Towards an Abundantly Lacking Radical Politics

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Abstract

Recently theories of abundance and lack have gained new life. Represented are supposedly separate visions of conceiving of the social and therefore the possibilities for radical politics. Yet this excluding view forecloses investigations into the deeper ways abundance and lack interact in the formation of the subject and social relations. By contrast, this paper examines the dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship of abundance and lack in the social construction of the subject. Specifically, it argues that they are integral and compatible parts of the broader play of hegemony. Notably, hegemony resides in the dominant articulation of a social lack through which an abundance of social possibilities are able to emerge. As such hegemony is always an expression of what can be termed a "lacking abundance" – the abundance of possibilities arising from the articulation of a dominant lack. The crucial insight of this work, hence, is that radical politics should focus on questioning and dislocating these lacks. In this spirit, it would promote an "abundantly lacking" radical politics that would cultivate a democratic ethos around moving away from the limitations of hegemony's lacking abundance.

Introduction

Perhaps the most polarizing debate within contemporary political theory is regarding the philosophies of abundance and lack. Specifically, the decline of essentialism and determinism has led to postulations of the subject that is compatible both with philosophies of abundance and lack. On the one hand the overriding emphasis on contingency opens the space for the multiplicity of possible social configurations, in line with claims of the world's infinite potentiality in notions of abundance. On the other hand, the non-suturing nature of given dominant understandings points to the lacking character of subjectivity and dominant social ideologies more generally. Yet despite at times finding consensus in common normative goals, the ontological basis or ontic possibilities of these traditions is principally viewed as separate and distinct from the other. This excluding view forecloses investigations into the deeper ways abundance and lack interact in the formation of the subject and therefore the making of social relations.

Recently, however, theorists of both abundance and lack have attempted to positively combine these approaches in the name of conceiving a common radical democratic project. [1] Nonetheless, even at their most accommodating these works remain committed to viewing these traditions as ultimately distinct, construed as either differing interpretations of the same ontological process or as producing dissimilar ontic results. Consequently, their interaction is ultimately supplementary as opposed to genuinely integrative. While thinkers like Aletta J. Norval open the way for a better investigation of this type it remains unclear as to their actual role for the production of hegemony. [2] Just as importantly, this continued dearth in the philosophical understanding of their relationship masks the potential such insights might shed on theorization and practice of contemporary radical politics. Hence, apparent from these analyses is the considerable work still left to do in understanding the importance of abundance of lack in forming the contingent subject.

This paper therefore examines the relationship between abundance and lack in the production of the subject. It argues that these philosophies intersect via the process of hegemony. More precisely, conditions of abundance and lack are both necessary to and constitutive of the broader struggle for hegemony. This insight stems from readings of

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[1] Lars Tonder and Lasse Thomassen, ed. *Radical Democracy: Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005).

[2] Aletta J. Norval, "Theorising Hegemony: Between Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis", *Radical Democracy: Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 86-103.

hegemony as the contingent transformation of plurality into singularity[3] and back again as presented by Laclau and Mouffe. Notably, hegemony resides in the dominant articulation of a social lack through which an abundance of social possibilities are able to emerge. The subject, in this respect, is formed through this process, as the establishment of a hegemonic lack provides the foundations for extending into given identity in wide ranging, but nevertheless limited, ways. As such hegemony is always an expression of what can be termed a 'lacking abundance' – the abundance of possibilities arising from the articulation of a dominant lack. A radical politics, for this reason, must focus itself, at least partially if not primarily, on the task of ensuring that there is an 'abundantly lacking' politics composed of a multiplicity of lacks and thus horizons of possibilities.

In order to make this argument, I will begin by critically investigating established understandings concerning the philosophies of abundance and lack as primarily. From this reading I will show how far from being separate conditions they are in fact integrally related in the hegemonic construction of the subject. Drawing and expanding upon the work of Foucault for this purpose, I highlight how identity can be viewed as a process of subjectification whereby individuals embrace a prevailing 'lacking' identity which ironically allows them to pursue an abundance of possible expressions and potentialities. Building upon this critical insight, I will then reimagine hegemony as the dominant discursive articulation of a social lack from which an abundance of possibilities can flow. This broader argument will serve as the foundation for promoting the need to construct an 'abundantly lacking radical politics'.

Politics Between Abundance and Lack

Recently theories of abundance and lack have gained new life. Represented are supposedly separate visions of conceiving of the social and therefore the possibilities for radical politics. Abundance, in this respect, reflects a view of society as composed of an infinite multitude of available potentialities and identities. By contrast, theories of lack stress the feelings of absence and the need for wholeness that permeates all social relations and identities. Yet despite their common portrayal as being at best simply contrasting and at worst at odds, each remains incomplete.

