and a palpable critical distance towards the notion of democracy.<sup>26</sup>

This critical distance leads directly into the ensuing critique of the concept of totalitarianism, particularly as it is used in left discourse and in so-called “multiculturalism”, a common line of attack he would use to his rhetorical advantage throughout the early twenty-first century. As Žižek would write in a reflection on Lukács, for example, “the great task today is to think the necessity of the passage from Leninism to Stalinism without denying the tremendous emancipatory potential of the Event of October, i.e. without falling into the old liberal babble of the ‘totalitarian’ potential of radical emancipatory politics”.<sup>27</sup> At any rate, Antigone and the critique of democracy are almost always linked in Žižek’s work, opening up many avenues for a deeply polemical critique of the so-called purity of left melancholia and multiculturalism, moves that are most tangible in the later *The Ticklish Subject* (1999), *The Fragile Absolute- or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (2000), and *Did Somebody Say Totalitarian?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* (2001). In short, the critical point seems to be that the left does not try hard enough to break out of the patriarchal, racist, capitalist system, and so on, that it continually critiques and loathes but secretly and unconsciously supports.

Žižek argues that figures such as Sophocles’s Antigone and Sylvia Plath’s struggles with suicide signal not a successful rejection of the *phallus* per se, but, still, something *active* in the encounter with death. This is an attempted “breaking out” of the patriarchal symbolic order. Žižek’s

point about sexual difference, carrying much theoretical weight and controversy<sup>28</sup>, is that the symbolic phallus returns to the scene in truth in inverted form, or opposite<sup>29</sup>. Following his theoretical mentor Jacques Lacan who many argue “speaks about woman only as she appears or is mirrored in male discourse”<sup>30</sup>, Žižek’s own provocative stance on the question of woman finds something necessary about the structure of the phallus in contemporary society, at least at the level of the *fetish*. Because men that *have* the phallus are qualitatively different than woman that *is* phallus as the object of desire<sup>31</sup>, from the perspective of an internal critique of ideology at least, woman *is* negative in her symbolic role as “pure virgin, a mother, and a ferocious man-eating murderess” (as quoted above). This means that there is no direct access to woman – she is always-already imbued with ideological notions. In this sense, Žižek uses the *TK* text to argue, a theme that he will return to throughout his career, that his first book in English ultimately fails because it misunderstands the nature of the object that is always tied up with the complications of ideology. There is both no pure object because of the reality of ideology but neither is there such a thing as pure desire. Indeed, he contends that *SO* offers something resembling “the liberal-democratic political stance” because it characteristically oscillates between “Marxism proper” and a concept of “pure desire” or what is often simply called “democracy”. He argues that at the time he erroneously understood Lacan and Hegel as operating on two separate matrices instead of one. This is something he would attempt to remedy in the remainder of his still ongoing, absolutely prolific writing career.

Written before the end of the Cold War, *SO* attempted to link democratic practice to a universal sense of democracy<sup>32</sup>. In one important concluding passage he writes:

It is true that democracy makes possible all sorts of manipulation, corruption, the rule of demagoguery, and so on, but as soon as we try to eliminate the possibility of such deformations, we lose democracy itself – a neat example of the Hegelian Universal which can realize itself only in impure, deformed, corrupt forms, if we want to remove these deformations and to grasp the Universal in its intact purity, we obtain its very opposite. So-called “real democracy” is just another name for non-democracy<sup>33</sup>.

This seems to lend credibility to Laclau’s idea that Žižek rejects democracy altogether. But this interpretation is misleading because it reduces Žižek’s longstanding engagement with the topic. My point is that beginning in *TK* Žižek builds upon and refines these claims by rethinking his operative concept of democracy that initially equated democracy and non-democracy (or democracy and its Other – monarchy, totalitarianism, etc.). This is not to *reject* democracy as such (elections, for example, can be an important component of political struggle) but rather to challenge the false perspective that *democracy is all that there is*. As opposed to the assumption that democracy is the only legitimate political aspiration, Žižek’s subsequent work consistently argues that democracy in any of its varying forms – that is, in the ways that it is taken up in local situations, in everyday life – and essentializing fundamentalisms (religious, ethnic, nationalist,

classist, sexist, and so on) are not strictly opposed formal entities to be brought into relation to one another through analysis (in this sense, the critique has resonances with Laclau's critique of Arendt's formalism quoted earlier). In other words, formal democracy and deficiency are not somehow essentially different or radically separate from the other. On the contrary, democracy and nuggets of deficiency (or somatic enjoyment as Copjec puts it<sup>34</sup>) are each two sides of the very same coin<sup>35</sup>. As the subtitle of *TK* makes abundantly clear, "Enjoyment as a political factor", the intention of the book is to locate enjoyment in the context a rethinking of the possibilities of politics. Žižek's critique of enjoyment is part of his political contribution to theoretical and practical debates and should be recognized as such. But we might still ask: what is enjoyment as a factor in our reigning conceptions of democracy and politics?

The main point of Žižek's polemic against democracy is far from straightforward and represents significantly more than a simple rejection of democracy as such (in fact, Žižek has criticized Alain Badiou for rejecting democracy outright). This might go some distance in explaining why he has spent so many pages exploring and expanding on the problem of democracy with a wealth of examples derived from political events and popular culture over the past twenty years or so. The central claim that I would like to stress is at once metaphysical and political: Žižek makes an important and rigorous distinction between object and Thing, which is a critical reading of desire in the context of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory.

The first sense of object is as we usually understand any material object. This basic or first order of object is "right here and now" (the reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is implied). The key theoretical point to stress is that this object is always bound up and supplemented by fantasies of fullness and illusions of the Whole or universal. As Georg Lukács argued in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), "Marx urged us to understand "the sensuous world", the object, reality, as human sensuous activity"<sup>36</sup>. Žižek's reading of object is an important contribution to Hegelian Marxism and, in this sense at least, remains remarkably consistent with that of the early Lukács and the standpoint critique of reification. Let us take the example of the typical case of a cynical individual. According to the cynical view, we know that exchanging gifts (and objects) during important holidays is little more than a charade in which we participate to keep our friends, family, and the markets happy and so on. The cynic is the one who knows how this operates: we participate in events such as this because the symbolic order expects us to participate. From the vantage point of this perspective – that is, in the context of ideological or fetishistic distance ("I know how things really are, but still I participate") – we are able to *imagine* or fantasize about a pure and unmediated concept of object. We do so by controlling our distance towards it through cynicism. We really *know* what is happening underneath the layers of sham, but we participate to keep others (the symbolic) happy. The object is at once part of a symbolic order but also separate from it based on our critical abilities to abstract it from its context and constituent properties. Subject and object are "objectively" separate from one another against a neutralized

background. Democracy, too, is seen as a whole object, either gained or lost in the course of struggle. In an important sense, we can either take democracy as an object or leave it, based on our own personal desires and inclinations.

On the other hand, however, the presence of the Thing is distinct from all other objects because it carries a certain command over one's desires. The Thing "produces its own object-cause"<sup>37</sup> and is imbued with subjective and passionate attachments. It is what Žižek particularly in his early work calls the "sublime object of ideology", the regular, everyday object "elevated to the dignity of the Thing"<sup>38</sup>. The ordinary object of our desire is sublimated to the level of what Lacan named the *objet petit a*, "a pure void which functions as the object-cause of desire"<sup>39</sup>. According Žižek at least, the *petit objet a* is a lost object that embodies the Thing but is not a simple stand-in for the noumenal realm.

In *TK*, he illustrates the distinction between object and Thing by reference to Ernst Kantorowicz's "the king's two bodies"<sup>40</sup>. The King has two bodies, the first is his "terrestrial body subjected to the cycle of generation and corruption", which makes the King human like everyone else. The second is "his sublime immaterial, sacred body", that which makes him King<sup>41</sup>. In the construction of his own critical conception of democracy, Žižek rejects the possibility of democracy as an exceptional object of desire (master signifier) or sacred object in the sense of the King's sacred body. That is to say, democracy is not to be located at the level of the Thing. Rather, it is an object that is always accompanied with a "nugget" of enjoyment that ties it to fundamentalist fantasies of a completely sutured totality and pure democratic society.<sup>42</sup> In short, democracy is stained with enjoyment and subject to decay. The more general point is that democratic society does not exist without the primacy of *lack* or the ongoing threat of castration. He writes that "there is no neutral "zero point" from which society could be conceived as a Whole [...] And the class struggle is none other than the name for this unfathomable limit, split, which cannot be objectivized, located within the social totality, since it is itself that limit which prevents us from conceiving society in general as a totality"<sup>43</sup>. So, we learn from this perspective that it is the class struggle that prevents democracy from being universalized as a sacred object. Democracy and the class struggle are in constant tension: For Žižek, we can't have democracy without deficiency, no matter how hard we might try: democracy is not the *petit objet a*, an ultimate object of desire. It is rather an everyday object like any other; even the King has a real "human all too human" body.