Theories of abundance and immanence have formed an important part of the Western intellectual tradition. From Spinoza to Nietzsche to Deleuze ideas of a self-contained world

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[3] I am using the term singularity here to denote merely the move toward a more cohesive definition. This is not ignore debates around how to properly interpret the term, only that such are outside the scope of this paper.

of immanent possibilities have deep roots both philosophically and politically in Western thought. This perspective views experience as composed in the multiplicity of potentialities for self-identification in a social field with nothing beyond itself. Presently, this view has taken on a more explicitly political character. Most notably, theorists such as Paul Patton[4] and William Connolly, despite their theoretical and normative differences, have highlighted the latent compatibility between ideas of abundance and radical democracy. Drawing principally on Deleuze, in this regard, they attempt to illuminate how a broader democratic ethos and counter-hegemonic politics can be formed around the flowering of the inherent multiplicity of potential social identities and values.

To this effect, Connolly promotes plurality as a means for establishing wide-ranging political movements composed of diverse though interdependent members. Similar to Patton he explicitly draws on Deleuze to describe this resistant community saying "The assemblage will be rhizomatic, then linked through multiple lines of connection, rather than unified by a central political idea or ethical principal which all participants endorse together."[5] Connolly suggests two specific "virtues" for achieving this desired democratic society in which the ethos of abundance take center stage in the forming of an ethical shared community.[6] The first refers to the tolerance differing established identities must have for the other and the second the willingness to recognize the emergence of new identities. At stake thus is a community which recognizes its interdependence and therefore accepts the multitude of identities that will be produced for the achievement of common, though never inherent, goals.

In his later works, Connolly directly connects "radical democratic impulses" with the deepening of plurality more generally. Not merely does he see pluralism itself as a condition for a democratic ethos but also attributes to it a primary role in changing existing hegemonic understandings troubling present democratic societies. For such established subjectivities as consumption to be opposed requires in his words "the emergence of a significant minority of citizen in a large variety of subject positions who cultivate an abundance of life anchored in either immanence or transcendence…"[7] This common ethical mindset, as opposed to the sharing of a coercive singular discourse, provides for the coming together of disparate social elements in a non-authoritarian pluralistic democratic manner.

While not undermining the importance of thinking democracy in terms of abundance

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[4] ibid., pp. 64-65.

[5] William E. Connolly, "The Ethos of Democraticization", *Laclau: A Critical Reader* .(New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 168.

[6] ibid., pp. 176-179.

[7] William E. Connolly, "Immanence, abundance, democracy", *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 252.

certain challenges to such a view inevitably arise. Whereas it would be incorrect to proffer abundance as antagonistic to ideals of democracy it does not make them completely compatible either. Indeed if abundance and a democratic ethos is one's normative starting point it must be addressed why existing communities based largely on these precepts have resulted in such ideologically and politically 'closed' societies. This critical question paves the way for a potentially much more troubling theoretical concern – namely how is abundance inherently related paradoxically to processes of ideological and political closure? What does this, in turn, reveal about their ability to inform a more revolutionary radical democratic project?

Theories of lack, though if you will lacking, nonetheless do much address to this problematic. From Plato to Lacan, this perspective orients itself on the inherent drive to move beyond oneself or social horizon. To this end it argues that individuals are necessarily incomplete and therefore strive for fullness in relation to a given ideal. The Platonic Socrates arguably began such a project through his promotion of the human conditions' inherent lacking quality due to the innate constraints of being a physically desiring human. Consequently, he configures a morality not in terms of plurality but in the possible transcendence to a larger Good.

In modern times Lacanian psychoanalysis has shifted this subject of lack to encompass prevalent notions of a non-essentialized social subject. Lacan proposed a complex reading of subjectivity centered on the individual's continual yet unreachable desire for fullness through fantasy. As such one is always involved in the failed process of finding wholeness through differing fetishized objects. This psychoanalytic turn has lent itself to readings of the social as contained within this phantasmatic drive. Perhaps the most famous thinker in this regard is Slavoj Zizek. The author has turned to a diverse number of contemporary phenomena, from cinema to the more explicitly political, to show the social's construction via the lacking subject's psychological strive for phantasmatic wholeness.[8] The presence of ideologies and given desires is explained through the matrix of collective discourses which equally provide for this drive while captivating individuals in the enjoyment of their constant failure attain to do so.