This theoretical stance attempts to radicalize the class struggle in conjunction with the psychoanalytic theory of the object. Žižek has partially agreed with Laclau that the crux of the issue involves the relationship between the Universal and the Particular<sup>44</sup>. Žižek's argument is that even though many prefer to understand democracy as a universal "pure form," or perhaps something inherently and morally good as a neutral object of our desire (the King's sacred body), democracy retains narcissistic, phallic, and pathological attachments that continue to link democratic practice to racism, sexism, and classicism to be sure (the King's human body).<sup>45</sup> He

contends that the solution to the problem of universalized racism through representation brought about by the reign of liberal democracy, purporting to outline a pure form of democracy, is not to disavow this connection, to repress it, or to live in a space of “false consciousness”. Rather, in *the Ticklish Subject* (1999), as one example among others in his later works, he writes that these questions conjure the problem of how to conceive of the possibilities of political action in relation to considerations of violence (some have claimed for this reason that Žižek is excessively fascinated with violence)<sup>46</sup>. This is a question that requires an open and we might even say brutal acknowledgement:

it would be productive to introduce the distinction between the public symbolic Law and its obscene supplement: the notion of the obscene superego double-supplement of Power implies that *there is no Power without violence*. Power always has to rely on an obscene stain of violence; political space is never “pure”, but always involves some kind of reliance on “pre-political” violence. [...] In human society, the political is the englobing structuring principle, so that every neutralization of some partial content as “non-political” is a political gesture *par excellence*.<sup>47</sup>

On this basis, Žižek’s blunt suggestion, based on the identity between violence and power, is to openly acknowledge and identify with the symptoms of democracy as an impure, all-too-human object. As he puts it in *SO* in relation to the radical negativity of the death drive, “the thing to do is not to ‘overcome’, to ‘abolish’ it, but to come to terms with it”.<sup>48</sup> That is to say, democracy, as we presently know it in our everyday lives, as a form of Power has *very precise limitations* and its implication with questions of violence and particularity is far from easy for us to accept. Furthermore, democracy should not be reduced to its Other, non-democracy. He writes in “Class Struggle or Postmodernism?”:

[w]e are not dealing simply with different subspecies of the genus of Democracy, but with a series of breaks which affect the very universal notion of Democracy [...] this tension is not simply internal/ inherent to the notion of Democracy, but is defined by the way Democracy relates to its Other: not only its political Other – non-Democracy in its various guises – but primarily to that which the very definition of *political* democracy tends to exclude as ‘non-political’ (private life and economy in classical liberalism, etc).<sup>49</sup>

In his “return to Hegel” via Lacanian psychoanalysis and German Idealism<sup>50</sup>, now located on exactly the same level of analysis, Žižek enunciates a critique of democratic practice that he argues still relies upon a “rigid designator” in relation to specific forms of mobilization of people in search of a *cause*. This mobilization involves the possibility of violent outcomes because of populism’s “inherent” need to construct a fully present and real enemy in which to gather the unity of the “Us” against the threat of the “them.” In a word, Žižek turns from a concern with the ideals of democracy to a concern with *act*, which also enables a linking of populism and democracy. In the forward to *TK*, he argues:

[t]he Lacanian name for this gesture of breaking the vicious cycle of the superego is *act*, and the lack of a clear elaboration of the notion of act in its relation to fantasy is perhaps the key failing of *The Sublime Object* [...] Fantasy fills the gap between the abstract intention to do something and its actualization: it is the stuff of which debilitating hesitations – dread, imagining what might happen if I do it, what might happen if I don't do it – are made, and the act itself dispels the mist of these hesitations which haunt us in interspace.<sup>51</sup>

Žižek's fame as a social and political commentator in many ways hangs on his analysis of fantasy and ideology.<sup>52</sup> In his writings fantasy functions in relation to a field, and fantasy (like cynical distance) is part of an activity of "quilting", which "performs the totalization by means of which this free floating of ideological elements is halted, fixed – that is to say, by means of which they become parts of the structured network of meaning"<sup>53</sup>. Fantasy is implicated in everything we do and adds meaning and significance to the world<sup>54</sup>.

### ***On Populist Reason***

As mentioned at the onset these debates have been recently re-staged in the spring 2006 edition of *Critical Inquiry*. In response to Laclau's last published book to date, *On Populist Reason* (2005)<sup>55</sup>, Žižek first published an article called "Against the Populist Temptation", later republished in revised form as "Why Populism is (Sometimes) Good Enough in Practice, but Not in Theory" in *Defense of Lost Causes* (2008)<sup>56</sup>. This line of attack began already in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* and outlines serious and extensive criticisms of Laclau's most basic premises. Žižek's central point is that Laclau avoids the old problem of the Marxist class struggle and the critique of reification via Lukács in his elaboration of the contingency of the postmodern social movements. Laclau's notion of populism, or social collectives, is therefore also deficient because it remains at the formal level of analysis of empty signifiers (signifiers without any necessary content) and which basically leaves the capitalist system or "background" unaccounted for<sup>57</sup>. Secondly, the argument is that populism by its "true" definition, at least according to Žižek, seeks nothing less than the all-out destruction of the enemy in the search of Justice. In this way, he draws attention to the potential violent outcomes of populist politics, a form of politics that Laclau would otherwise wish to celebrate as the "royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such" in his later writings. This is heterogeneity or vagueness<sup>58</sup>.

Let us inquire into how Laclau's theory might be capable of responding to Žižek's attacks. Laclau readily concedes that populism does in fact need an enemy to garner specific forms of hegemonic unity for any given social movement. The populist enemy marks the limits of the movement (there is "no totalization without exclusion"<sup>59</sup>) and becomes a rallying point and a major part of the identity formation of the movement. The movement basically knows who and what it is because it knows what it is *not* – that is, the enemy. However, as I shall argue here, the theory of

drive attempts to subvert the supposed necessity of violent outcomes that Žižek wants to tack onto Laclau's theory. In *On Populist Reason* [hereafter *OPR*] Laclau responds to Žižek's claims made in the closing, heated chapters of *Hegemony, Contingency, and Universality*, and argues that his theory of populist reason *does* imply a specific content for populist social struggles and does not simply take a Kantian formalist high-road. This content is a "real relation between groups" or with what Laclau calls "the people"<sup>60</sup>.

The entity of the people involves the slightly more technical psychoanalytic account of "partial objects"<sup>61</sup> or the *petit objet a* (Laclau discussed this as "partial problems" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*)<sup>62</sup>. Working with Žižek's *Sublime Object of Ideology* supplemented by Joan Copjec's work in *Imagine There's no Woman* (2002), Laclau insists that the content of populist movements are always overdetermined by multiple meanings, or are simply vague<sup>63</sup>. Ultimately, it is only the name of a movement and its rhetoric against an enemy that guarantees its consistency over time because the content of any given movement is always subject to change (for instance, the name "freedom" or "justice" are empty signifiers that can mean radically different things in different contexts and movements<sup>64</sup>). Thus, it again follows that the working class does not have a necessary role in the construction of popular movements. *OPR* attempts to turn the page on common dismissals of populist movements as being endlessly diverse and thus difficult to classify as simply extremes of the right or left of the political spectrum. It does so by turning these vague features into positive ontological feature of the *populus*: "The empty character of the signifiers that give unity or coherence to a popular camp is not the result of any ideological or political underdevelopment; it simply expresses the fact that any populist unification takes place on a radically homogeneous social terrain"<sup>65</sup>. Popular movements are constructed around "the surface of inscription" or popular signifiers but these signifiers are not simply "*transparent*"; rather: "vagueness' and 'imprecision' [...] are inscribed in the very nature of the political"<sup>66</sup>. So, again, what in one sense could be a criticism of the entire label of "populism" as being basically formal and meaningless becomes an ontological fact once Laclau feeds it through his theory of the empty signifier.

Affirmatively citing Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd* earlier in *OPR*, Laclau contends that: "the unfixity of the relationship between words and images is the very precondition of any discursive operation which is politically meaningful. From this point of view, Le Bon's remarks are penetrating and enlightening"<sup>67</sup>. Laclau celebrates Le Bon's 1895 text as an example to illustrate the lack of any direct correspondence between signifier and signified (note here that Laclau translates the discussion into the terms of Saussure, which Le Bon does not use). Laclau, furthermore, translates Le Bon's ideas into a *general theory of the political* based on the theory of language that recognizes the decline of a direct or necessary link between the signifier and the signified. But at one point the reader learn that this is not "a signifier without a signified" but rather a Lacanian inspired "void *within* signification"<sup>68</sup>. Earlier, Laclau argued that: "in language there are no positive