Presently, theorists have sought to show the connection between lack and a radical democratic politics. Marchant, in particular, rejects the inherent connection between lack and

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[8] See especially Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989). Also Slavoj Zizek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).

essentialism, either ontologically or politically. [9] While he warns of the possible non-democratic forms this perspective can create, he nonetheless sees it as an essential building block for informing non-essentialist democratic movements. He contends that lack, if not taken to its most extreme ends, can provide the foundations for a continual politics of transition more adequate than abundances' reliance on types of spontaneity. Glynos and Stavrakakis, similarly, emphasize the potentially radical role of lack for highlighting the contingency of all social relations. Specifically, Glynos argues for a move away from an "ethics of desire", or one pre-occupied with a specific fantasy, to an "ethics of the drive" emphasizing this process of phantasmatic transgression overall. [10] The essentialized hold of contingent ideologies is thusly broken in the availabilities of these ever new subjectivities arising out this incomplete transcendence.

Contemporary theories of lack therefore help to account for the afore mentioned problems contained within theories of abundance. Primarily, they illuminate why essentializing discourses persist in spite of their repeated historical failures and the presence of communities emphasizing plurality along with political change. Moreover, they allow for a normative agenda equally stressing the contingency of social relationships with the allowance for never permanent yet nonetheless over-arching subject positions. To this end they link ideology, and its sustained power, with the presence of fantasy; equally providing therefore a more descriptive representation of modern shared communities while also offering a perhaps more realistic means for overcoming such discursive configurations. [11]

Yet theories of lack bring with them their own problems, of which philosophies of abundance may be crucial for addressing. Namely, such theories say little about the seemingly unavoidable heterogeneity and ultimate plurality found within any social context. Whereas Stavrakarkis has rightly pointed to using this intervention for better understanding the "force" as opposed to the "form" of social discourses, this perspective, nevertheless, remains relatively silent concerning the diverse identities and seemingly endless potentialities marking any and all communities. It is exactly here where notions of abundance maintain their fundamental insight. The affective 'grip' of any dominant social discourse may revolve around feelings of lack however in its concrete manifestation it is equally defined by

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[9] Oliver Marchant, "The Absence at the Heart of Presence: Radical Democracy and the 'Ontology of Lack'", *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 17-32.

[10] Jason Glynos, "Thinking the Ethics of the Political in a Post-Foundational World: From an Ethics of Desire to an Ethics of the Drive", *Theory and Event*, 66, 4 (2000).

[11] See especially Jason Glynos, "The Grip of Ideology: A Lacanian Approach to the Theory of Ideology", *Journal of Political ideologies*, 6, 2 (2001).

abundance.

Apparent then is that whilst theories of abundance and lack my present themselves as competing, they are in fact incomplete without the other. More precisely, each speaks to the others perspectival limitations. Abundance too easily neglects the lack, and therefore closure, innate to social identifications. Lack, conversely, ignores the abundance of possibilities and selves equally inherent to the social. Required to address these issues is a more integrative perspective combining abundance and lack for understanding the formation of the subject, and consequently politics.

Searching for a Radical Politics of Abundance and Lack

Currently intervening into this abundance and lack debate are theorists seeking out their similarities for achieving similar normative ends. Intervening into this void theorists such as Tonder and Thomassen have offered a comprehensive examination of the possibilities for abundance and lack in informing a post-structuralist politics and theory. In this respect, theorists of both abundance and lack have sought to show the importance of their perspective for contemporary resistance movements and theory more generally. However, far from being a cohesive or integrative vision of these concepts, these works have by and large presented a cross-section of views on the subject ranging from purely abundance derived models for social action to those committed to the lacking subject. Nonetheless, well worth exploring are the growing, though still relatively limited, serious attempts to combine these traditions into a more complementary whole. Thus the literal investigation "Between Abundance and Lack", to borrow a phrase from Tonder and Thomassen, sets the stage for an examination of their larger role in constructing the social.

Jon Simons for his part shows the ethical possibilities found in the dual employment of notions of abundance and lack for a radical democratic project. While he retains the concept's analytical separation, lack symbolizing "cultural pessimism" and abundance more optomistically as "cultural populists", he argues for their potentially positive integration in movements of radical democracy. Accordingly, he attributes to the theories a yin and yang type role in the perpetuation of contemporary "resistance and transformation". Specifically, lack offers "valuable" critique to the required optimism of a radical politics. Though he clearly favors the latter, contending "while I acknowledging the significance of radical critique of existing forms of democracy and popular culture, cultural populists and theorists

of abundance offer the better cultural resource for radical, popular democracy"[12], he nonetheless respects the contribution each make to this process.

Yet such a normative viewpoint neglects the underlying ontological component of this politics, one which must be further investigated as to the interplay of abundance and lack within it. Simon's otherwise insightful and important analysis too easily combines the theories with an inattention to their actual implication for political communities as such. Undoubtedly critique and optimism are compatible elements for social resistance; however, this does not speak to the role of lack or abundance fundamentally for the construction of the social more generally. Simons' ability to pick and choose the qualities he would like regarding these theories, and criticize or promote them accordingly, reflects the limitations of his analysis in providing an understanding of how they work together or separately for social change and stability.

Aletta J. Norval goes further in this regard, revealing how abundance and lack intersect via an ontology of hegemony. In her paper "Theorizing Hegemony: Between Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis" she highlights how post-structuralist readings of hegemony contain within it elements of both abundance and lack represented respectively in the traditions of deconstruction and psychoanalysis. As such she posits that deconstruction symbolizes tendencies of abundance in its insistence on the always available plurality of interpretations for a given text or context.[13] Similarly lack is viewed in the "undeciadability" and incomplete nature of these hegemonic interpellations.[14] Moreover, Norval indicates the conceptual commonality between these philosophies including the likeness of itterrability to Lacan's *extimite*.[15] As such she states her goal as "one that does not seek to question the articulation between the traditions under discussion by falsely opposing one against the other or the very relevance and fecundity of these traditions for thinking about politics."[16]

However, while she admits that "At this deep ontological level, there is nothing that prevents a productive articulation between them" nevertheless "once one moves away from this general insight, to the particular tools each of these traditions brings to bear analytically, this situation potentially changes."[17] In this light, she presents deconstruction, and by proxy abundance, as a means for assessing the "richness" of possibilities in a social context while

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[12] Jon Simons, "Radical Democratic Possibilities", *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 164.
[13] Norval, op. cit., Ref. 3, pp.90-92
[14] ibid., pp. 92-96.
[15] ibid., pp. 99.
[16] ibid., pp. 98.
[17] ibid., pp. 97.

lack as a means for assessing the relative success or failures of desired identifications. She declares "While these analytical tasks are clearly complementary, they are not the same, and any worthwhile analysis of a hegemonic project would have to take all of these dimensions into account."[18]

In this spirit, Oliver Marchant's earlier mentioned piece reveals the ontological similarities between abundance and lack. Significantly, he posits that the differences between these traditions are present most fundamentally on the ontic level. However, his approach emphasizes their similarity in effect, as unstable ontologies opening the space for a non-essentialist politics, rather than their overall shared role for forming the subject. Consequently, he is unable to connect the concrete differences between abundance and lack into a shared reading of the social or as component parts of a more substantial radical political project.

Hence, it remains to be seen how and in what ways one should properly relate these disparate elements into an integrative understanding of social hegemony and therefore radical politics. While obviously abundance and lack speak to different aspects of hegemony, how in fact do they interrelate within this process? Whereas Norval and Marchant presciently points out these tradition's ontological sharedness as well as their ontic separation, still what is missing is an account of their dual role in hegemonically constructing the social subject. Such an integrative account would, in turn, potentially permit for a more ontologically robust and critically perceptive theory of radical politics.

Approaching the Integrated Subject of Abundance and Lack

Thus far this paper has revealed the need for a more integrative approach for understanding the role of abundance and lack in the social construction of the subject. Far from conceiving these as opposing perspectives, it argues that there must be a stronger comprehension of their shared function in constituting social relations and identities as such. Key, in this respect, is interrogating their common presence and dynamic interaction within existing hegemonic configurations. What is important, here, is not to view abundance and lack as separate analytical or philosophical viewpoints but as interactive elements eternally involved in the production of the subject.

Perhaps not surprisingly the stately non-metaphysical Michel Foucault provides one of the first and best interventions exactly along these lines. Distinguishing between the

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[18] Ibid., pp. 97.

"economic" and the "political", Foucault offers an analysis of how the infinite and finite merge to form individual subjectivity through the body's discursive regulation. Specifically the modern emergence of disciplines situated power as mediated by the increasing of an individual's economic capacity yet as always channelled within limiting political discourses. It is worth quoting the author at length on this point:

> Discipline increases the force of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination. [19]

This reading speaks to the important relationship between plurality and singularity for power, demonstrating how the continual emergence of new practices often strengthens existing dominant subjectivities. In particular, Mitchell reveals the "economy" not as a singular social sphere but as a space for the continual inclusion of a disaggregate set of practices within the common discursive horizon of "capitalism."[20] His earlier employment of the Heideggarian theme of "enframing" belies this fundamental intertwining of infinite possibility trapped within a finite social expression for purposes of regulation.[21] These analysis plays into a Foucaultian perspective of an ever expanding power which

> arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid heavy constraint, to the functions it invests but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contracts.[22]