terms, only differences”<sup>69</sup>. Laclau finds evidence of his theory of the overdetermination of both the signifier and the signified in different ways in each of the texts he reads in the book. This ranges from the theories of populism – or at least theories of the group – in Le Bon, as well as in the work of Margaret Canovan, Sigmund Freud, Hippolyte Taine, Gabriel Tarde to name only the most elaborate. This eventually comes to suggest that the term “populism” itself is a signifier without any significant content of its own, a signifier that harbours a void, which is demonstrated by the sheer variety of ways that it is used in the literature Laclau surveys in painstaking and at times “tortuous” analytical detail (an adjective Laclau uses to describe Freud’s theoretical hesitations in *Group Psychology* but which applies to Laclau’s text as well)<sup>70</sup>.

The ontological issue of “partial object” enables Laclau to provide an explanation of the “empty fullness” of the empty signifier<sup>71</sup>, and to use this to make a transition from his earlier work on “radical democracy”<sup>72</sup>. In his later work such as in *OPR*, the empty signifier is connected to entities such as “the people”, which involves a constant tension between the universal and the particular. The people emerges as a heterogeneous, partial object when a demand, the smallest level of analysis, is made (on a leader, an institution, a system, etc) that is not met. Strictly speaking, there is no “people” prior the making of a demand. The very performative nature of making a demand creates a people out of nothing. This makes the particular demands of the people closely linked with democracy, which is not necessarily connected to a space (parliament, for example) but a form of political subjectification<sup>73</sup>. He calls particularity, after Gramsci, *the plebs*, and universality, *the populus*, which do not exclude one another (as Laclau argues we find in Marx and Hegel). In the course of making a demand, a particular *pleb* is able to stand in for a more universal *populus*. After Gramsci, we can understand the universal and the particular as working in articulation with one another. The reader is told that there is no abstract separation between the universal and the particular, and this is evidenced by what Laclau calls “singularity”, which is linked to the theory of political ontology. Society is characterized by homogeneity and a concern with difference, whereas “the heterogeneous is what lacks any differential location within the symbolic order (it is equivalent to the Lacanian real)”<sup>74</sup>. The singular is outside of all conceptions of difference and can only be approximated through horizontal equivalence. Thus, we can only know a popular entity as a singularity in the context of heterogeneity by its name: “[w]hat I can now add, however, is that the unity of equivalential ensemble, of irreducibly new collect will in which particular equivalences crystallize, depends entirely on the social production of the name”<sup>75</sup>. The name is a “pure signifier” that is not determined by the “conceptual unity that precedes it” but relies integrally on how the name (and the people) is constructed<sup>76</sup>. In the course of his reading of Copjec, Laclau develops a theory of the Thing (or *Das Ding*) that is at odds with what I introduced in regards to Žižek above. For Laclau (and Copjec), the *petit objet a* is a substitute for the Thing – the Thing itself is beyond representation and thought (like Kant). But, further to this, the activity of sublimation is what makes the *petit objet a* to stand in the place of the Thing. Laclau summarizes

what this might mean in the context of his wider argument: “In this way, the partial object ceases to be a partiality evoking a totality, and becomes – using our earlier terminology – the *name* of that totality”<sup>77</sup>. The relevance of this is simply that there is no populist movement without some sort of cathexis in a partial object or attachment of significance. “The people” do not simply emerge via historical necessity or external pressures, but rather through dynamics and logics of equivalence and difference with other identities and names.

### **The battle lines between the stupid and the interesting**

From the perspective of his own psychoanalytical perspective introduced above, the Thing as presence through the *objet a*, Žižek makes the claim that Laclau’s “post-Marxist” theory of hegemony and radical democracy ignores the possibility of the working-class cum proletariat through universalization. This is because in Laclau’s theory that class does not *necessarily* become the universal class of political struggle as it does in specific tenants of Marxism (for example, in the early Lukács). It therefore also misses the entire background of capitalism. Žižek summarizes the debate as follows: “the difference between Laclau and me is that while Laclau tells me that my text is boring and stupid, I am telling him politely that his is interesting”<sup>78</sup>. Here is how Laclau understands the debate in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*:

What is, however, the true root of this theoretical disagreement? It lies, I think, in the fact that Žižek’s analysis is entirely eclectic, for it is grounded in two incompatible ontologies: one linked to psychoanalysis and the Freudian discovery of the unconsciousness, the other to the Hegelian/Marxian philosophy of history. Žižek performs all kinds of implausible contortions to put the two together, but he is clearly far from successful. His favourite method is to try to establish superficial homologies. At some point he asserts, for instance, that capitalism is the Real – in the Lacanian sense – of contemporary society, since it is what always returns. But if indefinite repetition were the only feature inherent to the Real, we could equally say that cold is the Real of capitalist society because it returns every winter. A true metaphorical analogy – one with epistemological value – would have to show that capitalism is beyond social symbolization: something Žižek would find impossible to prove<sup>79</sup>.