Put differently in terms of capitalism, quoting Mitchell, the ideology of neo-Liberalism "…while narrowing the window of political debate, it promises from this window a prospect

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[19] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 138.
[20] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (California: University of California Press, 2002).
[21] Timothy Mitchell, "Everyday Metaphors of Power", *Theory and Society*, 19, 5 (1990).
[22] Taken from ibid., p. 571.

without limits."[23]

Gestured to by these insights is the dynamic, and potentially complementary, relationship of abundance and lack for the production of the social subject. The increasing of bodily capacity represents the expansion of available opportunities for expression within a given social space. However, such expansion is only manifested here within necessarily limiting political discourses. This limiting nature of the subject can be seen in the distinct feeling of lack marking social identity. Foucault's relatively limited discussion of desire reveals this simultaneous presence of lack and abundance in the social construction of the subject. He links desire and knowledge as concurrent elements in the larger legitimisation of power more generally, saying "If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realise, it produces effects at the level of desire-and also at the level of knowledge."[24] It is worth emphasizing here that knowledge is fundamentally intertwined with desire; representative of not only what 'is' but what also what 'is not' and more to the point what 'is missing'.

Consequently Foucault at points frames issues of power and resistance around the continual interplay of abundance and lack. Whereas the previous movement of plurality to singularity reveals the importance of abundance for power, the availability for resistance ultimately reflects the lacking quality of these confining ideological discourses. The expansion of possibilities and opportunities cannot be contained within such limiting identifications, and therefore exceeds and challenges these past dominant conceptions. Foucault's focus on the body in this context personifies this ongoing political interplay between abundance and lack due to the incomplete character of these original political subjectivities. Again quoting Foucault at length on this point

> Mastery and awareness of one's body can be acquired only through the effect of an investment of power in the body: gymnastics, exercises, muscle-building, nudism, glorification of the body beautiful. All of this belongs to the pathway leading to the desire of one's own body, by way of the insistent, persistent, meticulous work of power on the bodies of children or soldiers, the healthy bodies. But once power produces this effect, there inevitably emerge the responding claims and affirmations, those of one's own body against power, of health against the economic system, of

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[23] Timothy Mitchell, "Dreamland: The Neo-Liberalism of Your Dreams", *Middle East Report,* 210 (1999), p. 28.
[24] Michel Foucault, op. ed., Ref. 26, p. 58.

pleasure against the moral norms of sexuality, marriage, decency. Suddenly, what had made power strong becomes used to attack it. [25]

Present is a conception of the subject formed through the continual interaction of abundance and lack. Notably, individual's experience of abundance leads ironically to feelings of lack and in turn the desire for more abundance. Importantly, this interaction is inherently political - an ongoing 'battle' for power. Foucault declares

Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself under counter-attack in the same body. Do you recall the panic of the institutions of the social body, the doctors and politicians, at the idea of non-legalised co-habitation or free abortion? But the impression that power weakens and vacillates her is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organise its forces, invest itself elsewhere…and so the battle continues.

This "battle" then refers to the ways a subject is at once limited by the discourses guiding his or her actions yet always necessarily exceeds such discourses. Reflected, in turn, is a deeper and more general comprehension of the mutually constitutive role of abundance and lack in the broader play of hegemony.

The Lacking Abundance of Hegemony
Foucault opens the way for seeing the subject as composed through abundance and lack. Yet the question remains as to their deeper effect on the subject's constitution ontologically. The importance of such an investigation is that a mere historical account leaves unclear how social meaning more generally involves itself in structuring a social space. If indeed the subject arises out of a discursive horizon it is imperative to understand the conditions of possibility provided by this foundational phenomenon. In short, as the subject is a result of social knowledge it must be interrogated how exactly this knowledge allows for subjectivity as such. Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony offers such a framework without falling into the traps of essentialism or formalism. His readings, along with that of the Essex school, permit a greater view of the interdependent role of abundance and lack in the underlying processes of social construction with special regard to issues of power.

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[25] ibid., p. 56.

Despite opening the way for a more integrative understanding of abundance and lack in the construction of the subject, Foucault nonetheless ignores the contingent and discursive nature of this process. This analytical inattention shows itself most clearly when Foucault directly deals with issues of social meaning. He states clearly his desire to focus on "relations of power, not relations of meaning." For this reason he rejects linguistic readings of social change maintaining, "I believe one's point of reference should not be the great model of language and signs, but to that of war and battle."[26] Yet if he does in fact long to look at the "intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics" especially as construed through given discourses it is necessary to investigate how meaning structures itself for these political struggles. Put differently, Foucault is treading in contradiction in asserting simultaneously that knowledge is power then contending that the "structure of communication" can't "account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts." While undoubtedly the form of language itself cannot be seen as explanatory, this does not mean that processes of discursive articulation have no structuring role. Instead what is important is to assess how social meaning, contained within articulatory practices, shapes politics through similar productions of the subject, especially as it relates to the generalizable interaction between conditions of abundance and lack.