As we have seen with Laclau in his early career, the claim against Žižek is that the latter attempts to establish “superficial homologies” between unrelated identities and objects. In a word, there is no such thing as “capitalism” without language (capitalism is socially produced through metaphors and symbolization and does not exist *per se*). Later, Laclau argues that “the coherence of capitalism as a social formation cannot be derived from the mere logical analysis of the contradictions complicit in the commodity form, for the social effectivity of capitalism depends on its relation to a heterogeneous outside that it can control through unstable power relations, but

which cannot be derived from its own endogenous logic<sup>80</sup>. Capitalism as a concept, too, is the result of the “hegemonic construction” and has no metaphysical or essential basis.

But, for Žižek, capitalism is Real in the Lacanian sense of the term: it is the background for how we relate to objects today, populism and democracy included. Capital largely determines what options are available to us, not some sort of objective standard of personal choice. Today it is capitalism that provides the objective standard itself. And furthermore the critique of capitalism emerges from the inside of capitalist dynamics: “it is real in the precise sense of determining the structure of the very material social processes<sup>81</sup>. This assumption allows Žižek to raise the question of class and the class struggle today, whereas for Laclau these are only contingent emergences. Žižek writes:

The fate of whole strata of population and sometimes of whole countries can be decided by the solipsistic speculative dance of capital, which pursues its goal of profitability in a blessed indifference with regard to how its movement will affect social reality. Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than direct precapitalist socioideological violence. This violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their ‘evil’ intentions but is purely objective, systemic, anonymous<sup>82</sup>.