Laclau, by contrast, investigates how discourses compete for hegemonic domination within a given social context. In his work co-written with Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* he critically employs Gramscian ideas of hegemony to promote the primacy of discourse for the social while turning away from past essentialist views of this phenomena. Put differently, Laclau and Mouffe theorize the social as known only through its meaningful discursive articulations as uniquely bound to a given social space. Moreover, social meaning works within a process of hegemony, where discourses struggle to achieve an always incomplete supremacy. Social meanings thus are always contingent, produced out of their specific circumstance, and form the basis for politics and identification as such.

Significantly, unlike Foucault and certain theorists of abundance, Laclau does not take the multiplicity of social configurations as doing away with the need for conceptions of totality. Instead discourses are defined in their always ultimately failed attempts to achieve totality over a given social space. Laclau refers to discourses thusly as "the structured totality resulting from articulatory practices", one that is never determined, always incomplete, but yet necessarily present. Consequently the heterogeneity of the social is always mediated by

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[26] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power", *Power Knoweldge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (Great Britian: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 114.

processes of discursive articulation. More precisely, the very presence of lack and abundance are by-products of a hegemonic articulation of the 'social'.

While, traditionally Laclau has been construed as a theorist of lack, especially as his later work draws heavily from Lacan, upon closer reading his discursive theory is equally reliant upon perspectives of abundance. Laclau defines hegemony as "a space in which bursts forth a whole conception of the social based upon an intelligibility which reduces its distinct moments to the interiority of a closed paradigm."[27] Yet this over determination has no a priori reasoning, it is merely the attributing of meaning and thus identity to existing differences in an ordered way. Accordingly, the very absence of meaning as such paradoxically demands its articulation. Hegemony thus acts as the force for temporarily anchoring a plurality of expressions into a singular one. Central to this process are the combined elements of abundance and lack, as the moment of hegemony reduces plurality to a lacking singularity and its contestation its reversal from singularity to a renewed plurality.

Yet just as hegemony exists as the translation of abundance to lack, its inherently incomplete quality allows for the opposite movement from lack to abundance. Discursive totalities are defined always in their relationships to antagonisms, revealing ultimately their very impossibility. To Laclau "the social is articulation insofar as 'society' is impossible."[28] The dominance attributed to any discourse in suturing others within its meaning is offset by the presence of antagonistic forces threatening its monopoly. The "totality" of a discourse is eternally challenged, redefined, and shown contingent via these antagonisms. As such for Laclau the perceived moment of objectivity, its "experience", is contained within its antagonisms, as he famously declares "This 'experience' of the limit of all objectivity does have a form of precise discursive presence, and this is antagonism."[29] Antagonisms represent not an objectivity of social wholeness but an interruption of such efforts revealing the contingency of any hegemonic configuration and therefore opening the space for an abundance of new meanings, identities and potentialities to emerge.

Recent interventions, however, illuminate the hegemonic character of this move from lack to abundance via antagonisms. Thomassen, in this vein, emphasizes the stabilizing function of antagonisms. Using the historical case of Argentina as a paradigmatic example, he notes

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[27]Ernesto Laclau and Chantelle Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 93.
[28] ibid., p. 114.
[29] ibid., p. 122.

if the imaginary horizon—including the central antagonism—of Argentine politics was the same for almost half a century, then it seems wrong to talk about instability. There was stability with regard to the terms of political and social struggles, and there was a common imaginary shared by the whole political order, including the antagonistic forces.

Present, then, is what Bloom and Dallyn[30] refer to as the 'paradox of order' in which social stability is ironically linked to the shaping rather than eradication of social differences and undeciadability.

Illuminated, consequently, is the ways lack provides the basis for abundance. In other language, the articulation of a certain lack serves as the foundation for a wide range of emergent possibilities within this broader horizon of meaning. Central to this process is the act of naming. Laclau declares a name "as the ground of a thing", or that which provides the foundation for a social object's existence within a social horizon. As such, for Laclau naming refers to the labelling of heterogeneous discursive elements into an articulated whole. Yet, as this analysis gestures too, it can also denote the articulation of a lack and its resultant abundance. Inherent to hegemony is the always duelling interplay between abundance and lack, between attempts at a lacking fixity and the eternal transcendence of these efforts into a greater plurality. He states:

> The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the particular character of this fixation proceed from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.[31]

Practices of naming, hence, channel this inherent overflowing of meaning, articulating what is 'lacking' and serving as the basis, accordingly, for the abundant possibilities arising from this perceived lack. To this end, the naming of 'racism' as the primary lack within a social field will necessarily create a different set of identities and demands then one focused on 'class' or 'gender'.