According to these premises, Laclau thesis ultimately lets Capital as a social formation off the hook in the turn away from Marxism and an *a priori* position for the working class. Instead, from Laclau’s perspective, the working class like any other social movement can be a particular part of postmodern social movements. That is, it can become implicated in the absent fullness of the universal; it can become a formal universal. However, this is always an *absent fullness* that is forever fleeting, ephemeral, and subject to deconstruction and deferral. The universal is never achieved and remains elusive. Žižek critiques Laclau’s work for an undo celebration of political failure and bracketing of the question of Capital. In this sense, Laclau doesn’t understand his theory of contingency and hegemony as happening against the background of the capitalist transformation in class relations, which is a certain stage of capitalism that enables us to understand social movements as contingent and not connected to any stable non-vague mode of production.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Schlagend, Aber Nicht Treffend!," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. Autumn (2006); ———, "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. Spring (2006); Ernesto Laclau, "Why Constructing a People Is the Main Task of Radical Politics," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. Summer (2006)., ———, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005). Schlagend, Aber Nicht Treffend! can be roughly translated as "striking, but not appropriate!".
- <sup>2</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). See: "The Transition from the War of Manoeuvre (frontal attack) to the War of Position – in the Political Field as Well", 238.
- <sup>3</sup> Judith Butler makes a similar point linking *Hegemony and Socialist Struggle* with that of Althusser's ideological field as a "permanent (and promising) instability" in Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993)., 192. She continues: "The incompleteness of every ideological formulation is central to the radical democratic project's notion of political futurity. The subjection of every ideological formulation to rearticulation of these linkages constitutes the temporal order of democracy as an incalculable future, leaving open the production of new subject-positions, new political signifiers, and new linkages to become the rallying points for politicization".
- <sup>4</sup> Ernest Mandel is an example of a thinker who tried to formulate the stakes of a Marxian science, or "the Laws of Motion" of Capital see: Ernst Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres (London: Verso, 1978 [1972]). It is also useful to consider Fredric Jameson's fruitful response: Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991)., 53-4.
- <sup>5</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: Verso, 1977)., 88.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91; 124-134. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, Second ed. (New York: Verso, 2001 [1985])., 176-177. The debate on economism, however, has had a long and varied history in the Marxist tradition well before Laclau and Mouffe's intervention. For example, Lenin's early book *What is to be Done?* is preoccupied with opposing so-called economism, or with what Lenin associates with "amateurishness". See: V.I. Lenin, "What Is There in Common between Economism and Terrorism?," in *What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1973).; ———, "Amateurishness and Economism," in *What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972).
- <sup>8</sup> Laclau and Mouffe cite Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions " Marxist.org, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>.
- <sup>9</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.*, 11.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 13-14. In Chapter 1, "Hegemony: the Genealogy of a Concept", they write: "The concept of hegemony will merge precisely in a context dominated by the experience of fragmentation and by the indeterminacy of the articulations between different struggles and subject positions. It will offer a socialist answer in a politico-discursive universe that has witnessed the withdrawal of the category of "necessity" to the horizon of the social. Faced with attempts to tackle the crisis of an essentialist monism through a proliferation of dualisms – free-will/ determinism; science/ ethics; individual/ collectivity; causality/ teleology – the theory of hegemony will ground its response on a displacement of the terrain which made possible the monist/ dualist alternative".
- <sup>11</sup> This is a distinction that Laclau would continue to adhere to in his important review of Negri and Hardt's *Empire* in Ernesto Laclau, "Can Immanence Explain Social Struggles?," *Diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001).
- <sup>12</sup> Consistently since his early work in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, Laclau has pushed for a *substantive* (as opposed to formal) understanding of social movements and populism (146). See: ———, "Democracy and the Question of Power," *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory* 8, no. 1 (2001). His efforts to do so, however, have not always been successful. Andrew Norris, for one, argues that Laclau remains too abstract and sweeping in his observations regarding the nature of "the political". See: Andrew Norris, "Against Antagonism," *Constellations* 9, no. 4 (2002); ———, "Ernesto Laclau and the Logic of 'the Political'," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, no. 1 (2006).
- <sup>13</sup> Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism.*, 86.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>16</sup> In the opening line of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Žižek writes that in Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) Lacan's name appears "only five times and each time in conjunction with other names [...] Lacanian theory is not, then, perceived as a specific entity" by Habermas. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989)., 1.
- <sup>17</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.*, 58.
- <sup>18</sup> Chantal Mouffe in particular has argued that democracy is a "paradox" that simultaneously relies on politicization and neutralization. In *The Democratic Paradox* she argues that democracy is antagonistically split between the desire for struggle predicated on the friend-enemy conception of politics and the need for regulation and institutional control. Thus, her call for an "agonistic" politics that would work within adversarial institutions. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000). See Stefan Rummens' critical reading of Mouffe's model of politics, which he claims is not always easily allied with the work of Laclau (antagonism) but rather with Claude Lefort (formalism): Stefan Rummens, "Democracy as Non-Hegemonic Struggle? Disambiguating Chantal Mouffe's

Agonistic Model of Politics," *Constellations* 16, no. 3 (2009)..

- <sup>19</sup> For a contextual example see: James P. Hawley, "Antonio Gramsci's Marxism: Class, State and Work," *Social Problems* 27, no. 5 (1980). Hawley puts it in what became a more dominant "Laclauian" tone: the "reductionist tendency objectifies the discrete, atomistic data of immediate activity, breaks down the totality of social processes into fragmentary facts of reality, and consequently creates universal categories".
- <sup>20</sup> According to Laclau in a later text, the "discourse of emancipation" is historically constituted around "two incompatible lines of thought: one that presupposes the objectivity and full representability of the social, the other whose whole case depends on showing that there is a chasm which makes any social objectivity ultimately impossible". See Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(S)*, *Radical Thinkers Series* (London: Verso, 2007 [1996]), 5-6.
- <sup>21</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, x.
- <sup>22</sup> Jan Jagodzinski, without providing any support for the claim, argues that *For They Know Not What They Do* was written in French before *Sublime Object of Ideology*. See: Jan Jagodzinski, "Struggling with Žižek's Ideology: The Deleuzian Complement, or, Why Is Žižek a Disguised Deleuzian in Denial?," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010), 2.
- <sup>23</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 101-104.
- <sup>24</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, Second Edition ed., *Radical Thinkers* (New York: Verso, 2008 [1991]), xvii-xviii.
- <sup>25</sup> ———, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 305-333. In this recent book, Žižek mentions his crucial rejection of pure desire that he detects this time, for example, in Yannis Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left: Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
- <sup>26</sup> Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, xvii-xviii.
- <sup>27</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Georg Lukács as the Philosopher of Leninism," in *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness by Georg Lukács* (New York: Verso, 2000), 156.
- <sup>28</sup> Žižek's position on woman and ideology has generated a significant literature of its own, especially in the context of the debate on the symbolic status of Antigone. See: Judith Butler (1993) Chapter 7 "Arguing with the Real" in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*; Geoff Boucher, Jason Glynos, and Matthew Sharpe, eds., *Traversing the Fantasy: Critical Responses to Slavoj Žižek* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); For his recap of this debate and in conversation with both Butler and Giorgio Agamben, see: Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (New York: Verso, 2002), 98-100. See also: ———, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, Second ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), ———, "Rossellini: Woman as Symptom of Man," *October* 54(1990).
- <sup>29</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*, Second ed., *Radical Thinkers* (New York: Verso, 2005 [1994]), 143-164. Žižek writes: "Lacan's achievement here is to conceive of the sexual difference at the transcendental level in the strict Kantian sense of the term – that is to say, without reference to any "pathological" empirical content. At the same time, his definition of sexual difference avoids the pitfalls of "essentialism" by conceiving of the "essence" of each of the two sexual positions as a specific form of inconsistency, of antagonism"; Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 154-6
- <sup>30</sup> Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*, 105.
- <sup>31</sup> As Lacan puts it in *Écrits*: "Let us say that these relations will turn around a "to be" and a "to have", which, by referring to a signified, the phallus, have the opposed effect [...] Paradoxical as this formulation may seem, I am saying that it is in order to be phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved." Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 289-90.
- <sup>32</sup> Jodi Dean contends that Žižek refers to democracy as a "necessary fiction", but we might perhaps suggest that he does not find it "necessary" any longer now that the difference between democracy and capitalism is minimal. See "Chapter 3: Democratic Fundamentalism" in Jodi Dean, *Žižek's Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 103-133.
- <sup>33</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 148.
- <sup>34</sup> Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (MIT Press, 2002).
- <sup>35</sup> Dean, *Žižek's Politics*, 101-109.
- <sup>36</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: The Merlin Press Ltd., 1971), 19.
- <sup>37</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 158-164; ———, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 229-233.; Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Four Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (New York: Verso, 2002), 149.
- <sup>38</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 71.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.
- <sup>40</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).
- <sup>41</sup> Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 254.
- <sup>42</sup> Dean, *Žižek's Politics*, 17. As Jodi Dean puts it: "enjoyment is a kind of fixity – something that holds the subject together and that provides it with a place [...] it is the incommunicable nugget or excess that prevents the subject from ever occupying the place provided for it, which provides it, we might say, with another place".

- <sup>43</sup> Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor.*, 125.
- <sup>44</sup> ———, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality.*, 146; See: Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Verso, 2000), 95.
- <sup>45</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology.*, 184-187.; Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 1999), 188.
- <sup>46</sup> See: Slavoj Žižek, *Violence, Big Ideas/ Small Books* (New York: Picador, 2008).
- <sup>47</sup> Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject.*, 191. Original emphasis.
- <sup>48</sup> ———, *The Sublime Object of Ideology.*, 5.
- <sup>49</sup> Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left.*, 94-5.
- <sup>50</sup> For an excellent account of Žižek's ontology in the context of the reading of German Idealism, see: Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008).
- <sup>51</sup> Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor.*, xi.
- <sup>52</sup> See: Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 2008 [1997]).
- <sup>53</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology.*, 87; 95-6. See also: Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*, 105.
- <sup>54</sup> See: Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*. Chapter 1 "The Seven Veils of Fantasy".
- <sup>55</sup> Laclau's latest book has not been published to date: Ernesto Laclau, *Elusive Universality* (Routledge, 2010).
- <sup>56</sup> Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes.*, 264-333.
- <sup>57</sup> The issue of capitalism as "the background" or horizon of social struggle was very important in Žižek's compelling critique of Laclau (and Judith Butler) in *Contingency, Hegemony and Universality*.
- <sup>58</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*, 67.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid. 78.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. 73.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid., 113; 234.
- <sup>62</sup> Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left.*, 198.
- <sup>63</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*, 67.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 97; 101.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 98.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., original emphasis, 98-99.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid., 24-5.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid., 105.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., 25.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 106.
- <sup>72</sup> Žižek, "Schlagend, Aber Nicht Treffend!.", 197.
- <sup>73</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*, 171.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid., 108.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., original emphasis, 108.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., original emphasis, 108.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid., 114.
- <sup>78</sup> Žižek, "Schlagend, Aber Nicht Treffend!.", 185.
- <sup>79</sup> Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Contingency, 235.
- <sup>80</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason.*, 235-6.
- <sup>81</sup> Žižek, "Against the Populist Temptation.", 566.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid., 566.