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[30] Peter Bloom and Sam Dally (2009) "The Paradox of Order: Reimagining Ideological Domination", *The Journal of Political Ideologies* 16:1.
[31] ibid., p. 113. (Author's original emphasis)

Hegemony can then be redefined as the articulation of a lacking abundance. Put differently, it is the naming of a 'what is missing' for producing a multiplicity of social expressions of the self. The Laclauian notion of 'failed transcendence' helps to clarify this dynamic. According to Laclau:

> The social terrain is structured, in my view, not as completely immanent or as the result of some transcendent structure, but what we could call *failed transcendence*. Transcendence appears within the social as the presence of an absence. It is around a constitutive lack that the social is organized."[32]

The affective 'grip' of any hegemonic articulation is the always elusive potential for transcending a prevailing lack. The continual efforts to overcome this constant failure produce in their wake ever new identities and understandings. Significantly, the success of a particular hegemony depends on its ability to keep this abundance within its own limiting horizon of meaning.

Towards an Abundantly Lacking Radical Politics

The interconnection of abundance and lack for the production of the subject has clear ramifications for the conceiving of politics more generally. For the analysis of hegemony it puts into sharper relief how a contingent discursive subject is formed within articulatory practices focused on the interplay of abundance and lack. Specifically, it describes it as a condition of lacking abundance – the naming of a 'lack' from which a multiplicity of potentialities can arise. As such it provides the grounding for reconfiguring radicality around the goals of creating a counter-hegemonic abundantly lacking politics.

Importantly, the lacking character of any hegemonic expression opens the space for a plurality of discourses to arise which contest its dominant status as incomplete and contingent. David Howarth and Aletta J. Norval, along with Laclau, have referred to this process as hegemonic dislocation. Here, a previously accepted social knowledge is put into question and is subsequently seen as unable to include all social identifications within its meanings.[33] This process signifies how lack creates the possibility for abundance. The

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[32] Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 244.
[33] Aletta Norval, *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (London: Verso, 1996). Also David Howarth, "The Difficult Emergence of a Democratic Imaginary: Black Consciousness and Non-Racial Democracy in South Africa", *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change* (Manchester and

enhanced revealment of contingency via dislocation precipitates the emergence of a multiplicity of previously repressed discursive positions. As such the exposing of an existing hegemony as lacking permits for an abundance of identities to come to light. The initial moving beyond of dominant discourses opens the space for the immanent revealment of a plurality of expressions.

This emphasis on the function of dislocation for producing plurality, and as such abundance, complements a broader envisioning of radical democracy as the allowance for differences. Mouffe, in particular, argues for an 'agonistic democracy' which fosters the continuous hegemonic competition between views and identities within a social field. In this respect, she radicalizes established notions of liberal democracy, emphasizing the values of plurality and 'rights' in order to promote a plurality of competing ideas and demands as founded in the constant play of hegemony.

However, this view, while perhaps undeniably appealing, neglects the ways the emergence of abundance is always attached to the hegemonic articulation of a lack. Much more fruitful then are attempts, either explicitly or implicitly, to reformulate radical democratic politics in light of their dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship. Tonder's "Inessential Commonality: Immanence, Transcendence, and Abundance" is especially interesting, in this respect. Here he attempts to combine abundance and lack for normative goals-this times focused on a more redistributive and responsive economy. Particularly, he advocates for the formation of communities around notions of an "inessential commonality" representative of contingent and always evolving collective identities based on shared goals. Central for the immanent arising of abundance is the recognition that existing configurations can be transcended, implicitly acknowledging then their constitutive lack.

Paul Patton, one of the foremost readers of Deleuze, similarly proposes a conception of radical democracy which implicitly integrates the flowering of abundance with feelings of lack. In his "Deleuze and Politics" Patten vehemently rejects interpretations of Deleuze, and by proxy ideas of immanent becoming, as counter to established democratic ideals.[34] Instead he links Deleuze's objections to Liberal democracy as reflecting the contamination of present social configurations for that of a "pure democratic event." Similar to Derrida's "Democracy to come", a democratic ethos, conforming to previous standards of public discourse and majority consensus, is a never achievable always strivable ideal available for resistance

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New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 168-193. Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution or our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 39-59.

[34] Paul Patton, "Deleuze and democratic politics", *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2005), p. 50-68.

movements.[35] Here the empirical failures of contemporary democracies serve as the impetus for an eternally becoming abundant subject.

While these analyses do much to enhance understandings of radical democracy, they ultimately fall short in providing a critical perspective that adequately accounts for the complex relation of hegemony to abundance and lack. Most notably, as with Mouffe, there is dearth of attention of paid to the ways lack and abundance are an expression of hegemonic articulation. What is required more generally, therefore, is a theory of radical politics that can dislocate the lacking abundance of a dominant discourse. Such a perspective would, in turn, have particular implications for conceiving and waging a radical democratic struggle.

Significantly this eternal move from lack to abundance is an ontological feature of subjectivity and as such cannot be simply transcended, however normatively desirable that may be. Though theorizing contingency, Laclau does not reject necessity but instead rearticulates it in relationship to this non-essentialist ontology. Meaning *necessarily* is paradoxical-both seeking fixation yet always remaining partially unfixed. The requirement for assigning meaning to an object is constantly undermined by the fact that such a definition will always be incomplete and therefore available for rearticulation. In this way

> …the relations between 'necessity' and 'contingency' cannot be conceived as relations between two areas that are deliminited and external to each other…because the contingent only exists within the necessary. The presence of the contingent in the necessary is what we earlier called subversion, and it manifests itself as symbolization, metaphorization, paradox, which deform and question the literal character of every necessity."[36]

Hegemony therefore exists not as a condition but as a continual and necessary process of articulation and rearticulation composed in the required interplay of abundance and lack.

A radical politics, in turn, must focus itself on the radical possibilities implied by this necessary, though always contingent, hegemonic relation of lack to abundance. One implication of this insight is the importance of engaging in hegemonic struggle around the dislocation of a dominant lack. Take for example the increasingly contentious issue of sexual orientation within a number of Western counties, specifically that of homosexuality within a dominantly heterosexual culture. The questioning of the inherent nature and morality of

[35] ibid., pp. 64-65.
[36] ibid., p. 114.

heterosexuality opens the space for different forms of sexual relationships to emerge and become socially acceptable. However, while this sets the stage for a more pluralistic perspective of sexual orientation, this identity itself must be made intelligible within this already existent social field. In particular, it runs the risk of reifying a prevailing hegemonic lack linked to 'sexuality' that ironically reinforces established sexual stereotypes on the one hand and the centrality of sexual orientation for identity on the other.

However, by rearticulating what is in fact lacking an abundance of new potentialities for identification and social relationships occur. Returning to the above example of sexuality, Foucault famously in an interview[37] seeks to reorient this struggle around questions of "friendship" and "intimacy". He positions the struggle for homosexual rights (which he does dismiss) as leading to a deeper dislodging of existing social barriers to the expression of intimacy between "friends" as a new "mode of life". He declares

> What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [plaisirs]. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities.

Hence to his mind to be "gay" does not represent the conformity to a specific essentialized identity but rather "to be 'gay' I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a new way of life". Foucault regards "homosexuality" thusly as a "historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities". Critically, this serves as an example of the hegemonic rearticulation of what is considered 'lacking' – in this case from 'sexuality' to 'intimacy' – so as to transform an existing horizon of possibilities.

This reading, moreover, helps to reimagine radical democracy. Existing 'agonistic' approaches retain a liberal democratic emphasis on the need to ensure for different voices to be heard and respected. For Mouffe the

> Articulation (of radical democracy) with the liberal logic allows one to constantly challenge, through reference to humanity and the polemical use of human rights, the

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[37] Michel Foucault. "Friendship as a Way of Life" *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*

forms of exclusion that are necessarily inscribed in the political practice of instituting rights and defining the people who are going to rule.[71]

Yet this analysis shows the overriding necessity of always putting into question the dominant 'lacks' giving birth to these diverse identities and positions. Accordingly, it is sensitive to the need to go beyond a mere tolerance and fostering difference (however radical this may be) but constantly permitting the space for new expressions of lack and therefore abundance to be made visible and explored. In this respect, the question of plurality and tolerance extends not only to already immanent pluralities but also to multiplicity of lacks that can exist and disrupt a given social space.

The crucial insight of this work, hence, is that radical politics should focus on questioning and dislocating hegemonic lacks. In this spirit, the aim should be not simply to challenge prevailing social logics or encourage plurality. Rather, it should be to illuminate and dislocate what is a dominant articulation of a social lack. In doing so, it would it would cultivate a democrat ethos around moving away from the limitations of hegemony's lacking abundance. In this spirit, it would promote an abundantly lacking radical politics.